An Institutional Ethnography of Women Entrepreneurs and Post-Soviet Rural Economies in Kyrgyzstan

by

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Abstract

The overarching problematic of this study is to understand how initiatives developed by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) come to organize processes of economic and social 'development' in Jerge-Tal, a village located in a remote mountainous region of Kyrgyzstan. My objective was to examine how courses developed and delivered by the Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA) coordinate with the actual needs, capacities, and work processes of women entrepreneurs and the broader contexts in which they live and work. My original contribution to knowledge is an account of how people's work processes are drawn into and coordinated by a set of relations that, whether intentional or not, preclude dialogic interchanges across a sequence of interrelated activities that link my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers (both local and international), the goals and practices of different levels of governance, and the efforts of women entrepreneurs in local sites where 'development' actually happens.

I used Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a framework of inquiry to investigate how development agendas aimed at improving the well-being of women are coordinated at institutional and local levels. Training programs for women entrepreneurs are part of a strategy developed by Western gender specialists concerned with how to address the problem of women's social and economic marginalization. As such, they are tied into an international development programming complex wherein concerns with women's well-being are articulated through institutional processes (such as accounting systems, accountability systems, and computerized technologies) which produce definitions of gender, establish gender mainstreaming programs and policies, and assess effective implementation and compliance with these processes. This study contributes to better understanding how such processes operate. The insights provided offer a starting point for developing a body of knowledge about local development processes that is empirically informed, politically useful, and, at least to some extent, locally produced. This kind of knowledge is politically useful to the local peoples who have contributed to it, but also to the institutions that study and serve them (or fail to serve them), and those seeking to better specify what concepts like colonization, capitalism, and transformation mean in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz context.

Keywords: Institutional Ethnography (IE); women entrepreneurs; rural development; post-Soviet; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); Kyrgyzstan
I dedicate this to Laura, Alex, Margot and Sam. Your patience, understanding and support were very much appreciated.
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1. Introduction

Figure 1.1. Map of Central Asia

My interest in doing research in the Central Asian region, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, originates from a project I was involved in as a senior research assistant in 2008\(^1\). Dr. Marie Campbell was investigating the way processes of global governance, framed by the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, enter into and coordinate local efforts to achieve gender equality in international development efforts. Her research was focused on Kyrgyzstan, one of five countries (including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan,

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\(^1\) This was a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded project entitled *Women’s NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, International Funding and the Social Organization of Gender*. Marie Campbell was the principal investigator for this project. See: http://web.uvic.ca/~mariecam/kgSite/welcome.html. Campbell, M. *Women’s NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, International Funding, and the Social Organization of Gender*. 2008 [cited 2013 August 3]; Available from: http://web.uvic.ca/~mariecam/kgSite/welcome.html.
Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) that make up the Central Asian region of the former Soviet Union. As part of the project we applied for a Partnerships for Tomorrow Program II grant\(^2\) to bring Gulnara Baimambetova, chair of the Kyrgyz non-governmental organization (NGO), Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA) to the Canadian Community Economic Development Network's (CCEDNet) national meeting held in Saskatoon in May, 2008. My responsibilities included hosting Gulnara and providing conversational English translation during her stay. Although my Russian skills were somewhat limited we enjoyed getting to know each other over the course of the week. I had grown up in Saskatoon and arranged a visit with members of my former Doukhobor\(^3\) community so Gulnara could get a glimpse of rural Saskatchewan and meet some local Russian speakers\(^4\). During the conference Gulnara became interested in the way the concept of social economy is used in Canada\(^5\), and I became keenly interested in and troubled by the challenges Gulnara encounters in her work with women entrepreneurs. In response to an invitation from Gulnara to visit Kyrgyzstan, I applied for

\(^2\) This was a two-year Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) program that supported small projects aimed at building and strengthening partnerships and linkages between Canadians and citizens of the Balkans, Central Asia and Eastern European countries. The goal was to facilitate the capacity development of individuals and institutions in these regions while also developing Canadian expertise in working within the region.

\(^3\) Doukhobors are a spiritual community who were persecuted for treason against the Russian state, and also for rejecting the icons and power structures of the Russian Orthodox church. On June 29, 1895 they gathered their weapons and burned them in mass protest. Many were beaten, imprisoned or killed - the rest were exiled to Siberia where they learned to survive its harsh conditions. Tolstoy was intrigued by this pacifist group and arranged with Queen Victoria to bring them to Canada between 1899 and 1905. Doukhobors were noted for their sound agricultural practices and were brought to the prairies to break the land.

\(^4\) Two of the women subsequently accompanied us to assist with translation at some of the Conference activities.

\(^5\) Social economy is comprised of a number of "responses to the negative socio-economic impacts of neoliberal capitalism. It is broadly understood to include...economic and quasi-economic activities that are pursued with the intent to create social benefits rather than to maximize profits" (McMurtry, 2010:105). Two broad perspectives have come to characterize the term: (1) the 'third sector' perspective is a pragmatic reform approach wherein the social economy is intended to fulfill needs left unmet or undermet by the dismantling of the welfare state; and (2) a radical utopian approach wherein "the social economy is seen as a separate (often non-market) circuit of capital. This form of 'alternative' economy specifically establishes itself outside the mainstream market" (McMurtry, 2010:105). McMurtry (2010:105) defines the social economy as "economic activity neither controlled by the state nor by the profit logic of the market, [that prioritizes] the social well-being of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain." It was this sense of social economy that Gulnara was attracted to.
and was awarded a reciprocal visit grant to Kyrgyzstan for myself and Annie McKitrick, co-coordinator of the Canadian Social Economy Hub. The grant funded a 10-day visit in December, 2008 during which we learned about Kyrgyz social economy initiatives while also discussing and presenting our view of the social economy to people from various sectors working to enhance community economic development in Kyrgyzstan. My motivation to do PhD research in this region stems from my involvement in Marie Campbell’s project, observations made during my initial visit, my own displaced-Russian roots, a keen interest in ‘development’, and an invitation from Gulnara Baimambetova to work together to explore and develop alternative options for economic development in Kyrgyzstan. In the course of attending seminars and visiting villages we caught a glimpse of the problems people from many sectors encounter. We found that while new forms of management (business permits, health regulations, taxation) were being developed by governing bodies, people did not have adequate access to information or training about them. In other words, there were important disjunctures between the management practices of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and the way they coordinate with the local work processes of governments, local NGOs and women receiving support for rural development.

1.1. Background on WESA

My research partner Gulnara Baimambetova, chair of Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA), and the staff at WESA have spent years working with international aid and development organizations to design training courses for women entrepreneurs. WESA offers 13 training courses that provide locally-adapted instruction to assist women with starting small scale social enterprises in baking, curtain design, needlework, hair-styling, food processing and customer service for restaurants and cafes, to name a few. WESA's courses are available to beginner and experienced entrepreneurs of all ages, including those in remote rural areas. WESA employs highly experienced trainers so they can deliver quality instruction. Their courses are in demand

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6 The courses originate from a seminar held in Tashkent in 2002. The seminar was funded by HandwesKammer Rheinhessen Programs (HRP) and funded by the German Federal Economy, Cooperation and Development Ministry.
in many regions of the country, and also in neighbouring countries where they have
given courses in felt making, milk refining, and scrap needlework skills. WESA designs
and coordinates the four to ten day courses to be locally specific. A consultant visits
each village in advance to find out what kinds of skills already exist, what people are
interested in developing further, and how WESA can help with training7. WESA experts
then design courses to fill the knowledge gaps identified and develop the skills desired.
Grants partially fund delivery of the courses for such items as trainer salaries and
materials. Participants are generally expected to provide food, accommodation and
partial payment for rental of the local facility where courses are held.

WESA’s main goal and mission is to provide locally-appropriate strategic
economic support to women entrepreneurs. Gulnara Baimambetova explains that by
hanging on to this single mission, WESA has developed a wealth of experience, a roster
of good researchers, and a number of valuable training resources. WESA has a column
in the local newspaper and a website that explains their work. WESA’s earlier work in
the area of women’s land rights led to legal training for rural women, gender approaches
in public administration, and amendments to laws that were limiting women’s access to
land8. Gulnara Baimambetova is well respected in Kyrgyzstan, where she has earned a
reputation as an adept negotiator who refuses to compromise her mission to suit the
agenda of funders. Although difficult to achieve, WESA is striving toward self-
sustainability so that it does not have to rely on grant funding for its operations – it is one
of the most stable NGOs in the country (Aliyeva Zinaida, Rural Development Fund,
personal communication). In the course of carrying out their mandate, WESA staff have
learned to manoeuvre through new forms of management (grant writing, business
permits, health regulations, taxation, etc.); high levels of corruption in government;
changing laws with respect to the rights and obligations of businesses and property
owners; poorly functioning regulating bodies; and a general sense of distrust among
people, and of institutions, due to all of the above (Baimambetova, 2008; Kuehnast &
Nechemias, 2004b; Lazreg, 2000; Mendelson & Glenn, 2002). Their success, I believe,
is due to their commitment to improving women’s lives in Kyrgyzstan, their knowledge of

7  I also observed that people sometimes come to WESA headquarters for consultations.
8  See: Rural Development Fund - Collaboration with WESA http://www.rdf.in.kg/en/p1545005/
local needs and resources, and the expertise they bring to developing and delivering their training programs. Most important, however, may be their competence in coordinating their activities with the management practices of the international non-governmental organizations that fund them.

1.2. The research problematic

The overarching problematic of my study is to understand how initiatives developed by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) come to organize processes of 'development' in a rural region of Kyrgyzstan. The site of my research is Jerge-Tal village, located in the remote mountainous region of Naryn. My investigation seeks to understand how courses developed and delivered by the Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA) coordinate with the actual needs, capacities, and work processes of women entrepreneurs and the broader contexts in which they live and work. My intention is not to criticize the work of WESA, the INGOs that fund them, or the efforts of others working to 'develop' rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. I fully appreciate the considerable effort it takes INGOs and local NGOs to develop effective programs that are well-intentioned and sensitive to local needs and capacities. Neither is it my intention to explain how policy produces effects. Rather, I set out to explain how work processes across a broad range of interrelated sites come to be coordinated with and by a distinct set of relations located elsewhere. My premises are similar to those of Nikolas Barry-Shaw and Dru Jay (2012) who suggest that NGO projects are hooked into a broad web of relationships with agendas that place limits on what they are able to accomplish. Barry-Shaw and Jay (2012:53) argue that NGOs may be able to provide temporary relief, but that broader conditions of poverty "will not improve if the overarching structures that reproduce poverty do not change." My aim is to explicate the overarching structures of development, not as abstracts such as 'neoliberalism', 'capitalist relations', or 'market economy skills', but as practices put in place and maintained by people whose work is coordinated across multiple sites.

I begin with the view that the institutional and ideological framework of today's 'development' practices can be traced back to a project initiated by the United States to reconstruct the world capitalist economy and secure its hegemony in the post-World War
II era. In this view, the development project in its early stages was a strategy for stimulating nationally managed economic growth. The project served two underlying functions: the first was to universalize the nation-state form as the political framework for 20th century capitalism, and the second was to establish "a vehicle for institutional stabilization under US hegemony" (McMichael, 1998:100). The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established as drivers of that vehicle. They have since come to reflect the policies and interests of not only the US, but of other powerful states and interests that promote "transnational economic integration through bilateral and multilateral aid programs and foreign investment" (McMichael, 1998:102). 'Development' can thus be apprehended as a concrete institutional process and set of policies used to hook national economies into the transnational economic organization of capitalism.

My work begins with the premise that development policy is a social relation that can be grasped ethnographically in the work that people do to interpret and implement it. I am not interested in making judgments about what constitutes rationality in rational planning (Escobar, 1995; Moser, 1993; Rai, 2002) or explaining how local practices resist the dominant order (Abu-Loghod, 1990; Paasiaro, 2009; Saul, 2006; Scott, 1985). My interests are rather along the lines of Kapoor's (2008) work on explicating how institutional biases and geopolitical interests silence the subaltern, and Spivak (1988), who engages with the continuing practices of imperialism while attending to the hidden ways in which even radical and oppositional historians “unknowingly or even knowingly, perpetuate the structures and presuppositions of the very systems which they oppose” (Young, 2004). However, while my interests are similar to those of Kapoor and Spivak, I am not as concerned with issues of the subaltern per se, as I am with explicating concepts such as 'rational planning', 'participatory development', and 'humanitarian aid' as social processes that can be grasped in people's day-to-day work and the way they come to understand it. My research begins by providing an empirically informed account of how 'development' initiatives are brought into being in and through work practices that are coordinated across multiple local and extra-local sites. From this account I am able to show how work processes are drawn into and coordinated by relations that, whether intentional or not, preclude dialogic interchanges across a sequence of interrelated activities.
A major issue I confronted as I began to plan my fieldwork was the question of how I was to authentically investigate and historically understand women's lives in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. I was keenly aware that regardless of any sensitivities I may have had to unequal power relations, my own knowing and purpose were infected by Western social science and a range of techniques -- methods of access, professionalized knowledges, and ethics requirements -- that were not always appropriate at the local level, but required me nonetheless, to organize forms of knowledge to be comprehensible and accountable to the institutional processes and powers of Western academia. I could see that in order to understand the work processes that bring about, shift, deny or defy transformation in women's lives, and the broader communities they live in or are connected to, I would need a framework that makes visible the way a broad range of work processes are hooked into a common set of institutional relations that link my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers, and the work of women entrepreneurs in local sites of 'development.'

1.3. The framework of inquiry

Over the past two decades advocates concerned with transforming top-down approaches and their associated 'expert knowledges' have striven to conceptualize and promote forms of development that are socially inclusive, equitable, human in form and scale, sustainable in terms of environment and livelihood, and predicated on social rather than solely economic empowerment (Atleo, 2011; Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2007; Desmarais, 2007; Emmanuel & MacPherson, 2007; Fridell, 2007; Kapoor, 2008; Lewis & Conaty, 2012; McMurtry, 2010; Saul, 2006; Veltmeyer, 2008). The key roles that women play in 'development' processes have been of interest in a wide variety of contexts (Acker, 2004; Cornwall et al., 2007; Escobar, 1995; Gready & Ensor, 2005; Howard, 2003; Kabeer, Sudarshan, & Milward, 2013; Mies & Shiva, 2004; Rai, 2002; Sen, 1999; Stephen, 2005; Stevenson, 1999, to name but a few). Feminist research has shown that development projects are historically situated in specific theoretical and political frameworks that have important implications for how projects are raised, planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated (Acker, 2004; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Moser, 1993; Rai, 2002). It has thus come to be widely appreciated that "feminists engaging with development in different parts of the world have very different
experiences, which come from the ways in which their nations and regions are positioned, materially, politically, and discursively” (Cornwall, et al., 2007:11). A related concern is that advocacy based on a language of gender conceptualized in Western individualist terms does not account for context-specific local practices. This results in further marginalizing oppressed women and diluting their political efficacy (Abu-Loghod, 1990; Mander, 2005; McIlwaine & Datta, 2003). An additional concern is that when framed as a primarily social concern, gender equality, and by association poverty relief, loses its political urgency. In view of these concerns, many important questions have been raised about how project planning and desired outcomes are conceived in the first place (Moser, 1993; Rai, 2002; Rathgeber, 1990).

In the case of Central Asia, there is much interest in the role of women entrepreneurs in the project of rebuilding post-Soviet economies (Campbell & Teghtsoonian, 2010; Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Gal & Kligman, 2000; Hemment, 2000; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b). Of concern to me is the way development institutions take for granted that entrepreneurial activity is empowering for women and their communities, while failing to analyze how capitalist transformation of society is accomplished under the guise of concerns with women's well-being. This is not to say that women's entrepreneurial activity does not empower them. It would be remiss to discount the way lifting of trade barriers opened up the potential for women to participate in the global market economy; or how women entrepreneurs benefit from the flexibility of being able to engage in income-generating activities at home where they can also care for their families. What I am referring to is related to the way women's empowerment is hindered by what Ela Bhatt (2013:281) calls the 'tyranny of classification', the tendency of development institutions to use classifications that exclude some kinds of workers and "promote only certain types of work -- work that fits the global market economy." This framing of work, backed by economic theories and adopted by policy makers, privileges paid work (i.e., waged labour) while overlooking the broader requirements and circumstances of embodied day-to-day living. Premised on a discourse of individual responsibility, it ignores the notion of universal rights9 previously associated with...

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9 The discourse does not, of course, entirely discount universal rights but shifts the principal concern with rights to protection of private property and to the interests associated with it.
citizenship, and replaces political debates about the causes of poverty and inequality with the private moral responsibility of individuals, or, in the case of development institutions themselves, 'social responsibility' (Dagnino, 2008). Through this framing, the concept of both work and responsibility for people and institutions are "increasingly constructed in relation to the needs of capital" (De Vault, 2008:291).

A similar phenomenon is evident in critiques of 'gender mainstreaming', a public policy strategy that appears by design to be an empowering starting point to achieve gender equality, but by framing 'gender' as a technical category has come to substitute for deeper changes in objectives and outcomes (Cornwall et al., 2007). In this view, not only are the root causes of poverty assumed to be primarily material, but "all of the parties involved -- donors, governments, NGOs, the poor -- [to] share the same noble objective of fighting poverty" (Barry-Shaw & Jay, 2012:7). In this scenario, women are seen to have a moral responsibility to take part in waged labour, and development institutions and states to have a social or fiscal responsibility to facilitate them in doing so. The scenario does not, however, involve a dialogic process through which women are entitled to request support for their work and then receive aid. In order for the process to be set in motion at all, the work in question must be 'eligible' for support. In order to be eligible for support (micro-finance, resources, training) the work needs to be

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10 The concept of 'gender mainstreaming' emerged from the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, and was formally taken up at the 1995 Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing as part of the Beijing Platform for Action. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework (2003:5) states that "gender-mainstreaming is a process rather than a goal. Efforts to integrate gender into existing institutions of the mainstream have little value for their own sake. [UNESCO] mainstream[s] gender concerns to achieve gender equality and improve the relevance of development agendas. Such an approach shows that the costs of women's marginalization and gender inequalities are borne by all." The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1999) Report framework asserts "mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."
"officially classifiable" as work (Bhatt, 2013). The process of becoming officially classifiable draws women into an institutional apparatus that operates according to a set of managerial practices and accountabilities that are external to their local setting, but are nonetheless inserted into what they do as a condition for receiving support. The reason development institutions insert managerial practices into local work processes is so that officially classifiable terms like 'gender mainstreaming' and "humanitarian aid" can be made measurable and accountable along a chain of work activities that results in access to and reporting about development assistance. The problem with officially classifiable terms is that they do not adequately represent the actualities of social life as it is experienced at the local level. This leads to disjunctures between the reporting requirements and representations of programs developed elsewhere and the actualities they stand in for at the level of local experience and accountability.

Training programs for women entrepreneurs are part of a strategy developed by Western gender specialists concerned with how to address the problem of women's social and economic marginalization. As such they are tied into an international development programming complex wherein concerns with women's well-being are articulated through institutional processes such as accounting systems, accountability systems, and computerized technologies which produce definitions of 'gender'; establish 'gender mainstreaming' programs and policies; and assess effective implementation and compliance with these. Development programming is geared towards helping women "sculpt themselves into a kind of worker envisioned not only in bureaucratic managerialism but also in the neoliberalism that…pervades organizational thinking" (DeVault, 2008:292). Organizational thinking is woven through with "ideological codes", which in the current era, give the increasingly sophisticated discursive frames of neoliberalism "a pervasive and seductive power" (DeVault, 2008:293). By appearing in multiple fragmented, though interconnected settings, ideological codes are able to

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11 Bhatt (2013:280) explains that the tyranny of having to belong to a well-defined category of work has meant that "the livelihoods of millions of people...are not perceived as work, and therefore remain uncounted, unrecorded, unprotected and unaddressed,...[and] conveniently invisible to policy makers, statisticians and theoreticians."

12 Smith's (1999:159) analogy of an 'ideological code' borrows from the way 'genetic code' is used to describe "a schema that replicates its organization in multiple and various sites... Ideological codes generate the same order in widely different settings of talk or writing - legislative, social scientific, administrative, popular writing, television..." and so forth.
produce "consensus vocabularies [that] carry the underlying ideologies of a new regime" (DeVault, 2008:293). Their power to control and coordinate is exercised through institutional management practices that escape notice precisely because they are so pervasive. Devault (2008:295) explains that consensus "effects are achieved through the many small moments of action that join people engaged in diverse yet coordinated courses of action." Within these courses of action, people engage in local face-to-face relations, but are accountable to textualized organizational processes that lie elsewhere. The practical effect is that local discretion in key decision-making processes is displaced as the centre of power and authority, and disembodied managerial technologies operating at some distance from local settings come to be taken for granted as not only reasonable, but 'natural'. The overall effect is a form of intellectual colonization.

The concept of intellectual colonization has been raised in a number of contexts related to my work (Escobar, 1995; Harding, 2004; Mohanty, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Most relevant to my study is the range of critiques aimed at contesting neoliberal development agendas and their associated economic growth processes (Atleo, 2011; Cornwall et al., 2007; Fridell, 2007; Kapoor, 2008; Rai, 2002; Saul, 2006; Veltmeyer, 2008). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the concept of colonization is complicated on a number of fronts. For one, local scholars operate in a field where those trained in the schools of communism have had to shed what were considered by some to be questionable pro-socialist practices and ideals in exchange for the likewise questionable 'democratic' practices and ideals of neoliberal capitalism. This has resulted in different understandings about the history, geographic scope, and future trajectories of the region (Amsler, 2007; Cummings, 2012)\textsuperscript{13}. Central Asia's former status as 'Second World' further complicates understandings of what 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' can legitimately mean, given these concepts are generally reserved for the experience of the 'Third World' or the 'South'. Thus while Central Asian societies have encountered "projects of nationalization, internationalization, cultural hybridization and essentialization that situate [them] firmly within the postcolonial world" (Amsler, 2007:30), 'colonization' may not be an appropriate framework for explaining or understanding Central Asian societies. In any case, while these distinctions are important, this is not the context in which I invoke

\textsuperscript{13} Will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2.
the concept of intellectual colonization. I am not referring to a practice that involves the seizing of state institutions and political domination of dependent states by colonial powers. Nor am I referring to neocolonialism and the political control of ostensibly sovereign states through economic domination. What I am referring to is a complex of interrelated activities that begins with documentary forms that organize activity according to concepts and categories that can be recognized extra-locally as "an instance or expression of [a] textually authorized procedure" (D. E. Smith, 2006:83) at different times across multiple sites. Intellectual colonization in this sense is a relational complex that includes many levels of interrelated activity. To apprehend it in this way requires a method of inquiry that makes visible the way a broad range of work processes are hooked into a common set of institutional relations that link my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers, and the work of women entrepreneurs in local sites of 'development.'

1.4. The method of inquiry

There is a range of scholarly critiques, feminist and otherwise, that points to the limitations of institutional arrangements prepared in advance and at a distance from local circumstances (Brohman, 1996; Escobar, 1995; Gates, 1993; Rai, 2002). In the case of mainstream sociology, Dorothy Smith (1999) critiques how sociologists learn to fit their experienced worlds into the conceptual frameworks and relevancies of sociological discourse, thereby excluding the standpoint of people living and acting in the everyday world. Smith's Institutional Ethnography\(^{14}\) (IE) is a reconstruction of sociology as "a form of knowledge constructed from the standpoint of individual experience, [that] explores how the particular social relations that constitute the particular world in which that experience arises have come into being and how they now operate" (Laslett & Thorne, 1992:85). In Smith's view, 'experience' in sociology never actually happens -- it is

\(^{14}\) Dorothy Smith does not use upper case letters to refer to institutional ethnography as it gives the impression that it can be classified as Grand Theory. Although I refer to 'Smith's IE' in this work I am not implying that she claims ownership of the method of inquiry, but rather to reference it as a particular form of institutional ethnographic inquiry. Smith is careful to give credit to IE researchers who have found new ways to apply IE. For Smith, IE is not a finished project but "an emergent mode of inquiry, always subject to revision, and the improvisation required by new applications" (Devault & McCoy, 2002:752).
always in language. Thus, if a researcher is to avoid fitting information into a framework of taken-for-granted language, she must "know methods of inquiry beginning from a standpoint outside the relations of ['institutional knowing'] and be able to call on a sociological knowledge put together the same way" (Smith cited in Laslett & Thorne, 1992:96). She must also explore how she 'knows' organizational processes and how phenomena corresponding to social acts come to be accepted as such without question (D. E. Smith, 1987). IE makes visible not only the power relations at work in the setting under study but also those involved in the research process itself. As such it offers "an alternative to the objectified subject of knowledge of established social scientific discourse" (D. E. Smith, 2005:10).

IE was developed as a method of inquiry for investigating social processes that coordinate the work done by actual people in local sites to meet the requirements and specifications of institutional practices and professional discourses developed elsewhere. An IE researcher investigates the way institutional practices and professional discourses coordinate and interpenetrate a range of social relationships between different actors. IE can thus be used to explicate how local work practices are rendered accountable through a set of categories that originate in professional discourses. In my research I use Institutional Ethnography as a framework of inquiry to examine the processes through which development agendas aimed at improving the well-being of women are organized at both institutional and local levels. I found IE to be particularly useful for exploring just how development institutions come to produce and reproduce institutionally recognized categories such as 'gender', 'poverty', and 'need', regardless of locally lived experiences and understandings of them.

In the post-Soviet Kyrgyz context, concepts such as colonization, capitalism, socialist, modern, traditional, transition, democracy and even gender equality are not only poorly specified, but are locally contentious\(^{15}\). While I do not (and cannot) entirely

\(^{15}\) I learned in the course of writing up a research proposal in partnership with a local NGO and an academic colleague that the notion of colonialism in Kyrgyzstan is hotly debated among local scholars, some of whom understand Western professional interpretations of Russian domination as privileging 'modern' over 'traditional' and hence as having effects that were primarily positive, while others view the Soviet era as highly disruptive (Anonymous e-mail, April 16, 2012).
reject them, rather than conceptualizing them as either theoretical or categorical points of analysis, IE allows me to investigate them as social processes that can be apprehended in how the actual work practices of people are coordinated to meet the requirements and specifications of institutional practices and professional discourses developed elsewhere. By providing an empirical account of how things come to happen the way they do, I am able to identify, not theoretically or conceptually, but in actual practice just where disjunctures between institutional policy and its application in local sites occur. Disjuncture refers here not only to a disconnect between theory, method and practice, or programming and outcomes, but to the organization of social relations that precludes the possibility of mutually empowered dialogic interchanges in the first place. With a clear and specified understanding of how the social is actually put together (or is in the process of being put together) in local sites, my research contributes an empirically informed study of how work processes come to take on depoliticizing functions through practices that, by design, preclude a dialogic interchange.

This focus emerged in part out of my experience of attending a Business Course for Women Entrepreneurs sponsored in December 2008 by WESA. Participants included representatives of other non-governmental organizations as well as women working in trades and crafts. The focus of the morning sessions was on developing a business plan. The articulation of the training to transnational capitalist practices was very obvious: A good business plan, participants were told, statistically leads to less chance of bankruptcy and greater chance of success, access to business loans, marketing research in advance of starting the business, consideration of the particular strength of a business proposal, the writing of an effective resume, and negotiation of contracts to ensure a business idea will be viable once it comes to fruition. I was able to attend the course as part of my initial visit to Kyrgyzstan during which, in just 10 days, we learned about the problems people from many sectors encounter as they struggle to understand the institutional requirements of a market economy. It was evident that not only do people have difficulty accessing information about business permits and regulations, legal rights and processes, and the shifting role and function of local governing bodies, but training in this regard also appeared to be limited, or at least did
not adequately account for the requirements of newly emerging institutional relations between village and state\(^{16}\).

In addition to explicit institutional disjunctures, we heard about problems associated with limited, unreliable and rationed electricity during the cold winter months in the village, and experienced them while walking after dark on the poorly lit and maintained streets of Bishkek, and while touring museums that offered neither heat for comfort, nor lighting for viewing displays. We learned of the importance of sheep, not only to rural economies but also to the Kyrgyz culture and economy more generally. We also learned that social enterprise and the social economy (though not identified as such in Kyrgyzstan)\(^{17}\) was alive and vibrant, both as a concept and practice in the emerging Kyrgyz economy. People seemed keen to receive information they could use to not just improve their business practices, but to understand the emerging and complex processes of governance they were encountering at multiple levels of institutional organization. In the midst of these complexities, women entrepreneurs seemed central to the struggle to improve the livelihoods of families and communities in rural regions of the country. Of interest to me is how the efforts of these women become entangled in broader processes of transformation that organize how development gets done in Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere.

\(^{16}\) See Appendix A for a more detailed ethnographic account of the December 2008 visit.

\(^{17}\) While teaching at AUCA I found summary notes in the Social Research Centre archives of a lecture given in 2009 on the merits of 'social marketing.' According to the consultant giving the lecture, an overwhelming majority of NGOs have been involved in the practice of social marketing, but they do not identify what they do as 'social marketing' because they see the system as already existing unconsciously and intuitively rather than as something innovative and new. Citing a Russian colleague, the lecturer explained that the best way to differentiate between social and commercial marketing is to see "commercial marketing as marriage for money, social marketing as marriage for love" (SRC, 2009:n.p.). In addition, social marketing is not understood to be a panacea for reform, but rather, a part of overall strategic planning. I also noticed that Social Economy, although typically absent in international development discourse, recently appeared in a Call for Papers issued in the fall of 2012 by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (see: UNRISD  Project Brief 2: Potential and limits of social and solidarity economy).
1.5. Transformative processes of development in Kyrgyzstan

1.5.1. Social, economic and political tensions in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is one of five countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, that make up the Central Asian region of the former Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan became a sovereign state in December 1990, officially declaring political independence in August, 1991. Kyrgyzstan’s population (2009 census) of 5,362,800 is comprised of three main ethnic groups: Kyrgyz (70.9%), Uzbek (14.3%), and Russian (7.8%). Ethnic composition varies regionally across the country, and particularly in the fertile Ferghana Valley where, given its border with Uzbekistan, the Uzbek population is more concentrated. The ethnic composition of the country has seen drastic change in recent years due to labour migration not only from rural to urban areas, but also to Russia and Kazakhstan. It is estimated that almost one million migrants have left the country to work in construction and other trades in Russia or Kazakhstan. Once hailed as an “island of democracy” in the Central Asian region, Kyrgyzstan’s reputation for democratic reform has been tarnished by political revolutions culminating in the ousting of two presidents over the past decade. The revolution of April 2010, was violent, leaving hundreds dead and many more fleeing the country in the wake of ethnic clashes that ensued, particularly in the southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad. The revolution led to the ousting of President Bakiev and his family on allegations of corruption and nepotism. Amidst ongoing social unrest, a new parliamentary system was put in place in October 2010. Although a new president has since been elected, democratic reforms continue to be a challenge, particularly in Southern regions of the country where ethnic tensions remain unresolved. Ethnic tensions are aggravated by widespread poverty given that there are few opportunities for men to find work, women’s jobs once depended on Soviet provision of social infrastructure, and youth have limited access to knowledge and skills required to viably participate in market economy processes. The country and its peoples rely heavily on foreign aid and donors whose programs and agendas are developed for the most part outside of local control (Hemment, 2000:105; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b). In the midst of these upheavals, it is small wonder that the prolific international aid organizations working to rebuild infrastructure and
community security in the region seem able to achieve only piecemeal success in their efforts to tackle the immense task of the country’s ongoing political and economic transformations. Noteworthy is how foreign education institutions, and the discipline of sociology in particular, are implicated in ongoing processes of transformation in Kyrgyzstan.

1.5.2. AUCA as an instrument of political and economic transformation

During the Soviet era the discipline of sociology was used to legitimize and de-legitimize the planning and implementation strategies of Soviet collectivization in Central Asia. The imperialist project of Sovietization was largely responsible for establishing not only the basis of legitimate scientific research, but also institutions of higher learning across Central Asia. For its part, sociology had served as a national or patriotic science used to shore up an official rhetoric (Amsler, 2007) that proclaimed "a harmoniously integrated national community, motivated by shared beliefs and values...in which the division of labor had lost its antagonistic, anomic, or forced character" (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005:9). Social scientific study, directed by Moscow, was largely responsible for the upkeep of this utopian self-image which was, of course, far from the reality of lived life. The great distance between official rhetoric and lived reality during the Soviet era posed disjunctures for many academics (not to mention those whom they studied). External support, then as now, was a vital factor in the institutionalization, and thus the funding and legitimization of social scientific work. Today reliance on external support remains a significant factor. In post-Soviet Central Asia, Kyrgyz sociologists have not only lost financial and social privileges, but legitimacy and careers now depend upon and are constrained by the agendas of newly formed and unstable governments, as well as international organizations, donor support and the 're-colonization' efforts of neoliberal and anti-communist forces (Amsler, 2007).

Thus I found Amsler's (2007) historical account of the experience of sociologists in Kyrgyzstan relevant to my research, especially since I funded my stay with employment as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) from August 2010 to July 2011. Amsler's account is drawn from detailed insights gleaned through her assignment in 1999, to assist with
establishing the Department of Sociology at AUCA by serving as co-chair. AUCA was initiated as the Kyrgyz-American Faculty in 1993 during which time it was housed in the English-language faculty of the Kyrgyz National University (KNU). In 1997, the school separated from KNU and moved to a building that had formerly served as the headquarters of the Kyrgyz Republic's Communist Party Supreme Soviet. The new school strengthened its ties with the United States government and changed its name to the American University in Kyrgyzstan (AUK), after which its independence was conferred by presidential decree. The AUK then "began a rapid transition from a small, professionally oriented Soviet faculty to an American liberal-arts-style private college. The shift [involved] reorganization of the disciplines, [with a particular] focus on building departments of social science" (Amsler, 2007:107). When the sociology department was established in 1998, it was as a private and international institution aimed at developing "sociology as a liberal art, [a] form of social criticism, and [a] semi-commercial enterprise" (Amsler, 2007:94). The school has since been renamed the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) and today represents itself as a model for 'independent' higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Its main sources of funding are tuition fees, the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation), and the US State Department. External political and economic relationships are thus deeply embedded in the functioning and funding of AUCA.

Amsler had been assigned to work with Ainoura Sagynbaeva, a Moscow-educated sociologist, to establish a 'new kind' of sociology department in Kyrgyzstan. One of Sagynbaeva's tasks was to compose promotional brochures for the new department. Amsler's description of two of the brochures provides insights into how a set of interconnected relations came to impose a particular orientation of what that 'new kind' of sociology would be, and how they also came to preclude inclusion of Sagynbaeva's own version. Sagynbaeva acquired her inspiration to expand the university's sociology offerings during an academic exchange programme in the US where she had been exposed to "a range of sociological perspectives unknown in Kyrgyzstan, a strong scholarly community and specialized degrees in which students

18 Its founder was a language teacher named Kamila Sharshekeeva. Her intention was "to train students in English and introduce them to 'market-oriented' fields such as business administration, law and economics" (Amsler, 2007:107).
made choices about how to design their own educational programmes" (Amsler, 2007:107). This was counter to Soviet-style university education wherein the authority to design programs was primarily the domain of administrators. What Sagynbaeva hoped to establish was a sociology built on Soviet sociological experiences and social problems as defined by Kyrgyz sociologists. Amsler (2007:113) noted, however, that these were left out of the 1999 promotional brochure:

Despite her proclivity to view sociology as an intellectual vocation, Sagynbaeva's immersion in Kyrgyzstani society, concern for students' material welfare and responsibility for departmental finances compelled her to take a more pragmatic approach to defining the discipline.

Thus the brochure she produced favoured an American style critical-liberal agenda. By 2003, however, faculty members, including foreign sociologists, began to express concerns about the uncritical application of the liberal-critical agenda to Kyrgyzstan, and the absence of national issues and localized content from the sociology curriculum. Sagynbaeva revised the brochure, this time defining sociology as "a scholarly, practical and marketable discipline that was oriented towards public service at both national and international levels" (Amsler, 2007:115). In the new version, sociology was legitimized not only by its grounding in liberal traditions of 'critical thinking', but also by its technical practicality, national relevance and recognition by Western 'experts'. What Sagynbaeva had initially conceptualized as an intellectual experiment within and for a transitional post-Soviet society was again reoriented by "the pragmatic demands of institutionalizing it as a standardized, degree-granting academic discipline. [The form it took] resulted not in the articulation of a 'new Soviet-American sociology', but rather in the urgent importation of foreign, mainly American and British, models of sociology education" (Amsler, 2007:113).

What I have described above is an instance of how a set of relations external to the department chair came to reorganize the model of sociology she had intended to build at AUCA. The outcome may not seem remarkable given that AUCA is, after all, a US-funded institution. What is remarkable is the way the set of relations organizing the practices that link AUCA to both the state and specific Kyrgyz political and economic policy are woven through with 'ideological codes' that operate in a similar fashion to those of development programming for women. In the case of AUCA, it is sociology that
is sculpted into a discipline envisioned by bureaucratic managerialism, and then utilized
as a tool for promoting the neoliberalism that pervades organizational thinking. The
organizational thinking I am referring to is a complex of interrelated activities and
relations that extend beyond the sociology department, AUCA, and Kyrgyzstan itself. It
functions to organize diverse local activities and accountabilities to be comprehensible in
terms given by standardized concepts and categories developed elsewhere. In what
follows I further demonstrate how in the case of AUCA, administration, faculty, students,
state government, development institutions and my own research effort are drawn into a
common set of relations that promote the agenda of neoliberalism.

The sociology department at AUCA faces financial hardship just as women in
rural development programming do. Thus, retaining highly qualified instructors, hiring
new instructors to enhance the curriculum, and finding support for internal intellectual
interests is challenging. Since the department receives little in the way of financial or
professional support from the university (which is likewise constrained by a shortage of
resources), sociologists have had to seek alternative sources of funding. One of these
led to establishing in 2002, the Applied Research Center\textsuperscript{19} with funding obtained by
commissioning studies from international organizations (Amsler, 2007). So successful
was the enterprise that by 2011 the Social Research Center (SRC) was reorganized into
two entities: The Central Asian Studies Institute (CASI) and the Tian Shan Policy Center
(TSPC). The forms that reorganization took provide insights into connections to donor
support and other institutional interests that influenced the reorganization.

The CASI home page (2011) bears a USAID\textsuperscript{20} logo, and describes the institute
as "a research and academic unit of the American University of Central Asia, established
with the mission of promoting the study of Central Asia locally and internationally." It is
noteworthy that the website explicitly mentions that CASI (2011) "is a non-profit
academic research unit accountable to the President of the American University of
Central Asia" (who is American). The Tian Shan Policy Center (2011) makes clear
AUCA's political orientations, and also those of the former SRC from which it evolved:

\textsuperscript{19} By the time I was employed at AUCA the name had been changed to the Social Research
Center (SRC).

\textsuperscript{20} United States Agency for International Development
The Tian Shan Policy Center is an innovative nonprofit public interest organization focused on research, analysis, and implementation of appropriate and effective public policy in the nations and communities of Central Asia. TSPC specializes in the critical fields of strategic development policy, human rights, and sustainable environment programs, and through its efforts strives to strengthen good governance as the bedrock for efforts to better the lives of the peoples of our emerging countries.

The predecessor of TSPC was the Social Research Center (www.src.auca.kg) one of the few acclaimed research centers in Kyrgyzstan and widely recognized for undertaking serious analysis of various important issues in contemporary national policy agenda. Since its establishment in 2007, the Social Research Center (SRC) promoted the research and development of the major principles and practices of democracy, free market, rule of law, and social equality in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. The strategic goals of the SRC were to improve and contribute to the policy-making process in Kyrgyzstan by carrying out public-policy analysis, proposing alternative solutions to current problems, fostering substantive policy dialogue between government, civil society, academia, business, and general public. The SRC also aimed to nurture cooperation and dialogue between various policy actors – government, civil society, academia, business and general public – in order to diversify approaches towards solving socio-economic and political problems.

Concepts such as 'good governance', 'democracy', 'free market', and 'civil society' are significant components of the discursive frames of neoliberal political and economic reorganization. AUCA can thus be understood as a centre of training and education in the policy and practices of neoliberalism.

I have used the example of AUCA to begin unfolding, in part, how my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers, and the work of women entrepreneurs in local sites of 'development' are linked by a common set of organizational practices. As a professor employed at AUCA I was drawn into the relations that organize education about neoliberal policies and practices. I was also drawn into processes of organizational thinking that were often frustrating for me or did
not make sense given my training and experience working in Western universities\textsuperscript{21}. I tried to approach my work with the attitude that it was me who had to change and adapt to local processes, yet while doing so I sensed that I was losing the respect of my colleagues. I had come to AUCA with the idea that I had as much to learn as to teach, and this was at odds with local expectations of my role as a Western sociologist. Also pertinent is the contradiction that although my personal views are politically at odds with the neoliberal agenda, I could not have completed my research in Kyrgyzstan without the funding I received through employment at AUCA.

It is important to note that my research takes place in an arena of major political, social and economic transformation where orthodoxies of truth are in the process of being questioned, dismantled and reorganized, and where not only NGOs, but also academics and local elites contend for power, resources and legitimacy. Even though I tried to remain sensitive to power relations at all stages of my work, academic relations being what they are, in the end I could not avoid being drawn into practices of intellectual colonization. The end product of my research is after all a PhD dissertation; and my own position, among others, as a Westerner, a PhD candidate, a sociologist and a woman is never separate from the social relationships I am investigating. Thus I struggled with the question of how I could produce research that is sensitive to these realities and not compromised by them. In other words, how could I engage in a research practice that would hold me to account for intellectual colonization while I tried to write an account of the institutional relations that organize the training of women entrepreneurs, while simultaneously being held to account by the institutional relations that organize the writing of a sociology dissertation? This is the complex task I set out to unfold in the chapters that follow.

\textsuperscript{21} For example, particularly frustrating for me was the flexibility around deadlines for the graduating thesis. In my experience deadlines are tied into administrative processes that preclude any possibility of making alterations at the level of the department. Yet this kind of negotiation was assumed by students to be possible, and could indeed be negotiated with the department chair and university administration as needed.
1.5.3. **Summary of chapters**

In chapter Two, I introduce some of the historical context necessary for understanding Kyrgyzstan, the Central Asian region, and how processes of development have been introduced, and are playing out there. I begin by explaining what the concepts Central Asia[n] and 'Muslim women' refer to in my study. This is followed by a brief historical account that begins with ancient epochs and carries forward to events leading up to and including the Soviet era, particularly as they relate to the experiences of women. I then go on to examine the building of an independent Kyrgyz state; women's involvement in NGO work; and 'development' as a project that draws women into particular kinds of transformative processes in Kyrgyzstan. I conclude with the question as to how, despite a range of other options, 'development' work in Kyrgyzstan came to follow the same patterns as development processes elsewhere, and how this relates to transformative learning processes, including my own.

In the Chapters Three and Four I explain how institutional ethnography as a transformed research practice allows me to account for transformative learning processes by investigating the way institutional practices and professional discourses coordinate the work practices of women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan. In the third chapter I explain and expand upon the rationale and methods used in institutional ethnography, including the problematic and issues of representation in IE. In the fourth chapter I explain how I applied IE as a framework of inquiry in my research; that is, how my research design evolved, how I gained access to the research sites, the processes through which the research problematic was developed, data collection processes, the practical aspects of interviewing and interview analysis, and practical limitations and ethical concerns in my research.

Chapter Five provides background information about my principal research site, Jerge-Tal village. Here I describe some of my fieldwork processes -- how we prepared for each trip, how we travelled, and observations made while staying with host families. The chapter provides something of a village tour, including interviews with kindergarten staff and students at the high school.

Chapter Six is my ethnography of women entrepreneurs and the relations they confront in the course of doing their work. In this chapter I investigate some of the
processes by which WESA training programs are brought to the village, and the challenges women entrepreneurs confront in their efforts to do entrepreneurial work.

Chapter Seven is my overall analysis of outcomes and disjunctures in village economic development. I draw on development discourses that have been used to understand and develop policy for women's well-being, feminist literatures concerned with why support for women's empowerment and participation continues to fall short of its claims and goals in development practice, and studies of the particular case of gender and development in Central Asia. While on the surface it might appear that minimal outcomes can be attributed to ongoing internal discord and the challenges of adapting to market economy processes, my study systematically illustrates that there is much more to the relationship between minimal outcomes and ongoing difficulties than meets the eye.

Chapter Eight examines formal processes of governance in Jerge-Tal village. Through an ethnography of administrative decision-making processes I explicate the way documentary forms of organization enter into and reorient village governance processes so that they come to be defined by and coordinated with reporting requirements developed external to the village, a process I refer to as the textual mediation of village need.

I conclude in Chapter Nine with an overall summary and discussion of my findings. The focus of my investigation was the way development institutions insert managerial practices into processes of rural development such that conceptually produced phenomena like 'gender equality', 'poverty reduction', 'market economy skills training', and 'humanitarian aid' are organized and made measurable along a chain of work activities at the local village level, but are accountable elsewhere. My aim was to show how work processes are drawn into and coordinated by a common set of relations that, whether intentional or not, preclude dialogic interchanges across a sequence of interrelated activities that link my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers (local and international), the work of local and national governments, and the work of women entrepreneurs in local sites where 'development' happens. Transformation occurs regardless of intentions - and it occurs not as a concept, but as a social relation that I show can be apprehended in the way that local
work practices are coordinated to meet the requirements and specifications of institutional practices and professional discourses developed elsewhere. This has implications for both local and extra-local actors. My account of the more implicit relations that organize training for women entrepreneurs contributes to better understanding how processes of 'development' operate.

My research addresses a growing concern with the way feminist and other progressive agendas are systematically depoliticized by the insidious processes of neoliberal development (Barry-Shaw & Jay, 2012; Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; Cornwall et al., 2007; Rai, 2002), and contributes to work that challenges conventional frameworks of development aimed at empowering women (Blakeley, 2007; Cornwall & Goetz, 2007; Mies & Shiva, 2004; Moser, 1993). My account of the more implicit objectives of programming contributes to a better understanding of how processes of 'development' can be organized to more effectively empower all actors involved. By effectively empower, I mean to understand and account for the underlying basis of empowerment, the nature of what is actually being empowered, and the political outcomes made possible, dismissed, or precluded at the nexus of development, social transformation and the training of women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere. The insights I provide offer a starting point for developing a body of knowledge about local development processes that is empirically informed, politically useful, and to a considerable extent, locally produced. Such knowledge is politically useful to local peoples, but also to the institutions that study and serve them (or fail to serve them), and those seeking to better specify what concepts like colonization, capitalism, transition, and development mean in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz context.
2. Unveiling Historical, Political and Religious Processes: Women in Kyrgyzstan across the Ages

Before going to Kyrgyzstan to begin my fieldwork I ‘patched’ together a historical account through which I began to appreciate what Cummings (2012:1) refers to as "the obscurity and importance" of the Central Asian region. In this early piece I used the analogy of a patchwork quilt, with the end product being a somewhat coherent mass of patches, some of which fit together very well, some clinging together by a few or many threads, and others difficult to patch in at all. In returning to this project I maintain the analogy is useful for considering a historical context for Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region. Like others, I believe that to speak of ‘the region’ at all fails to account for the varieties of historical experience and interpretation that make it difficult to formulate a unified account of either its history or geography (Cummings, 2012; Golden, 2011). Nonetheless, there are a number of well-written historical accounts that offer, through in-depth examinations, a broad range of views and debates about the history of the area and about the composition of its geographic expanse (Cummings, 2012; Gleason, 1997; Golden, 2011; Köçümulkılıç, 2005; Rahimov, 2012). There are also a number of accounts written about women in the Soviet/post-socialist/post-Soviet eras, and the particular experience of Muslim women in the Central Asian context (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Gal & Kligman, 2000; Kamp, 2006; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b; Suchland, 2011; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995). My concern in this chapter is not to recount this vast body of historical literature, but rather to familiarize the reader with some of the historical, political and religious conflicts, tensions and processes that have come over time to articulate particular transformative processes in the Central Asian region, and thus also, to formulate particular frameworks for understanding and 'improving' the condition of women's lives in rural Kyrgyzstan today. While I attend as best I can to the

22 Others might find ‘pastiche’ (Jameson, 1991) or ‘bricolage’ (Derrida, 1993; Strauss, 1962) more academically savvy, but since my intention is to comb through the ‘social fabric’ to see how it is put together and what it is connected to I find ‘patchwork quilt’ to be a more suitable analogy.
particularities of each event and time period as I have come to understand them, I acknowledge that my understanding is limited by my reading and interpretation of the works of others, augmented by observations made during my time in Kyrgyzstan\textsuperscript{23}.  

2.1. What is Central Asia[n]?

\textit{Figure 2.1. Central Asian States today}

![Central Asian States today](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Asia_-_political_map_2008.svg)

Scholars tend to refer to four main historical eras that shape the way the Central Asian region is understood: pre-conquest or pre-colonial; pre-revolution or Russian imperial; post-revolution or Soviet; and post-Soviet or post-independence (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Gleason, 1997; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995). There are also four leitmotifs by which Central Asia is typically characterized: geographic landmarks; nomadic and sedentary populations; the meeting place of the world's ancient civilizations; and the site of the 'New Great Game' of neo-imperialism (Cummings, 2012). The geography of Central Asia is typically characterized as: landlocked and central; having natural boundaries imposed by topography; or having a geology and topography too difficult to

\textsuperscript{23} I would also like to acknowledge Gulnara Ibraeva's helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
constitute as a whole. When understood in relation to the surrounding region (Eurasia or the Greater Middle East), Central Asia is seen as either a liability in terms of mobility and trade, or as an asset given the region's central position between Europe, Turkey, India, Russia and China (Cummings, 2012). The borders demarcated on the map in Figure 2.1 were drawn by Stalin in the 1920s. This representation is generally accepted by Central Asian, Russian and English scholars as an interpretation of 'where' Central Asia is today. This is the region and borders of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia that I have in mind when I refer to them in this chapter.

Central Asian societies have survived a long and complicated history of conquest and invasion during which the Islamic faith was introduced, Turkic languages came to be prominent, the Great Silk Road brought transitory prosperity to the region, and, more recently, the Soviet regime imposed national boundaries which continue to demarcate nations within the Central Asian region of today. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan as it exists today within the geographical enclosure of particular borders came about as the product of Russian imperialism, not as a result of the efforts of a nationalistic Kyrgyz people. History has shown that within Kyrgyz borders is the federation and fragmentation of socio-political units that existed prior to the Soviet era, along with urban/rural, sedentary/nomadic, lowland/highland, religious, tribal, regional, ethnic and dynastic lines, that actively persisted in the wake of Soviet conquest, continued throughout the Soviet era, and still exist today. Today, just as in the past, a tension between the forces of modernization and tradition is woven through cultural, regional, and religious interests, attitudes and divisions, and how these adapt to, resist, and contribute to the emergence of particular forms of political and economic organization in the ethnically and geographically diverse expanse of the region today (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Cummings, 2012; Gleason, 1997; Massell, 1974; Rahimov, 2012; Steimann, 2011; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995).

2.2. Are Kyrgyz people Muslim?

The Central Asian region is a distinct cultural and historical entity whose cores and limits have been encroached upon and variously transformed by Persian, Greek, Turkish, Arab, Mongolian, and Russian empires. Its history has also given rise to its own
strong indigenous rulers, traditions and beliefs. Thus in Kyrgyz society today, unity and difference tend to be demarcated, on the one hand, by a range of distinct cultural and historical cores in the form of language and genealogical descent (Persian, Turkish, Russian or Chinese), and on the other, by the centrality of Islam as a core practice in daily life\textsuperscript{24}. These cores are not discrete categories, but rather overlap in terms of intellectual space, economic systems and systems of values (Cummings, 2012).

In terms of the centrality of Islam, while the term 'Muslim' implies adherence to the official tenets of Islam, in practice the tenets are subject to interpretation (Sunni, Shia, Sufi, etc.). There are also variations in the extent to which particular rituals and traditions are observed, and also in degrees of commitment at various levels of society. At the level of state, "Islam is acknowledged as an integral part of the cultural heritage…, but is rejected as a guiding principle of public and political life" (Akcali, 2005:104).

Indeed, where the state is concerned, there is a loosely defined line between 'integral' and 'fundamentalist', such that when observers begin to practice too zealously they have been subject to charges of 'terrorism' (Cummings, 2012). Indigenous forms of tradition have also persisted, and overlap with Muslim beliefs and rituals. Thus whether understood as a religious practice or as a guiding principle of public and political life, it is no wonder that I found the 'Muslim identity challenging to explain and understand in the Kyrgyz context. Below I describe some of the particular inconsistencies and variations I observed.

Some of my most notable observations about people in relation to their Muslim identity involved food and feasting. Feasting was often associated with state holidays, many of which were Muslim holidays\textsuperscript{25}. Nonetheless, from what I was told by students and colleagues, Kyrgyz people tend to enjoy and celebrate feasting itself more so than the religious tenets associated with it (much, I suppose, like my family celebrates Christmas and Easter these days). I also noticed variations in the practice of fasting

\textsuperscript{24} According to Gulnara Ibraeva (2013), "in Soviet times there was strong suppression of religion thus several generations grew up without significant Islamic influence. Local versions of Islamic belief and practices were also classified differently. For example in Kyrgyzstan it has been found that the deeply rooted Zoroastrianism, shamanism and other beliefs were mixed with Islam; in some regions the Sufist version of Islam was more widely practiced, etc."

\textsuperscript{25} State holidays were numerous, judging from my teaching calendar, there were several each month.
during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the month in the Islamic calendar when the Quaran is believed to have been revealed. During this time adherents are expected to fast from dawn to dusk. While people seemed generally aware that it was Ramadan, it seemed that fasting was not universally practiced. Some restaurants and cafes were closed until after eight o’clock in observance of Ramadan, while others remained open. The one practice that appeared to follow Muslim tenets most consistently was that pork was not available for sale at the local meat shop or grocery store\textsuperscript{26}. Even so, I came across a pork counter at Ortesai bazaar, though its presence was insignificant in comparison to offerings of lamb, beef and chicken.

\textit{Figure 2.2. International Women’s Day, March 8, 2010}

There were also many state holidays that were not associated with Muslim tradition; for instance, Independence Day, Nooruz (Persian New Year or spring equinox), the honouring of men who served in the military, and International Women’s Day, which

\textsuperscript{26} It seems, however, that these days some urban dwellers have begun eating pork, especially in the form of sausage (Ibraeva, 2013).
contrary to my experience in Canada, was celebrated with an enthusiasm equal to Christmas. Beginning a week or so before March 8, I began receiving greetings of Поздравляю (congratulations) almost everywhere I went. My son Sam had arrived to visit that day. Figure 2.2 shows how we joined the crowd of families gathered for celebrations in Ala-Too square. At least on International Women's Day, I could see that women were highly valued in Kyrgyz society.

During the last two months of my stay we moved to an apartment that was two blocks from to the central mosque in Bishkek. In the course of my daily wanderings, I noticed that both women and men went to the mosque to pray (though in separate prayer halls I was told). I was relating to some of my colleagues one day how much I enjoyed the evening call to prayer -- how the gentle song from the mosque drew me to my window and instilled me with a sense of calm. Their response to my surprise was, "Oh Debbie, how can you think so positively!" (Daily Journal, June 30, 2013). To them the call to prayer was an incessant annoyance -- a distraction constantly imposed in a day filled with more pressing things to attend to. In retrospect, I suppose they may have been irritated because the call attempted to impose a particular profile of Muslim identity that did not resonate well with everyone (perhaps much like the reading of the Lord's Prayer in Canadian schools when I was a child).

I also had occasion to observe ritualistic practices that were unrelated to either Muslim beliefs or state holidays, such as this one taken from my daily journal:

*Wednesday evening on my way home from supper with Margot I was walking behind two guys when one of them stooped to pick something up from the scrubby grass along the sidewalk -- he set it on the porch fence of the little shop we passed -- it was a small piece of bread. Then today I was walking up Erkindyk and a man stooped to pick up a piece of bread and set it on the window ledge of an apartment [bordering the sidewalk]. I wonder where this bread is coming from -- why is it being tossed on the ground -- and why is somebody picking it up?*  
*(Daily Journal, May 27, 2011)*

When I asked my colleague Nurlan Choibekov about this, he explained that Kyrgyz people consider bread to be 'alive' and that it was wrong to just throw it on the ground (Personal Communication, June 2011). The young men I witnessed picking up bread were observing respect for a Kyrgyz tradition called *yryński*, a complex ritual that involves
the exchange of (spiritual) power through food. Through many such observations I came to see what appeared to be a complex blending of traditional practices and beliefs with Muslim tradition.

What is 'Muslim'? If it is the observance of tenets of Islam such as ritual practices (daily prayers, fasting), holidays (feasting), and certain forms of behaviour and values (the segregation of women and men in religious services), how is it that people who do not observe these nonetheless seem to have some sense of being Muslim?

Early in my research I was challenged by a respected local colleague about framing my research as a study of rural 'Muslim' women. I had taken the framing for granted in my prospectus because the historical accounts I was reading seemed to suggest that the experience of Central Asian women was that of Muslim women. Through observations made over the course of the year I spent in Kyrgyzstan, I came to better understand the diverse experience, not only of 'Central Asian' or 'Muslim' women, but of Kyrgyz peoples more generally, and thus to better understand the disconnect between the literature and local interpretations. Since I cannot know in what sense any woman or group of women I spoke to might consider themselves to be Muslim, I have reframed my research as a study of rural women, some of whose lives show traces of being 'Muslim'. Thus, when I refer to Muslim women in this chapter, I am doing so only to stay consistent with the language used by the authors I cite. Noteworthy is that in a history largely written about and understood in terms of conquest, it is only through Islam that women and a more day-to-day view of social life become meaningfully visible. A more pertinent starting point for accounting for the diverse and historical experiences of rural/Kyrgyz/Muslim/women may be how they are excluded from broader discourses or drawn into them on the essentialized terms of a feminist discourse not of their own making. Suchland (2011), in her account of Central Asian women who attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, notes that they produced a 'Statement from the Non-Region' to protest what they felt was an intentional shutting-out from the so-called global conversation on women's rights. Over a decade later, many women from the former 'Second World' continue to feel left out of the conversation or are co-opted into it on the basis of Western feminist ideals (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). I have tried to remain sensitive to this in my accounts of how institutional processes enter into the lives of rural women in Kyrgyzstan. In the sections that follow, I outline some of the historical
contexts through which women have experienced transformations in their lives over time, and discuss the kinds of transformations current development practices attempt to organize in their lives today.

2.3. A brief traditional account of ancient history

My account of Kyrgyz history begins with what many consider to be an important local traditional context for understanding Kyrgyz history. Some claim that authentic Kyrgyz tradition has its roots in Tengriism, an ancient shamanistic practice widespread among Turkic nations before the introduction of Islam, and persisting alongside of it afterwards. Renewed interest in Tengriism has sparked concern among Muslim clerics who criticize its followers for polytheistic beliefs that oppose Islamic teachings. Islamic clerics argue that Tengriism was the religion of ancients and that people cannot be both Muslim and Tengriist at the same time. Critics of Islam, on the other hand, argue that it is completely possible to be simultaneously Muslim and a follower of Tengriism because this is in fact how many people in Kyrgyzstan see themselves (Ashakeeva & Najibullah, 2012).

From what I observed, more significant than either Tengriism or Islam in the lives of Kyrgyz peoples, is the epic tale of Manas through which moral guidelines have been orally transferred from generation to generation since the 7th century CE. These stories recount the campaigns of the hero Manas against neighbouring tribes and enemies from China, and explain the principles by which Kyrgyz people have lived for what is said to be 3,000 years. Nobody knows exactly when the epic first appeared, though it is believed to be sometime between the 7th and 9th centuries CE. Thirty-five versions of Manas are known to exist, with the first official written form dating back to 15th century Madjmu at-Tavarih (Köçümkulkiizï, 2005). The Manas epic, consisting of 180,378 lines of verse (according to the Sagymbai Orozbakov-Manaschi version) cannot be recited by just anyone. Rather, the verses are transmitted from ancestors through dreams that come to particular people who, once they acquire the ability to recite the story, are known as Manaschi. In the 35 versions of Manas known to exist, the principal content varies only with respect to some of the details and manner of expression. During the Soviet era the epic was studied and recorded in written form. Today, ‘Manas ordo’
(cemetery of *Manas*) is a designated sacred place in the Talas region where the hero is believed to have lived.

The *Manas* epic in its entirety is a trilogy: the first part tells the story of *Manas* as a youth and also includes his adult life and campaigns, the second continues with the tale of his son, Semetey, and the third with his grandson, Seyket. The epic is interlinked with mythologies that include animals, nature, and descriptions of events supported by historical evidence. The focus is not only on the heroic deeds of *Manas* but also on descriptions of the day-to-day life of Kyrgyz people. According to wordings of contemporary *Manaschi*, the epic contains all the cultural and traditional aspects of ethnic Kyrgyz society. The verses describe many traditions and rituals which are still practiced today, including the construction of dwellings both inside and out, food preparation, clothing, and how to look after cattle; they instruct how to conduct family holidays, celebrations and ceremonies, such as the singing of funeral songs of grieving. The epic is considered to be a moral guide that contains lessons about honour, love for one’s own land and people, how to maintain good relationships with neighbours, and how to treat enemies. Metaphysically, it describes a universe with an underworld and an upper world, and expounds a philosophy that believes in mutual dependence and reciprocal relations between a spiritual and a physical world. The *Manas* epic thus encompasses both the culture and the psyche of Kyrgyz peoples (Köçümkulkiizi, 2005).

The name *Manas* has been given to regions, villages, and streets, and politicians continue to invoke the primordial image of *Manas* and its associated symbols to influence people’s attitudes towards them. A telling illustration of the significance of *Manas* is the government’s decision in the fall of 2011 to replace the *Erkindyk* monument erected in the Central Square of the national capital, Bishkek, with a monument of *Manas*. The *Erkindyk* monument had been erected to represent freedom and independence during the time of secession from the Soviet Union. The country has since suffered two political revolutions and many believe that exchanging *Erkindyk* with the monument of *Manas* will help encourage unity and healing in the country. Despite the considerable cultural and historical significance of *Manas*, some traditionalists fear the epic and the cultural way of life it reflects may be disappearing. This would have important implications for how the Kyrgyz population constructs and understands both
personal identities and that of a ‘Kyrgyz people’ as powerful influences, both internal and external, work to transform the country.

**Figure 2.3. Erkindyk and Manas monuments**

Sometimes referred to as Kyrgyzstan's statue of liberty, the Erkindyk (Kyrgyz word for freedom) monument was erected to celebrate the country's independence. Erkindyk was the figure of a winged woman on a globe (representing the world and dreams of peace and freedom) with a tyundyuk (top of a yurt structure symbolizing hearth and home) raised in her hand. The monument came to be associated with the country's ongoing political tensions because in Kyrgyz tradition, women do not pick up the tyundyuk. Erkindyk was thus believed to exhibit the wrong symbols. The monument was dismantled and replaced with the one of Manas on Independence Day, August 31, 2011. Manas photos by Askat Chynaly.
2.4. A brief account of conquests and invasions

Figure 2.4. Alexander’s Asian Expeditions

In 4th century CE, the Central Asian region was primarily comprised of city states under the rule of Iranian (i.e., Persian) people. The conquests of Alexander the Great in the Central Asian region are said to mark early tensions between East and West. Alexander's stay was brief, but Greek influence and customs remained long after he departed (particularly in Uzbekistan), though there is some debate over the extent to which Alexander influenced 'the East' or was more moulded by it (Holt, 1988).

Regardless, the power of the Greek empire receded after Alexander's death in 323 CE, giving rise to the Parthian empire and a return for a time to Persian influence. The Turks of the northeast plains sporadically invaded the valleys of Central Asia during this time but their impact was not significant until much later. During the 6th century two great kingdoms, the Persian and the Bactrian, ruled Central Asia. The 7th century brought a brief period of Arab rule during which science, culture and the Islamic faith were introduced. During this time, the Arabic language became "the local language of science and commerce in the region" (Gleason, 1997:29), and continued to be so for the next 300 years. It is noteworthy that Central Asia was in the process of becoming a centre of
learning at the very same time Europe and the Mediterranean region were passing through the Dark Ages (Gleason, 1997:39).

After the collapse of the Persian (Samanid) empire near the turn of the 7th century, power in the Central Asian region was held for a time by Turkic warriors until the invasions of the Mongol, Ghengis Khan, in the early 13th century. Although Khan himself ruled from afar, after his death in 1227 his descendents divided up Central Asia and ruled directly. The Mongol invasions were destructive, laying waste to many of the beautiful cities of Central Asia, the Arabic and Persian centres of learning and commerce, and the ancient irrigation system of the fertile Ferghana Valley. Nonetheless this era brought unity for the first time to the ancient world of Eurasia, uniting the region (if only as empire) "from the Pacific Ocean in the east, to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf in the south, to the edges of central Europe" (Gleason, 1997:30). The stabilizing effects of the Mongol empire saw trade flourish for two centuries along what came to be known as the Great Silk Road until the early 1600s when global circumnavigation took precedence over land routes across Central Asia. In any case, three enduring features of Central Asian history are said to have emerged at this time: the first is the ascendancy of Turkic languages and the cultural traditions of Islam; the second was the reorganization of Central Asia into small principalities ordered according to shifting coalitions among clans; and the third was the division of society into two economic classes, settled and nomadic, and particular forms of leadership that organized them (Cummings, 2012).

Political leadership of nomadic peoples was hereditary – communities or clans were organized along kinship lines whose powerful lineages are still apparent in the leadership of Central Asian republics today. Shifting legitimacies of leadership in urban centres, differences in understandings and experiences of urban and rural leadership, primordial attachments to tribe, clan and village, and segmentation resulting from linguistic and geographical separatism have always been difficult to transcend in the Central Asian region, even in times of crisis. The outcome has been interpreted in a number of ways. Gleason (1997) argues that these dynamics contributed to the region's vulnerability to coordinated outside conquests over the centuries. Corcoran-Nantes (2005) argues that it was Islam that held the region together and posed the greatest challenge to the domination of Central Asia by foreign powers. Massell (1974) argues
that the absence of a coordinated unity of political, economic, cultural, bureaucratic and military interests also made the region impervious to imperial integration. In any case, while the region may have been vulnerable to external conquests, the impact at the level of the local appears to have been mitigated in many ways.

2.5. A brief history of Russian imperialism in Central Asia

Figure 2.5. Map of Central Asia 1878

The Russian invasion of the Central Asian region in the early 1850s was initially an effort to counter increasing British power on the Indian subcontinent. The signing of the Paris Treaty in 1856 greatly diminished Russia's naval power on the Black Sea coast. Thus the Central Asian region became strategically important and invasion was more aggressively pursued. Colonial policy in the tsarist era was also influenced by changes in the world economy and new technologies. European imperialism in the 19th century was economically motivated, particularly with regard to the textile industry. Thus when the US Civil War disrupted the cotton market and the British turned to Egypt, Russia turned south to Central Asia, bringing trains and telegraphic communication to
the region. While the new technologies improved travel and communication, the tsarist invasions also installed formal administrative structures that imposed firm boundaries "between the cultural lives of the indigenous Muslims and the colonizing Russians. Communication between the two was discouraged, meaning that in general the Russians remained ignorant of and indifferent to the culture of the locals, and vice-versa" (Gleason, 1997:34). Unlike the Bolshevik Revolution to follow, the aim of tsarist colonization was not assimilation of Central Asian peoples in terms of either citizenship or civilization. Russian settlers enjoyed an elevated social status as skilled labourers and administrators during the tsarist regime, and resistance to colonialism was comparatively reduced, at least in the more settled (sedentary) regions (Cummings, 2012; Massell, 1974). In the more nomadic north, as Russian farmers began introducing settled agriculture to lands that had long been given over to pastoral and nomadic living, a series of rebellions broke out beginning in 1898 and continuing until 1929 (Rahimov, 2012).

2.5.1. The Bolshevik Revolution and the ‘Sovietization’ of Kyrgyzstan

The Bolsheviks found the imposition of a structure of Soviet power in Central Asia between 1918 and 1922 to be a challenging task. The problem Bolsheviks confronted was that the same pattern of traditional solidarities and orientations that made the Central Asian region so vulnerable to Soviet power, also made them “particularly elusive to attempts to legitimize [Soviet power] and use it for rapid revolutionary and efficient integration [into Soviet society]” (Massell, 1974:37). While the means and ends of the Bolshevik Revolution had been comprehensible in Russia and Eastern Europe, Lenin encountered a peculiar dilemma when attempting to impose revolutionary ideals in the Central Asian region. As his self-proclaimed writings attest, the dilemma was:

How...to build socialism under ‘Eastern conditions’ – where there was no industrial proletariat to speak of, where peasants and nomads constituted the bulk of the population, where diverse primordial traditions were a guide to the norms of life, where the ‘Oriental masses’ were barely reachable, [and] where one must solve the problems of a struggle not against capitalism, but against survivals of medievalism?

(Lenin, 1961 cited in Massell, 1974:42)
In other words, by what means could a region that had not yet passed through the capitalist stage of development be made to pass on to a system of Soviet communism? Lenin’s strategy was to apply what he saw as a scientific approach (evaluating and comparing local proposals, initiatives and experiences) to issues of social transformation that led him to eventually sanction a policy called ‘different roads to socialism.’ Given its non-industrial history, the Central Asian region, Lenin argued, required a slower, more systematic approach than that used in Russia\(^{27}\) and Eastern Europe, one that allowed for more diversity. Opponents (especially Stalinists) argued that the more advanced Russian revolutionary centre had a responsibility to take forcible command of the transformation of the Central Asian region. For them, assertions of individuality such as those made by smaller Asian nationalities had no place in the broader communist project. Thus the Bolsheviks ignored Lenin's appeals for balanced social and economic development and proceeded with widespread exploitation of the region’s people, food and raw materials (cotton was especially important). They argued that appeasing minorities’ sensibilities and demands would not only lead to vitiation of the principles of political unity, but by perpetuating traditional solidarities, could also engender nationalist and eventually separatist tendencies (Massell, 1974)\(^{28}\).

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\(^{27}\) Russia itself was not highly industrialized at this time compared to its European and American counterparts (Ibraeva, 2013).

\(^{28}\) In the year 1916, the tsar’s armies brutally crushed a Kyrgyz rebellion that left over 300,000 slain. One website claims that had it not been for the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the tsar’s armies might have succeeded in wiping out all of the Kyrgyz. Even today Lenin is honoured and revered as the savior of the Kyrgyz people. His timely entry and tempered approach to dealing with the problem of the Central Asian region might explain the floor dedicated primarily to the Leninist revolutionary era in the national museum in Bishkek.
I was surprised to find the monument of Lenin in Parliament Square. I saw others like it in the countryside. The museum in the background has a floor devoted to Lenin and the revolution where you can find some of the writings of Marx and Lenin preserved behind glass. Marx and Engels also have a place in a public park across the street from the American University of Central Asia (which was next door to Parliament) in Bishkek.

The Bolsheviks had two means at their disposal to force the general population into compliance. One was outright coercion, the other was to identify and recruit a surrogate proletariat\(^{29}\) where no proletariat in the classic Marxist sense had existed before. Rather than outright coercion, the Bolsheviks proceeded with a strategy of physically removing traditional elites through “moral denigration, political isolation, economic deprivation, selective resettlement and massive roundup and deportation” (Massell, 1974:77). Bent on rooting out the reactionary forms of authoritarianism that made local communities so resistant to sovietization, this effort was frustrated not only by the capacity of tribal communities to adapt, but by their walls of secrecy and internal solidarity. It became increasingly difficult for Soviet investigators to identify not only the truth of what was said, but also the identity of authoritative clansmen and relatives. In effect, due to a succession of rituals and oaths taken collectively by kinsmen, “far from being supplanted by considerations of class, property, and bureaucratic status, the old

\(^{29}\) This concept was coined by Gregory Massell in his book of the same title (Massell, 1974).
unities based on kinship, custom, and belief showed signs of persisting even in the absence of traditional figureheads, and seemed to present just as great an obstacle to the diffusion of Soviet influence as before” (Massell, 1974:83).

Corcoran-Nantes (2005) offers an alternative explanation for why in the absence (or at least what officially appeared to be the absence) of traditional figureheads a certain kind of unity persisted among the people. She credits Islam, which, although hardly an immutable characteristic, is nonetheless part of the historical struggles of different groups in Muslim society (Khalid, 1998). In the case of Central Asia, Corcoran-Nantes (2005:134) asserts

by the ninth century, when the Arab conquest of the region was complete, Central Asia had become one of the cultural pillars of the Muslim world, and it remains [so]… The majority of Central Asian Muslims are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school of law and are both liberal and tolerant in the practice of Islam. [Shiism is also practiced] by a minority of [people] principally…located in the Fergana regions… It is important to acknowledge…that various Islamic groups and sects form an important part of the development of Islam in the region… Various forms of Islam were sustained during the Soviet period, [but] Sufism, often referred to as folk Islam or Islamic mysticism, has been most influential in the expansion of Islam and the fight against the de-Islamicization of the region since the twelfth century… Sufism, following Sunni Muslim tradition, was not church-bound in its practice of Islam; noted for its tolerance of other religions, it focused on the importance of private prayer rather than the mosque.

During the years when Sovietization was being imposed, Sufi orders went underground to sustain Islamic tradition and practice. This surely contributed to the failure of the Bolshevik mission to destroy the religious base of the community.

Tokhtakhodjaeva’s30 (1995) historical ‘insider’ view of both the colonial/imperial and the post-Soviet eras of Central Asia offers an additional viewpoint on the role of Islam as a unifying force, especially in terms of historical implications for women's

30 Tokhtakhodjaeva (who has a PhD in Architecture) has been a long-time leader of the women’s movement in Uzbekistan and has written extensively on the status of women in Central Asia in post-communist societies. She was a founding member and co-director of the Women’s Resource Center in Tashkent from 1991 until it was closed down under pressure from the Uzbek government in 2005.
autonomy. Writing primarily about the experience of Uzbek women, Tokhtakhodjaeva examines Muslim traditionalism as a force upholding cultural identity during the Soviet phase, then re-emerging to the forefront in the independence phase. Her premise is that Central Asia, as one of the cradles of human civilization and a transcontinental trade route between East and West, has long been a target of political and cultural expansionism. She argues that Central Asia today has been "trapped in the Middle Ages" (1995:16) since the region lost significance as a transcontinental trade route with the opening of maritime trade routes during the Middle Ages. While she believes that the Muslim faith worked to a certain extent to unify people against external forces of oppression, she asserts there was at the same time intensification of what some might call Islam’s internal forces of oppression (i.e., conservatism) (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995). In the Soviet period, information was scarce and people’s mobility beyond their rigidly defined circles of existence negligible. Thus, Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995:24) argues, Islam “became a force contributing to the preservation of medieval norms while the external threat [of Russian] expansionism forced people to reject new ideas. The politics of isolation led to greater rigidity in religious norms…[giving rise to] extreme moral conservatism in both public and domestic life.” The effects were felt most significantly by women, the reason being that Islam, which was supposed to “wipe out the concept of differences between people…by prescribing guidelines and duties that applied to all” (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:25), nevertheless continued to uphold important differences in the guidelines prescribed for men and women.

At issue for Tokhtakhodjaeva is that conservatism is not an inherent feature of Muslim tradition. She cites ancient Egyptian memoirs that show women at one time performed important political roles and attended holiday events alongside men. Women appear to have lost positions of influence by the end of the 16th century, a period marked by the collapse of secular society after which women were excluded from education opportunities and only identified in memoirs as someone’s wife or mother. Tokhtakhodjaeva’s (1995:38) scathing appraisal of this era emphasizes how customary seclusion of women condemned them "to degradation, led their mental potential to stagnate, suppressed their individuality, lowered their worth, [and] led to physical exploitation and their being treated as child-bearing machines.” Women of varying ages were materially tied to each other in extended marital relations (often polygamous) in
which they were expected to suppress their own desires, aspirations and opinions and to defer authority to those older than them, particularly their mother-in-law. Upon marriage women left their families to live with their husband and in-laws and it was customary for the mothers-in-law to be in charge of allocating household chores, supervising the conduct of family members and often acting as family treasurer. These customary practices persist today, in that upon "entering their new family environment young brides are expected to show deference and respect to their husbands and older family members and conform to expectations and practices that govern the family" (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:152). Age and the birth of children eventually elevate a woman's status and influence in the family but the expectation is always that a woman will place the welfare of her husband and new family ahead of her own 31.

2.5.2. Unveiling socialism in Soviet Central Asia

In addition to overcoming tradition and Islam, the Bolsheviks found it difficult to apply the conventional criteria of class struggle to the Muslim traditional context because the people whom they deemed to be 'underprivileged and exploited' did not themselves see their experience through a lens of what could be called class consciousness. In time, the Bolshevik administration realized what was needed was a strategy that would not only reliably disengage Muslim societies from their “matrix of traditional ties, values, and beliefs; [but that could also] tap potential sources of indigenous support to change traditional orientations and commitments beyond recognition” (Massell, 1974:85). Thus they shifted their focus to the primary cell of the conservative village, the family, where women, deemed to be suffering humiliation and exploitation because of their segregation and seclusion from public life, were set up as the "surrogate proletariat" (Massell, 1974).

Central Asian society had long been organized according to a complex system of combined religious and tribal tribunals, usages and laws; “in such a context conflict resolution could be formal or highly informal, public or private, and the prevailing legal forms, norms, and practices depended to a large extent on the particular region,

31 I observed in rural areas that it was the youngest son who seemed to be responsible for looking after his parents and that his bride is expected to join the household. However, I was also hosted by households where in-laws did not appear to live with the families.
communal organization, and ethno-cultural milieu, as well as on the personal charisma of the particular judicial mediator” (Massell, 1974:7). People were subject to two major categories of law: *shariat* or codified Muslim law managed by formal canonical courts staffed by Muslim religious elites and primarily operative in sedentary agricultural and urban centres; and *adat* or local customary law organized by informal codes entrusted to tribal leaders or local clergymen. Where women’s autonomy was concerned there would also be variations of tradition within individual family customs and preferences. The complex formal and informal codes, laws and networks at work in any particular family or community make it difficult to generalize about restrictions on female autonomy during any given era in the region. Corcoran-Nantes (2005:35) however, observes some general differences between the traditional practices and autonomy of women in settled contexts as opposed to rural nomadic communities in the early Soviet era:

in the settled communities…few women other than traders appeared in public without [veiling], and the majority were rarely seen outside their homes except for special occasions such as feast days, weddings and other family celebrations… In nomadic communities…however, men and women worked alongside one another and veiling was rarely the custom. Nevertheless, the wearing of traditional headscarves in nomadic society was as much a religious act as wearing the veil.

The first step in the Soviet plan to deliberately induce a class consciousness was to compile a list of damning ‘facts’ about the condition of Muslim women. Irrespective of the many logical contradictions in their rationale32, the Soviets planned to ‘wake up’ Muslim women’s consciousness by making them aware of new alternatives and opportunities, and by instilling in them a sense of individual potency and collective strength. In effect, the motivation to transform the gender division of labour in the public sphere appears to have been less an act of altruism, and more so an affront to Islam, which was seen as the main obstacle to Sovietization of the Central Asian region. There was also a great need for female labour in the emerging cotton growing, silk producing,

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32 For instance, given that women were so highly valued in terms of a man’s and family’s honor how could it be argued that she had such a low status? Given strong community ties, would not a husband’s arbitrary maiming or killing of his wife provoke a blood-feud with another kin group? (Massell, 1974).
textile and food industries. The Soviet plan brought these two motivations together in a strategy called *Khudjum*, a mass affront to the Muslim tradition of veiling.

The official mass unveiling of women was launched on International Women’s Day in 1927. It was intended to mark the passage of women from traditional Muslim to ‘modern’ Soviet citizen. Thousands of women unveiled, some even burned their veils in public ceremonies held to celebrate the event. However, what the Soviets failed to understand was that veiling

was a statement about the fundamental ordering of society, the nature of gender relations, the division between the public and private space, [and] the conventions of civility. [The undertaking of *Khudjum* thus] represented a full frontal assault on one of the more intimidating symbols of the population’s adherence to Islam tradition and culture…The back lash against it was thus far greater than any popular resistance that the Soviet authorities had encountered up to that point.

(Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:44)

In the days that followed, many women began reveiling to avoid the terror and shame of feeling ‘naked’ in public and of being ostracized as a traitor and ‘outsider’ by their community and family at home. The dangers were not insignificant. Many women paid with their lives for dishonouring their families and communities by crossing the cultural line with respect to both veiling and working in the public sphere (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995)33. In addition, many of those who succeeded in unveiling were set ideologically, materially, and culturally outside the rest of the indigenous population. The end result for Uzbek women, Kamp (2006:232) explains, was not entirely favourable for either women or men:

Unlike women’s struggles elsewhere, this one took place in a context of competing hegemonies, one where, unusually, the state acted in opposition to patriarchy… Women who decided to resist seclusion were successful in the long run not because they alone managed to convince Uzbek society to adopt new norms of equality, but because they found support from a state that intervened harshly… However…when unveiled women were able to mobilize government support, the relations of power

33 According to Corcoran- Nantes (2005:47), “most commentators agree that the numbers of women who died between 1927 and 1929 could be in the tens of thousands.”
changed: in place of women’s subordination to men, the state made men and women subordinate to itself.

The principal motivation of the Soviet plan, to be sure, was less the ‘liberation of women’ than a political campaign to induct the mass of women into the production process (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995). In terms of ‘liberation’ the plan was faulty on two counts. First of all, it did not account for the fact that women’s political mobilization would inherently entail a similar ‘emancipation’ of men from traditional authoritarian roles in what had, since time immemorial, been a male-controlled world. Second, it did not take into account that traditional male and female roles did not provide women with meaningful alternatives, much less sanctioned ones, to traditionally prescribed positions (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). Understandably, then, the Soviet regime’s ‘successes’ in female mobilization “entailed decidedly dysfunctional effects both for the women involved and for the regime” itself (Massell, 1974:325).

Two mutually dysfunctional consequences followed from the socialist state’s attempt to manage hierarchical power relations between men and women. There were contradictions and tensions on a number of fronts. First of all, the perceived benefits of full engagement with the Soviet system by complying with unveiling were an inadequate incentive for women to fully subscribe to such an offensive against their own culture. Those who continued with Khudjum34 engaged in “a precarious balancing act to maintain a modicum of respect within both cultures” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:47). Some continued to wear veils when visiting traditional areas of the city or at family and religious celebrations, while others exchanged the veil for large headscarves to denote their status as Muslim women. What emerged was a process of cultural assimilation based on the appearance of embracing Soviet culture and society in the public sphere while maintaining Muslim religion and cultural identity in the private one. By the 1930s unveiling came to be seen as less of a threat to religious belief and family honour, signifying the acceptance of Sovietization to Soviet authorities. In the private sphere, however, Muslim culture and tradition were more firmly entrenched. Soviet policy may

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34 According to Gulnara Ibraeva "Khudjum was topical policy for the south part of the newly established Kyrgyz republic, in the north part nomadic women NEVER were veiled" (Personal Communication, 2013).
have appeared to override Islamic law in the eyes of Soviet administrators, but the new laws were ingeniously resisted through various means by both men and women\textsuperscript{35} (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). When women did take advantage of them, the resulting increase of female-initiated divorces in court, impulsive unveilings, abandonment by girls and women of households and husbands, and retaliatory outcasting of women by men from home, meant greater dependence of women on state support from a regime that was ill-prepared to extend it (Massell, 1974:326).

The second consequence was that freedom from the bonds of domestic slavery had simply ‘freed’ women to become slaves to a state that could arbitrarily displace or replace them if they failed to perform their duty to provide cheap labour and bear children. Soviet policies (child-care, maternity leaves) put in place to facilitate gender equality (meaning access to the workplace) were more concerned with the need for women’s labour than an ideological commitment to equality itself. Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995:106) remarks that if emancipation implies an equal opportunity to realize oneself as an individual, “Soviet contradictions between family and society, between motherhood and production, meant that it was impossible for women to realize themselves either in the family or on the production line.” She cites an observation made by a female architect who spent many years planning village settlements in the Ferghana valley that “work did not give village women economic independence; their labour [was] appropriated, and they remain[ed] materially dependent upon men and therefore, even if they wanted to they couldn’t demand their rights” (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:93). Indeed, without adequate provision of physical protection and moral, organizational, and material support by the regime, women had few incentives to realize themselves by partaking fully in risky Soviet enterprises. Many turned instead to prostitution in the cities, returned home to their traditional fold, or ended up militating against the regime itself (Massell, 1974).

\textsuperscript{35} For instance, performing both civil and religious marriage ceremonies; and ongoing payments of \textit{kalym}, a wedding pledge that remained under the control of the woman, were made in the form of ‘wedding gifts’ such as livestock instead of being paid in cash.
2.5.3. Women at work in the Soviet era

Central Asian women’s entry into labour force participation was a state-mandated obligation - not a choice – and was thus variously experienced as coercion and an opening of possibilities by the women involved. The Soviet program of full labour force participation meant “the elimination of all types of economic independence based on private ownership, including independent agriculture, [leading] almost the entire Soviet population to become dependent on the state” (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:103). In the communist era employment became a constitutionally protected ‘right’ and relatively cheap food, housing and services were considered an entitlement from the state (in contrast to something that could be ‘claimed’). Accessing entitlements, however, was often a matter of ‘connections,’ bribes or bartering in the informal economy. Indeed, Gal and Kligman (2000:78) explain:

services were undemocratically and often arbitrarily delivered. Party committees or other local political organs [decided] who would get how much of what, creating particularized forms of inequality… there were very few ways of directly addressing social problems ignored or denied by the state. Poverty or unemployment were not supposed to occur, so they were simply omitted from any kind of ameliorative plan.

But poverty and unemployment did occur, opening opportunities, especially for women, in what has been called the ‘second,’ ‘informal,’ ‘black,’ or ‘shadow’ economy that emerged as a strategy to obtain consumer goods and services not provided by the state. Women involved in informal entrepreneurial work found they were not only able to fill gaps left by inadequate state support, but also to gain some independence from it. Women employed in state enterprises were, on the other hand, almost entirely dependent on the state for support. Women’s entrepreneurial work, rooted in “state socialism’s ideology of gender equality and its practice of educating and employing women…[also] gave them a way of thinking about themselves as potentially self-

36 Gal and Kligman (2000:76) explain that "what counts as ‘coercion’...parallels...the question of what counts as ‘choice’, and is in part dependent on the perspective of those who make the judgement, as well as on discourses and political circumstances." Whereas in the Western experience, labour force participation was something that white upper and middle-class women struggled to achieve, labour force participation was forced on Central Asian women, even if seen as a positive change by some.
sufficient, and in some respects equal to men” (Gal & Kligman, 2000:83). Many women took part in secure, regular work in state enterprises to obtain benefits while augmenting their poor wages with insecure, though often more lucrative opportunities in the informal economy. Both men and women employed strategies such as moonlighting, stealing materials or using tools from workplaces, manipulating state goods to sell on the side, and others ranging from quasi-legal to unquestionably illegal. What developed was a network of underground entrepreneurs dependent on the ('unknowing') support of the official state economy.

By the late 1950s, large numbers of women were drawn into structures of the growing 'shadow' economy linked to corrupt authorities. “Their association with the underworld meant that many of these women, who were traditionally responsible for bringing the first elements of spirituality into their children’s upbringing in the patriarchal family, became the source of a destructive lack of spirituality” (Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995:94)\(^{37}\). Moreover, Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995:131) explains, while women in the latter Soviet era had greater opportunity to realize themselves,...they did not have flexible support mechanisms either at home or at work. [Thus] the leveling of rights – that celebrated step towards the emancipation of women in the Soviet period – led to women being caught between a false dichotomy of choosing between work and motherhood, a choice which was in any case non-existent, given economic conditions.

Despite the socialization of many tasks considered to be the domain of women, “the division of labor in the household was never fundamentally transformed by state socialism [and, like the West] housework remained publicly invisible and devalued” (Gal & Kligman, 2000:48). When independence arrived, it became clear that the proclaimed equality of women had never in reality been supported by Central Asian society. Rather, the concept of women’s equality had always been regarded as a feature of the Western (Russian) way of life, and thus had not penetrated tenacious cultural attitudes (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995).

\(^{37}\) Nonetheless, Tokhtakhodjaeva maintains that educated women today do not see a return to the Muslim way of life as a return to spiritual values, but rather as an open form of suppressing women’s individuality.
Social paternalism had similarly dysfunctional effects on the lives of men. The formally organized economy of socialism had a twofold effect on the traditional authority of men. On the one hand, by participating in the work-force, women’s relative authority in the home increased, while on the other, state control of the allocation of resources also relieved men of some of their familial authority. In any case, where work was concerned, the Communist Party “educated people to express needs it would then fill, and discouraged them from taking the initiative that would enable them to fill these needs on their own” (Verdery, 1996:25). In order to exclusively meet the needs of its citizens through redistribution without enlisting their independent efforts, the Party required control of an unwieldy hoard of resources and continuously expanding production plans. Verdery (1996) explains that in capitalism, competition revolves around attracting customers and accumulating surplus value. Since the field of competition is among sellers, salesmanship -- the capacity to accumulate profit from sales, and the ability to develop new needs, products and markets -- is at a premium. In socialism, accumulating profit from sales and efficient production is of no consequence. ‘Efficiency’ results from the maximization of capacity and the full use of resources – consumer needs and desires are irrelevant – indeed, desire is kept alive by deprivation. When the drive is to accumulate distributable resources, then acquisitionship or procurement and the capacity to accumulate means of production are at a premium. This meant it was to a manager’s benefit to hoard both labour and supplies in order to establish ‘shortages’ to use in bargaining for increased allotments. The resulting clienteleism effectively undercut control of distribution by the Party, and combined with low worker productivity, foiled the success of expanded production plans. Moreover, keeping control of redistribution at the centre meant goods were effectively being produced for the purpose of being given away by the state. In effect, it was by not selling things and controlling redistribution that the centre managed its hold on power. Since goods were not being made to be sold, either at home or competitively on the world market, quality and choice were of no consequence (Verdery, 1996). The combination of clienteleism and lack of incentive to produce quality goods meant that neither men nor women were able to realize themselves on the production line.
2.5.4. Women and politics in the Soviet era

Despite the rhetoric of gender equality during the Soviet era, women’s authentic representation at the national level was low. As such, the nature of women’s participation in formal decision-making processes had been more so through indirect processes than by direct influence. Only three women were ever given posts in the Politburo, one in the 1950s and two under Gorbachev between 1988 and 1991. The four per cent of women who served as members of the Central Committee were token rather than full members. The generous quota system applied only to the lower representative bodies of political representation. Central Asian women initially approached involvement with the Communist Party very cautiously, but by the 1920s a number had joined the Communist Party and began to undertake political work. Some even managed to achieve high office in their respective republics, as well as in the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. Most notable is Yadar S. Nasriddinova, an Uzbek woman who served as chairperson of the presidium from 1959 to 1970. In the Kyrgyz Republic, two women served as acting heads of the Supreme Soviet between 1937 and 1938. Four female foreign ministers served between 1953 and 1991 and there were many others “who served as ministers or deputy ministers of departments such as social affairs, justice and culture. These women were influential "as role models for others who aspired to political careers; ... defended the interests of women within the polity, [and] supported and protected women outside of it” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:169). Nonetheless, according to a member of the Kyrgyz Women’s Congress in the early transition period, “under the Soviet system women were career politicians and you had to be a member of the party to get anywhere” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:169). Many believed women served as no more than puppets who had no real power to represent anybody, not even themselves.

In Soviet times, Central Asian women competed not only with men for political advancement but also Russian women. Central Asian women were at a disadvantage in promoting their professional and political careers or voicing their needs and interests in public debates because of the official Russian language requirement in these circumstances. Their interests were often represented by sometimes well-meaning Russian women who were out of touch with the realities of the women’s lives and experiences. An Uzbek journalist explains that
what most people do not understand is that we were a colonized nation and when Russian women came here they saw us as weak and repressed. Sadly it is an image that remains internationally but was never true. Russian women had greater privileges and status than Uzbek women and so it was they who spoke for us yet they never really understood us (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:27).

Central Asian Muslim women appeared alongside Russian and European women at the 2nd International Conference of Communist Women for the first time 1921. Their fully veiled entry to the proceedings reinforced the preconceptions ‘emancipated’ revolutionary women had of Central Asian women’s oppression. Despite the impassioned speeches some of the Muslim women had made on their own behalf, in the end, “the subjective assessment of the female congregation at this conference [fueled] a ‘top down’ campaign for the liberation of Muslim women, who were deemed unable to liberate themselves. The status of the proposed libertees was therefore already defined as inferior to that of the liberators” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:51).

On the home front, women who chose political careers were often estranged from both community and family, and were thus vulnerable both within their political roles, and when they lost their positions due to changes of leadership in higher echelons of the political sphere. These issues, exacerbated by a general increase in traditional values in the post-independence era, remain salient in women’s willingness to pursue political careers without family support today, especially in rural areas where traditional attitudes have always prevailed. The removal of quotas has also meant that “women are less likely to receive political support from parties in their registration as candidates or in political campaigns” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:173). In the final tally, women who desire political careers are faced with what seems like an insurmountable wall of obstacles: overcoming traditional resistance within their families or communities or suffering ostracism by them; overcoming bureaucratic opposition before they can obtain support for their candidacy, including finding some way to finance their election campaign in the midst of economic reforms which have placed women at a disadvantage in doing so [i.e. in Kyrgyzstan a prospective candidate must pay $650 to register when the average salary might be $21 per month]; and due to all of the foregoing, opportunities to gain experience in the field, and a shortage of role models and networks to turn to for support. Despite these obstacles, "the work of many thousands of Central Asian women
in the women's councils [of the late 1980s] was generally believed to be far more effective [in advocating and implementing gender-specific policy] than it had been in the past” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:163). The success of women's activism in the run-up to independence could not have failed to influence those women who now lead and participate in the new forms of women's advocacy that arose in the transition period

2.6. Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: The building of a democratic nation

Under the previous system there were no laws which discriminated against women, in fact they were given many privileges and in this way men were disadvantaged. Even single men did not get the same privileges as single women. Now this has to stop. We are now a democracy and women will have to compete equally with men for their place in society, politics and the labour force, just like the West. If they do not compete well, if they are unable to achieve similar positions to men, then it will be because they do not have merit.

(Uzbek government minister cited in Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:161)

Territorial-based nationalism began in Stalin’s era with the imposition of separate boundaries on what had once been loosely organized ethnic groups under clan leadership. The Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic was decreed in 1924, but it was not until 1926 that the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic was officially declared a republic of the Soviet Union. The independent Kyrgyz Republic, also called Kyrgyzstan, became a sovereign state in December 1990, officially declaring political independence in August, 1991. Nonetheless, relations with Russia are still of primary importance in Kyrgyzstan, and also Kazakhstan, though Uzbekistan prefers distance from Russian influence (Akcali, 2005). Of the Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan is the only one that has retained Russian as an official second state language. The considerable Slavic population in the north of Kyrgyzstan at the time of independence may have contributed to this, but there were also other efforts made to establish new institutions and policies that recognize ethnic minorities. Kyrgyzstan has thus sometimes been referred to as “an island of

Though he never accomplished it, Stalin’s ultimate goal was to create a unified Soviet people for whom regional attachments would eventually lose their meaning.
democracy and an open society in a region of autocracies and intolerance” (Pomfret, 2004:86). The image is of course oversimplified given that its presidents have ruled by decree when necessary. The country’s reputation for democratic reform has also been tarnished by political revolutions culminating in the ousting of President Akayev in the spring of 2005, and the ousting of President Bakiev and his family on allegations of corruption and nepotism in 2010. The revolution of April, 2010 was violent, leaving hundreds dead and many more fleeing the country in the wake of the ethnic clashes that followed, particularly in the southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad where ongoing ethnic tensions continue to smoulder.

Although political upheaval makes Kyrgyzstan appear unstable compared to its neighbours, it is also evidence that Kyrgyzstan is more attuned to democratic principles than its neighbours. Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian country to commit to market reform and the agenda of the IMF, and until 2013 was the only Central Asian country to meet the requirements for membership in the World Trade Organization39. Austerity programs introduced in 1992 to curb inflation weakened the state’s monopoly control over business activities, while at the same time making way for “a diversity of resources, including a media in which a variety of private individuals and groups owned publications and television stations” (Melvin, 2004:131). These opened spaces for a political opposition that would not be found in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan. Among the Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan is considered to be the only one with a genuine (even if weak and ineffectual) parliamentary opposition (Akiner, 2005). Uzbekistan tends to be a more sultanistic regime, while Kazakhstan is less pluralistic in its views than the government of Kyrgyzstan. Organizing political dissent under conditions hostile to a plurality of views would be more difficult to accomplish in these states.

The 2009 National Census registered the population of Kyrgyzstan at 5,362,800. This was a 5.3% increase over the first official Kyrgyz census conducted in 1999. The 2009 census also measured ethnic populations. Most numerous were Kyrgyz at 70.9% (up from 64.9%), Uzbek at 14.3% (up from 13.8%), and Russian at 7.8% (down from

39 Tajikistan became a member in March 2013; Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are still hedging on whether or not to seek membership.
A notable trend was a 9.8% increase in the population of Bishkek, the nation’s capital, reflecting increased migration from rural areas. The politics, economics, and social conditions of Kyrgyzstan have been shaped to some extent by the division of northern and southern identities, with the north said to be more politically and economically developed and less religious and conservative; and the south, more impoverished, less developed and less politically involved, also more sedentary and agricultural and thus more conservative and traditional in terms of Islamic influence (Akcali, 2005; Cummings, 2012). Clan relations continue to be a defining feature of post-independence Kyrgyzstan’s political economy and are often cited in media reports as the underlying basis for political and economic turmoil. This argument is congruent with the belief that there is a tendency for the south to support the president, and the north to favor the opposition. It has also been argued, however, that the north in general tends to be more pessimistic about the state and non-state institutions (Ryabkov, 2008).

Post-Soviet changes to power and property structures have done little to promote women’s economic independence and political autonomy. The status of women in post-independence Kyrgyzstan is complicated by three related factors: expectations arising from the kinds of employment opportunities women had during the Soviet era; reduction of state welfare supports; and the perception that breaking free from traditional constraints is a manifestation of either Russification or Westernization, and thus a loss of ethnic identity (Tabyshalieva, 2000). Corcoran-Nantes (2005) asserts that a rise in conservative attitudes and the reinstatement of cultural and religious norms is troubling for women’s prospects, especially as the threat of Western influence replaces that of Soviet infiltration. She suggests that both Western and Russian feminism are suspect among Central Asian women because neither offers a voice that resonates with their lived realities. Both are seen as an attempt to colonize the discourse of local political consciousness. Kuehnast and Nechemias (2004b:5), on the other hand, point out that Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have cultural and historical legacies more influenced by Europe than those of Central Asia where influences from China, the Middle East, and Turkey play a more prominent role. Their edited volume examines how women in post-Soviet societies are caught “between new nationalist

40 The explanation given was migration outflow.
discourses and more conservative ethnic charters [which] ultimately influence everything from policy to everyday survival strategies” (Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b:5). Though critical of the Soviet era, Tokhtakhodjaeva’s account is concerned that if attention is focused only on the more negative aspects of their Soviet past, Muslim women will lose the gains in equality and political rights they achieved during Soviet times. These considerations, in combination with aspects of nation-building, are some of the broader contexts in which training programs for women entrepreneurs are being introduced. Before I discuss some more specific contexts I must first introduce the concept of 'development' and its role in the transformative processes that Kyrgyz peoples confront.

### 2.6.1. What is ‘development’?

The concept and practice of development is both a field of study and a geopolitical project engaged in by states and international institutions. It has been contemplated by a range of historical, theoretical and political actors representing a spectrum of positions too broad to attend to comprehensively in this chapter. Nonetheless the historical and theoretical contexts pertinent to my study need to be introduced as background for understanding the nature of ongoing processes of crisis and transformation and the way these are connected to the work of women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan. Where historical origins are concerned, the colonial model situates 'development' in the violent expropriation of land and means of production during the era of European imperialism, the rise of industrial capitalism, enclosure of the commons, and imposition of the capital-labour relation (Goldsmith & Mander, 2001). In this view, colonialism not only "disorganized non-European societies by reconstructing their labour systems around specialized… export production, [it also] disorganized the social psychology of colonial subjects" (McMichael, 2012:54).

However, in the course, non-European intellectuals, workers, and soldiers were exposed to European liberal rights discourses which they also effectively applied to promote their political independence. So effectively it would seem, that in the post-WWII era, Truman devised his reparations project as a strategy not only to protect the ‘free world’ from the threat of communism, but also to free the colonial world from imperialist control (McMichael, 2012). To this end, the 'development project' was conceived as "a blueprint for national political-economic development [with] international aid, trade and investment
flows...calibrated to military aid from the West [in order] to secure Cold War perimeters and make the 'free world' safe for business" (McMichael, 2012:54).

The institutional origins of the development project can be traced back to the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and its principles of social and economic cooperation. In the post-WWII era, nation-states were formed within the international framework of the United Nations (UN) as well as the Bretton Woods institutions41 whose normative, legal and financial relationships were designed to integrate states into a set of universal political and economic relations. For newly independent Third World states, integration meant entering the international relations of the development project as a collectively defined 'underdeveloped' whole. In other words, incorporation was "into a singular project, despite national and regional variations in available resources, starting point[s], and ideological orientation[s]" (McMichael, 2012:78). International development efforts throughout the 1950s and 1960s embraced a 'modernization' approach (Rostow, 1959) characterized by a top-down 'aid' delivery model with relative progress measured in terms of per capita economic growth and industrialization. This era saw the nationalization of economic enterprises, expansion of domestic markets, market regulation, and a gradual reorienting of state and social institutions towards norms and values that favoured economic growth, culminating in 1964 with the 'trade not aid' policy of the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). System-wide production crises in the 1970s saw a shift away from 'deficit of modernization' explanations toward dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Singer, 1949) and world systems theories (Wallerstein, 1974) that linked the socioeconomic conditions of poor Southern countries to their location in the world capitalist system42. Development policy took on a people-centred approach focused on issues of access to and the redistribution of resources. By the early 1980s the political right co-opted this

41 Representatives from 44 Allied nations met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in July 1944 to set up a system of rules, institutions, and procedures to regulate the international monetary system. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are thus sometimes referred to as Bretton Woods institutions.

42 Many scholars today point to the absurdity of what appears to be a revival of Rostow's modernization thesis in the agenda of neoliberalism, and condemn the way ideas associated with modernization are used to rationalize the elevation of rights of capital over worker, human and environmental rights in new trade agreements (Bakan, 2002; Saul, 2006; Veltmeyer, 2008).
approach to rationalize the ineffective state as the central problem, and the neoliberal alternative as a solution to it. This shift provided a rationale for the emerging neoliberal agenda and its call for freedom from regulatory constraints and the welfare interventionist state. It also lent credence to the idea that multinational corporations and individual freedoms were the driving force behind economic growth. With the development state deemed to be ineffective, if not inherently corrupt, it followed that responsibility for capital accumulation, economic growth, and the ‘development’ function had to lie elsewhere. This brought about a fundamental shift in the agency of development. Development planning shifted towards ‘pro-poor’ policy, with the role of the state reassigned to a shared partnership between state and civil society. The rationale for development, initially conceived as the imperial and moral imperative of privileged nation-states, was thus reduced to an incidental by-product of an overall market-driven economic growth process (Veltmeyer, 2010). This is one of the underlying contexts in which training programs for women entrepreneurs been developed and introduced to Kyrgyzstan, and in which women’s employment in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan more generally takes place.

2.6.2. Women’s employment in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

In the latter decades of the Soviet era women outnumbered “men in medicine, education, research and finance, and equaled their numbers in science and civil service” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:81). This served to feminize certain professions, i.e., women were offered socially prestigious work as a trade-off for restricted entry to more highly skilled and highly paid blue-collar jobs. Nonetheless, prior to independence it was not unusual to see women as directors of plants or factories. By 1996 there was a marked

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43 Civil society is a concept promoted by the World Bank as central to ‘empowerment’ of the poor in the South. The concept refers to social networks that lie outside of government, and is sometimes conflated with NGOs (the United Nations identifies NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, or CSOs, as separate entities). It is somewhat of a buzzword in international development circles where many claims have been made about the potential of civil society “to act as a force to reduce poverty, promote democracy and achieve sustainable development” (Pollard & Court, 2008:133). Although social capital and civil society have been touted in World Bank policy as a resource for dealing with the social disruption caused by neoliberalism, it is unclear just how civil society can actually be empowered in a worldwide system that bases competition in an unfair playing field (Munck, 2005).
reduction in numbers of women in senior management and decision-making positions.  

One of Tokhtakhodjaeva's (1995:247) informant's remarks:

How many educated women who have lost their jobs are now working as seamstresses, knitters and car park attendants just to earn a livelihood!  
At the employment exchange jobs are mostly offered to men and the demand for women workers is very low, especially in the field of intellectual work.

Not only is there little incentive to secure a future for skilled and highly educated women in the new economic order, but the closing of factories and other previously state-managed industries has meant a sharp decline in employment opportunities for men as well.  All these factors lead to discrimination against women in the workplace.

Labour displacement following the economic restructuring of three major employers -- the construction industry, the Institute of Economics, and the Ministry of Water Resources -- resulted in a 40% reduction of the workforce.  Most heavily affected were women with university degrees.  This was because they not only lost their jobs, but access to social provisions that made entry into the labour force possible in the first place (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Gal & Kligman, 2000; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 1995).  Women under the Soviet system had enjoyed generous maternity leaves, extended leave to care for sick children, shorter working hours and the opportunity to work part time at any time in their career without loss of pension or other entitlements.  Women may have been "burdened with the triple roles of full-time employment, full-time mothering, and full-time domestic responsibilities" (Tabyshalieva, 2000:51), but the burden is greater now due to a decline in state social welfare supports (i.e., state-funded day care centres in fell by 75% between 1990 and 1994).

Education is another key factor.  It is difficult to determine actual literacy rates pre-independence given Soviet exaggerations.  However, free education was widely available in both urban and rural locales, and may account in part for the 99.7% literacy rate measured by UNESCO (2013) in 1995.  While the rate appears to have been maintained according to the 2009 measurement, the shift to a market economy accompanied by neoliberal austerity measures has meant reduced budgets for health and education spending.  Major reductions in financing of pre-schools, textbooks and
other resources (including uniforms and meals) places considerable pressure on families during a time when their incomes are also falling. The repercussions of cuts to public funding and closure of public industries have been felt much more strongly by young women than young men who find it easier to access specialist training and employer sponsorship. The removal of state welfare supports along with new employment laws designed to 'improve' women’s working conditions has made female labour more expensive to retain and employ. This serves to restrict women’s choices and flexibility in the private sector. Even when women do obtain employment, it is often in the form of contract work which requires them to sign away the rights given to them in new labour legislation (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005).

Figure 2.7. Photos from bazaar

A sector that has been amenable to women’s employment is the ‘bazaar economy’. In Soviet times, the bazaar economy played an unofficial role in the provision of low-cost goods and services procured on the basis of cash or barter between individuals. In the post-Soviet era, bazaar trade has become “the principal means by which men and women supplement their increasingly devalued wages and pensions” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:97). While small-scale trade is pursued by both men and women in the new economy, according to Werner (2004) the frugality and aggressiveness required for profitable salesmanship is seen to be a more desirable trait in women than in men. Women are also thought to handle money and manage the household income better than men. It is for these reasons, Werner believes, there are more women working at bazaar stands than men. Men’s work at bazaar stands also
tends to go on behind the scenes where more physical labour is required, or where they cook shashlik, a delicious form of shish-kebab also served in fine restaurants. Gleason (1997:168) remarks that the bazaar is the most interesting part of any Central Asian city, giving one a sense of the daily contact of modernization with tradition and the way “Central Asia’s history comes into line with aspirations for the future.” The impact of globalization, he says, is manifest at the bazaar where one can find traditional goods such as locally produced fruit, nuts, rugs and felt hats sold alongside electronics from the East, candy bars and magazines from Europe, and soft drinks and beer from North America. The bazaar economy is huge in Kyrgyzstan. I regularly visited three major bazaars in Bishkek alone: Osh, Ortesai and Dordoi, and know of many others. It is true that at the bazaar you can find everything from food -- to clothing -- to electronics -- to household goods -- to live turkeys, which I found roped to a tree outside Ortesai bazaar shortly before Christmas. The bazaar economy surely has a central role in processes of transformation towards a market economy in Kyrgyzstan.

2.6.3. **NGOs and employment for women**

It has been suggested that processes of democratization in Kyrgyzstan have "proven to be a gendered process whereby men and women are granted equal rights in a formal political sense (in accordance with Western-style democratic models), while the essentially empty and rhetorical nature of that formal equality is made clear by the virtual 'disappearance' of women from positions of power in political life and in civil society" (Graney, 2004:45). On the other hand, Kuehnast & Nechemias (2004) argue, a decline of women legislators in post-Soviet countries is less indicative of a reduction in women's political clout than continuity with women's characteristic invisibility (only there for show) in key decision-making institutions during Soviet times. In any case, the current era is characterized by two opposing trends: "a drastic decline in women's share of

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44 I counted no less than 200 stalls of shoes (primarily women's) at Dordoi bazaar alone, and this did not include the 'Chinese' section, an area set aside for purveyors of cheap, low quality goods from China. The Dordoi bazaar is also a major wholesale outlet for the country.

45 These were no doubt more intended for New Year's celebrations than Christmas. We fortunately found all-dressed turkeys inside the bazaar so we did not have to butcher our own! My daughter and I found it strange for the city to be engaged in business-as-usual on Christmas Day.
representation at the formal (national and local) government levels\textsuperscript{46}, on the one hand, and an unprecedented increase in women’s participation in informal politics, civil society building, and NGOs, on the other” (Tohidi, 2004:153). In fact, one of the most important sectors in the reconstruction of relations between the state and civil society has been the burgeoning NGO sector, headed primarily by women, to address urgent social issues and to defend human rights.

In urban areas where men have come to enjoy more involvement in formal politics, women engage in public advocacy through NGO work which is their primary, if not only domain of political power (Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004a). Women's NGOs (WNGOs) have been at the forefront of "the struggle for greater political representation for women in institutional politics" (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:183) and the organizing of women's political parties\textsuperscript{47}. As a result of their efforts, women’s political representation has increased in the National Legislative Assembly and gender-specific issues have been put on the political agenda. For instance, by restoring the National Women’s Committee to official status as a government WNGO in Kyrgyzstan, women have been able to maintain insider status with respect to informing and implementing government policy. Nonetheless, Women’s Committees have been harshly criticized for acting more as a buffer zone between the state and women’s organizations than effective advocates for women’s recognition and support in economic and public life. One of the problems is that Women’s Committees in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were forced to adapt to new circumstances and to redefine their role in independent states. At the time of independence, key areas of state responsibility were taken over by government NGOs (GONGOs) who operate outside the state structure, often in the form of charities or foundations, to provide welfare and social services the state can no longer afford to support. The well resourced and networked GONGOs have a much greater advantage in acquiring humanitarian aid, and this has been a bone of contention with independent NGOs who must compete with them for funding and support. Women’s Committees

\textsuperscript{46} The total number of seats in the Jogorchu Kenesh (Supreme Council) was increased from 90 to 120 when Kyrgyzstan's constitution was reformed in 2010. A quota established by Article 60(3) states that no more than 3 positions can separate men and women on electoral lists. In 2010, 28 women held 23% of seats (Quota Project, 2010).

\textsuperscript{47} The first was the Women’s Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, registered in 1996. It received 12.6% of the vote in the 2000 elections (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005).
have also been subject to criticism for the work they do with the state to improve the condition of women’s and children’s lives by prioritizing women’s traditional roles as wives and mothers. This work comes into conflict with the political agenda of WNGOs who wish to hold their government accountable as Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) signatories (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). Nonetheless, although strongly influenced by the Western feminist movement and United Nations discourses such as those promoted by the CEDAW, few Central Asian WNGOs identify as ‘feminist’. Kyrgyzstan appears to be somewhat more open to feminism than neighbouring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, if the Bishkek Feminist Collective SQ is any indication. The Bishkek Feminist Collective SQ, established to actively pursue campaigns related to a broad range of women’s issues, is reportedly gaining popularity among women in the 24 to 34 age range (Bishkek Feminist Collective SQ, 2013).

In any case, one of the principal forms of employment and political empowerment for highly educated and skilled women in the post-Soviet era has been the NGO sector. Women enter the sector in two ways: as actors in NGOs (not all NGOs address women’s concerns); and as NGOs whose role is to address concerns specific to women, or gender issues (Tohidi, 2004). NGOs are not only an important source of empowerment for their directors, but also play a key role in the training and funding of women’s employment over all. WNGOs focused on “female entrepreneurship and small business [are] some of the most active and successful” (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005:180)48. While NGOs serve as a principal form of employment for women, they have also been subject to much criticism. Berg (2004:12) found in her study of Uzbek NGOs, that chairs are typically “strong, well-educated, urban women who... have been pushed out of government or university work.” As a result Kay (2004) found, chairs tend to dominate their organizations, and to view rural women as traditional, religious and uninformed objects in need of instruction. She also found that when NGOs employ a hierarchical style of management, they neither involve nor mobilize grassroots women, and thus fail to empower women in ways that make sense at local levels. Hierarchical relations at the

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48 According to Gulnara Ibraeva (2013) the most prominent WNGOs in Kyrgyzstan are Innovative Solution, Inc. (based on the number of initiatives in the field and leadership in core activities within the women initiatives sector) and Forum of Women’s NGOs.
highest levels also tend to overlook grassroots knowledges and local contexts in favor of the ‘expertise’ of international institutions. Preferential treatment of particular individuals or groups by international donors can also aggravate problematic relations in a field where NGOs are required to compete for limited funds with strings attached.

Women working in the NGO sector must learn how to balance disjunctures between local grassroots knowledges, their own experiential knowledge of the way things work, and the premises assumed or imposed by the reporting requirements of international donors. Ishkanian (2004:15) explains that in effect, women working in the NGO sector learn how to simultaneously "deploy two different discourses; one to communicate with Western organizations using ‘gender talk’ or feminist discourses to secure grants; and the other to utilize discourses rooted in [local forms of expression] when engaged in communications among themselves” or in the communities they work with. For example, in Hemment's (2004) study, well-educated elite women find themselves having to negotiate between their own self-subscribed missions and the need to address the agendas of international donors. This has meant learning how to make strategic use of ‘democratization’ rhetoric to achieve their own goals while simultaneously integrating gender concerns into local contexts. Where local branch offices of international NGOs are concerned, Adamson (2002) likewise found them continuously involved in a struggle to reconcile competing demands from head offices with those of local constituencies. She describes the problem as one of disjunctures between visions of democracy promoted by international actors and the relevance of these to local social, political, and economic conditions. At the level of the nation state, Luong and Weinthal (1999) show how government imposed legal and political constraints can also place limits on the kinds of activities NGOs are able to engage in. At the level of INGOs, Campbell & Teghtsoonian (2010) show how transformative goals towards gendering aid effectiveness in Kyrgyzstan become subordinated to the integrative practices of gender mainstreaming agendas. It is evident that especially when working in post-Soviet contexts, development work requires understanding and working “at the local level to respond to a diversity of practices, values, and aspirations”

Berg (2004) suggests that women were already familiar with manoeuvring Soviet ministry campaigns aimed at their ‘emancipation’ so they knew how to adapt to the priorities of foreign donor agencies to achieve their own aims.
(Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004a:19). In this regard, NGOs are clearly an important site for investigating the forms and logic of agents who simultaneously seek to resist and participate in processes of development.

2.6.4. **Women’s poverty as the subject of development**

The theoretical and political frameworks of development projects emerging from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization have been the subject of much critique, especially in regards to how they have shaped and come to determine the processes and outcomes of development projects over time (Barry-Shaw & Jay, 2012; Bebbington et al., 2008; Cornwall et al., 2007; DeVault, 2008; McMichael, 2012; Munck, 2005; Ng, 2006). The early language of development characterized Third World\(^50\) nation states as underdeveloped, undeveloped, or a problem that needed addressing or managing. Women were absent from or invisible in early conceptions of development until the United Nations Decade of Women (1976-1985) drew attention to the important role they had to play in Third World social and economic development. When development work finally began to specifically take into account women’s issues, women, like impoverished nation states, were characterized as objects in need of rescue, rather than as subjects capable of being active participants and decision-makers in development processes. This characterization has not changed much over time. For example, in debates leading up to ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Homeworkers in 1996, homeworkers were still being framed as marginal victims in need of protection from exploitation by unscrupulous employers (Prügl, 1999). Issues regarding women’s access to land have similarly been framed by assumptions that “control over...land or capital [must] be bestowed upon women by external agents, rather than taken by women themselves” (Wilson, 2007:139). An overarching criticism has been that institutional approaches to resolving women’s poverty, when organized by techno-managerial development strategies, presume that poverty can be overcome by better-managed schemes and technologies. Techno-managerial approaches tend to treat the symptoms of ‘poverty’, rather than address the root causes of a condition.

\(^50\) The concept ‘Third World’ is used here consistent with how ‘developing’ regions of the world and their peoples were understood during the era I am describing.
represented by the term 'poverty'; ignore the historical and social circumstances of people’s deprivation and dispossession; and fail to account for how political processes function to ensure (intentionally and unintentionally) that particular forms of domination are maintained through development work itself. Thus when concerns with gender equality are co-opted into the discourses of better-managed schemes and technologies, they tend to be used to promote the agendas of neoliberal institutions, rather than more political concerns with gender equality (Cornwall et al., 2007). The end result has been that women are made to bear a disproportionate burden in the interests of neoliberal development goals (Cornwall et al., 2007; Griffin-Cohen & Brodie, 2007; Mander, 2005; Molyneux & Razavi, 2002; Rai, 2002; Zaman, 2012).

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, once 'liberated' from state control and the Soviet social contract, people were almost instantly left to fend for themselves. The costs and burden of rapid change fell most heavily on women, particularly in remote rural areas where economic opportunities were few and market economy skills nonexistent. During Soviet times, women's participation in the workforce had been supported by Soviet provision of social infrastructure. Women reached educational levels equal to or higher than men, and also made up “a substantial percentage of the professional class of physicians, lawyers, engineers, and scientific workers. Workforce participation rates for women were the highest in the world, with 90 percent of working-age women either on the job [in full time work, as part-time jobs were rare], or attending school” (Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004a:4). This was in part because women had been identified early on as the primary vehicle for accomplishing social transformation in Central Asia (Massell, 1974). It is noteworthy that the focus on women remains prominent in 'development' work in Kyrgyzstan as elsewhere, where it appears that women, under the guise of concerns with gender equality, are being used to 'transition' local economies into capitalist market relations. The implications of this came to mind late in my fieldwork when I began to question what was really going on with all the development efforts being funded in Kyrgyzstan and why things work out (or fail to work out) the way they do. What I began to realize was that training programs for women entrepreneurs were indeed a very political concern – not only in terms of positive and negative outcomes and the power relations involved, but also and perhaps more importantly, in the transformations that might follow.
Figure 2.8. Rural Kyrgyzstan

It was interesting to find persistent links to older forms of economy and tradition alongside more modern forms in people’s day-to-day lives. Note the contrast in Figure 2.7, in the modes of transportation used today. Donkeys and horse drawn carts are an ordinary part of the landscape outside Bishkek where most people cannot afford the transition to ‘modernization’, have been excluded from it, have not yet been manipulated into ‘needing’ its products, or are perhaps actively resisting it. Agriculture remains key to the Central Asian economy where, Corcoran-Nantes (2005) argues, out-migration from rural to urban areas is much less prominent than in other post-Soviet regions. This raises questions about the inevitability of a Western style capitalist model for the region. For one, if we look back in time, socialism was not easily imposed onto the region in Lenin’s time because there had been no industrialization from which to draw a proletariat. If we accept Tokhtakhodjaeva’s (1995) premise that the region is ‘stuck in the middle ages’, then the commons has not yet been enclosed. This suggests that imposing capitalism, especially in its current neoliberal individualist form, does not promise to settle very comfortably, especially in rural areas. ‘Development’ is a complex interplay of conflicted and interested goals, means and agencies, but it is also the process and outcome of a complex of consciously directed actions pursued by diversely located actors and agencies. The question is, how is it that ‘development’ in Kyrgyzstan has come to follow the same patterns as ‘development’ done elsewhere, especially where the role of women is concerned?
2.7. Transforming processes of knowing at home and abroad

To construct a locally relevant understanding of development programming and practice in Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere, is a conceptually contentious task on a number of fronts. Processes of transformation in Kyrgyzstan are occurring and being rationalized and contested not only in the context of a broad array of underlying beliefs about what development is or should be, but also amidst a complex interplay of local, regional, national and international influences, practices and interests that are also subject to a number of intervening factors that have resulted in major policy shifts over time. International development processes in the Western world have themselves been shaped by politically charged institutional assumptions and contexts that have operated to modify versions of policy, practice, and the agency of development over time. The 'development project' initiated in the post-WWII era "set in motion a global dynamic that embedded national policies within an international institutional and ideological framework" (McMichael, 2012:79). Kyrgyzstan's historical trajectory may be somewhat different from that of the Western world, but organizational practices were similarly applied to shape, legitimize and delegitimize authority in Soviet spaces and times just as they are being applied today (Amsler, 2007).

In the current era, development practice takes place not only within the context of shifting understandings about what and who has the capacity to constitute legitimate knowledge, but also as part of the neoliberal agenda to reduce state involvement in development processes. This is achieved through two interrelated processes: encouraging 'participation of civil society' in processes of governance and assigning the role of service delivery to NGOs or INGOs. In Kyrgyzstan the role of the state appears central in the discourses of 'transition' and 'crisis' that pervade current perceptions about Kyrgyz society. Yet these discourses are permeated by teleological rationales that naturalize neoliberal economic models and capitalist transition as the most logical paths out of 'the crisis' of independence (Cummings, 2012; Gal & Kligman, 2000; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b; Outhwaite & Ray, 2005; Verdery, 1996). What we see is the Kyrgyz state drawn into new relations of dependence based on a reduced political role for the state at the same time as it is trying to work out the terms of its independence from the Soviet regime (Akcali, 2005; Akiner, 2005; Cummings, 2012). In tandem with these
changes, knowledge produced about the Kyrgyz state and its peoples is increasingly ordered and regulated according to the terms of international development institutions that promote values of democracy and civil society while themselves engaging in relationships that fall short of egalitarian ideals (Amsler, 2007; Corcoran-Nantes, 2005; Cummings, 2012; Kuehnast & Nechemias, 2004b). Projects commissioned by international organizations draw local academics, researchers and NGOs into competition for grants whose end products are mostly institutional reports published in English outside the country, with little regard for the intellectual property rights of either those studied or those who have done the studying. The end result, according to one local academic (K. Isaev cited in Amsler, 2007) is that foreign foundations gather and have access to strategic information which the Kyrgyz government and state institutions are unaware of. This means that other countries can access information about Kyrgyzstan’s strengths and weaknesses, its market and economic potential, and how and what Kyrgyz people think, while local interests have little or no access to that information (Amsler, 2007).

Regardless of how we look at it, the Central Asian region is equipped on a broad scale with recent knowledge of the strengths and limitations of socialist or communist society. Could it not be ready to forge ahead with its own new version of social and economic organization? I believe the region holds great potential for imagining a path that leads to neither capitalism nor socialism (much less back to feudalism), but to innovations not yet imagined. In the middle photo of Figure 2.7 urban sheep join the workers coming home in rush hour traffic across a major road through an urban centre in the Issyk-Kul region. One does not have to travel far to see that sheep are integral to the cultural and economic lives of Kyrgyz people. In terms of transformation, it is interesting to note that a new social economy initiative in Fjallbete, Sweden recently looked to sheep as a way to rebuild the failing economy of their rural village51. The efforts they have made to integrate sheep into both the community and people’s day-to-day lives is considered innovative by advocates of social economy. This raises the question as to whether the presence and significance of sheep in Kyrgyz society is an aspect of modernizing or traditional impulses, or both. The third photo in Figure 2.7 is a

51 See: http://www.fjallbete.nu/
shed that houses a sheep and some chickens in the backyard of our driver’s parents’ home in Karakol. A bowl of apples from their backyard orchard decorated the table where we ate lunch. Forms of subsistence agriculture were present in all the villages I visited and surely comprise an important part of the local economy, filling, along with the bazaar economy, gaps left by the ‘transition’ to capitalism just as surely as it had filled gaps during the Soviet regime. Urban gardening and grow your own food campaigns are prolific in Western society. One has to wonder whether subsistence agriculture is a traditional or modernizing impulse and whether and to what extent the very notions of modern and traditional, and the concept of progress that has accompanied them, have ever been meaningful conceptualizations of social and economic life.

Verdery (1996) argues that neither feudalism nor capitalism are helpful concepts for making speculations about the future of the former Soviet bloc. She points out that feudalism, socialism and capitalism have all, at one time or another, been heralded as “the bright future of mankind” (Verdery, 1996:228). In 1989 there was not only a shift in the regime types of the former Soviet bloc, but also in foundational Western concepts and ways of life that had been built around the Cold War ‘other’ (Outhwaite & Ray, 2005; Verdery, 1996). The shift in notions of ownership and property, democracy, the nature and role of the state, the meaning of citizenship and nation, and the gendered dimensions of these are all important aspects of rethinking not only the case of Central Asia, but also Western contexts and theories for understanding itself. For instance, the parallels in the ways women were identified as key to dissolving the traditional bonds of society in the case of both Central Asian and Canadian colonialism are disturbing and instructive52. The key roles women have in rebuilding their communities after the imposition of any form of external re-ordering is important for understanding how women entrepreneurs are implicated and inserted into current processes of social and economic transformation (Bhatt, 2013; Cornwall et al., 2007; Howard, 2003; Stephen, 2005).

If there is one thing I have learned from my experience in Kyrgyzstan, it is that the problem is not so much that the experience and expertise developed in Western

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contexts cannot be valuable for post-Soviet actors, but that it is important to transfer knowledge in democratic ways (Rivkin-Fish, 2004). In this context, 'democratic ways' implies a two-way flow. The transfer of knowledge needs to be as much or more about the transformation of my own knowing in wondrous ways than an imposition of it on either informed or unsuspecting others. In the following two chapters I explain how Institutional Ethnography allows me to convey in academic format, the way processes of learning come to be organized along a chain of activities that includes my own learning, just as it includes the learning of women entrepreneurs and the development professionals that train them.

3.1. IE and sociological inquiry

Western institutional processes of knowledge production and scientific research methodologies have been criticized for their tendency to operate according to textual representations of knowledge that limit our ability to see 'living' knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986; Foucault, 1995; D. E. Smith, 2005). Where textual representations are concerned, the discipline of sociology has been particularly singled out for the way it uses socially organized forms of knowledge to turn lived social life into the concepts of sociological discourse (D. E. Smith, 2005). Where the study of women is concerned, feminists have argued there is a tendency in the objectifying methodologies of conventional scientific research to erase the knowledge and experience of women (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004). Three conditions of invisibility have been identified: exclusion, wherein women are completely ignored or marginalized by an exclusive focus on men; pseudo-inclusion, whereby women are marked as a special case, but an exception to the rule; and alienation because women's experiences are interpreted through male categories (Wibben, 2013:97). Feminists have addressed women's exclusion by developing interpretive frameworks that bring feminist theoretical insights to analyses that use both qualitative and quantitative research designs and findings. The notion of ‘feminist methodology’ refers not to a single paradigmatic methodology but to a diverse range of “researchers doing feminist work, using feminist methods” (DeVault, 1999:23). Feminists do not consider ‘methods' to be mere tools of research, but rather, distinctive ways of understanding the world. In feminist methodology the apparatus of knowledge production is considered to be a key factor in constructing and sustaining women’s oppression. This calls for a research practice that aims: to find what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed; to reveal both the diversity of women’s lives and the ideological mechanisms that make them invisible; to minimize harm and control in the
research process; to level to the extent possible hierarchies of power and control in research relations; and to support research that leads to social change or action beneficial to women and the communities they live in (DeVault, 1999). There are a number of ways Dorothy Smith's Institutional Ethnography (IE) meets these criteria.

Institutional ethnography was initially developed by Smith as a 'sociology for women,' but later evolved into a 'sociology for people' as its broader applications became understood. IE emerged in part from Smith's efforts to make sense of her own struggles as a woman and an academic. Her experiences as an academic in the 1960s drew her into the women's movement in sociology. This movement was struggling in the 1970s with how to remake the discipline to include women's concerns and experiences in sociological discourse. At that time "the pronouns 'he' and 'him' were [still] treated as the universal subject... [and] sociology was written almost exclusively by men from their viewpoint" (D. E. Smith, 2002:2). The task for feminists was to find a language from which women could speak their experiences with authority. Key for Smith was how to formulate a critique of the language of sociological discourse from the standpoint of women's everyday lives. Smith began from a standpoint in her own everyday world where she observed peculiarities in the way objectified social relations organized how she carried out her work at the university. She began to see "how the institutional order of which sociology was a part, was itself a production in and of people's everyday activities, [and] that it connected people translocally across multiple settings" (D. E. Smith, 2002:2). Smith (1987) set out to remake sociology from the ground up so that rather than treating people's social behaviour as the object of inquiry, the everyday world itself became the sociological problematic. IE was thus developed in part, as a critique of the social organization of knowledge, but its intent is feminist in that it also seeks to find what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual people's lives and the mechanisms that make them invisible in institutional processes.

3.2. Ruling relations and the textual mediation of reality

IE supports research that has an explicit focus on change in women's lives and in the systems of social organization that direct and control them. In effect, Smith calls for
explicit analysis of how women’s activities are connected to the relations of ‘ruling,’ and how the ideological processes of ruling shape, without fully determining, women’s accounts of their experience (DeVault, 1999). In IE, “the question of ‘how things work’ is not confined to the conventional problem of describing an alien culture or subculture. Instead, the concrete experience of individuals is treated as the key to discovering how the local organization of everyday worlds is connected with ruling relations” (Grahame, 2004:184). For Smith, ‘ruling relations’ does not refer to modes of domination, but rather to a particular form of social organization wherein the actual doings of people in local sites are organized extra-locally by ‘texts’ (forms, manuals, standards, reports and so forth), so that they can be recognized as an instance of that text at different times across multiple sites. The complex of ruling relations includes “specialized scientific, technical, and cultural discourses which operate through a variety of textual formats as constituents of the process of ruling” (Grahame, 2004:182). Textual formats do not necessarily constitute explicitly prescribed action, rather they establish “the concepts and categories in terms of which what is done can be recognized as an instance or expression of [a] textually authorized procedure” (D. E. Smith, 2006:83). Thus, the texts of ruling relations do not see the world from a standpoint in everyday life, but rather from the location of ruling relations. IE is concerned with explicating the way textually-mediated practices of ‘ruling relations’ come to obscure the actualities of everyday life -- its aim is to enlarge the scope of what can be seen. This does not however mean expanding categories by creating more nuanced subjects. IE expands the scope of what can be seen by making visible the ethnographic significance of texts as coordinating people’s work at the local level and beyond. This makes it possible to investigate the macrosocial ethnographically (D. E. Smith, 2006).

3.3. The 'institution' in IE

The crucial point of IE is that it describes the social organization of everyday life from a standpoint outside of institutionalized discourse, viewing institutions not as singular forms of social organization, but as functional interrelated complexes. 'Institution’ in IE refers not to a particular type of organization, but “to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place [across] multiple sites” (Devault & McCoy, 2002:753). As such they are relational complexes. 'Social relations', however, are not
understood in terms of abstract references to 'meanings' and 'norms', but rather as actual activities taking place between particular people, in particular places, and at particular times. George Smith explains that in IE a social "relation is not a thing to be looked for in carrying out research, [it is] rather, what is used to do the looking" (G. Smith, Mykhalovskiy, & Weatherbee, 2006:177). Social relations do not enter into IE analysis as a focus on the various kinds of relationships people engage in, but rather are the tool used to take up analytically how the actual work that is done by people in local sites is coordinated with and by sequences of action across multiple local sites where others are also active. Thus IE as a method of inquiry is neither focused on sites like 'resistance' and 'domination', nor on individuals who engage in them. The focus is rather on aspects of institutions that are relevant to people's experiences – this is what constitutes the object of inquiry in IE.

Much of contemporary living is organized by and coordinated with a common set of taken-for-granted organizational processes wherein "objectification and generalization are themselves [produced by] the local practices of people's everyday/everynight lives" (D. E. Smith, 2002:9)\(^{53}\). Institutions accomplish the objectification of people's lived actualities by constructing "forms of consciousness - knowledge, information, facts, administrative and legal rules…that override individuals' perspectives" (D. E. Smith, 2002:9). Ng & Mirchandani (2008:38) refer to these forms of consciousness as a "global regime of ruling." Here 'regime' implies that the processes they discovered were not accidental, but planned and brought into being by work processes that people could talk about, yet were invisible in the objectifying practices of their day-to-day work. IE analysis traces how people living in different circumstances, with different perspectives, and interests, are drawn into relations that accomplish the objectification of not only people, but also the work they do. The concept of work in IE refers to any activity embodied individuals engage in that is intentional, takes time and effort, "relies on definite resources, and is organized to coordinate in some way with the work of others similarly defined… Work is both about what people do and about the consciousness that

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\(^{53}\) One of Smith's contributions to feminist discourse is the notion of everyday/everynight worlds to account for the reproductive work women in particular are responsible for, and do around the clock, yet is invisible in workplace and social policy. It points to the taken-for-granted distancing of personal circumstances from what is considered 'productive' in the workplace.
necessarily goes along with the doing” (D. E. Smith, 2002:39). As such, IE extends the concept of work to include activities that people may not necessarily think of as work, for example thinking, reading, or producing objectivity in science. The concept of work, however, must never stand in for activity that people are actually engaged in doing.

"The interviewer must find ways of moving the talk beyond institutional language to 'what actually happens' in the setting” (Devault & McCoy, 2002:761). The focus needs always to be on what people are doing and how what they are doing "is shared by others in the same setting and bears the social organization of their coordinated work" (D. E. Smith, 2002:40). What IE seeks to understand is people’s relationships to their ‘jobs’ – the intersections of their commitments as ‘workers’ with those of the contracts, manuals, forms, etc. that define their work. Social organization in this sense is not a concept, but is present in the language people use as they talk about their work. The researcher hears and responds within the frame of an ongoing social act in which it is understood by the researcher that there is more going on than she is aware of or can attend to.

IE does not use people’s experiences to make statements about them, rather, it is the diversity of actual perspectives, biographies, and positioning people have in their knowledge of the work they do that is integral to IE’s ethnographic method. The point in IE is not that any particular group of informants share a common viewpoint or experience, nor is it to elevate or discount the perspective of professionals. IE does not seek to discover the meaning that social practices have for practitioners, nor is it about explaining performative identities and ethnopolitical agency through its study of social and political practices. IE is not looking for patterns from which to draw conclusions about people or the institutions they work in, nor does it require participants to set aside their feelings about what they do in the telling of their accounts. IE does not reduce institutional processes to texts, but rather aims to "conceptualize the local as an ethnographic moment embedded in ongoing, complex processes linking the moment into webs of relations extending into global processes” (Acker, 2004:22). The aim of IE is to discover webs of relations "and map them so that people can [understand] how their own [local] lives and work are hooked into the lives and work of others, [living elsewhere and at different times] in relations of which most of us are unaware" (D. E. Smith, 2002:4).
3.4. Ethnography in IE

Ethnography in IE is concerned with "research methods that can discover and explore...everyday activities and their positioning within extended sequences of action in order to locate and trace the points of connection among individuals working in different parts of institutional complexes of activity" (Devault & McCoy, 2002:753). Smith (2005:11) maintains that research is discovery – “the ethnographer works from the social in people’s experience to discover its presence and organization in their lives and to explicate or map that organization beyond the local of the everyday." IE thus makes visible the order people both participate in and confront. It means finding out "just how people’s doings in the everyday are articulated to and coordinated by [and with] extended social relations that are not visible from within any particular local setting, and just how people are participating in those relations" (D. E. Smith, 2005:36). More simply stated, the aim of ethnography is to build knowledge about and methods for discovering relations that organize people's activities in local settings to coordinate with practices developed elsewhere. Consistent with this method of inquiry, coordination is not understood in terms of obscure abstract concepts like 'system' or 'structure', or abstract practices like 'governmentality', but in terms of the actual work involved in the ongoing processes that organize and coordinate people's activities, "including the concepts, theories and so forth that are implicated in that coordination" (D. E. Smith, 2002:4). In other words, the point of IE is not to theorize connections such as those between patriarchy and capitalism, domination and resistance, or development policy and practice, but rather to ethnographically explicate them as they unfold in the material world.

3.5. The problematic of IE

An IE problematic begins with two main underlying assumptions: (1) social relations are not an abstraction but rather the actual linking and coordinating of people's activities and work processes in diverse sites; and(2) in contemporary society, local practices and experiences are tied into extended social relations or chains of action, many of which are mediated by documentary forms of knowledge. The work of the ethnographer is to discover relations in people's lives that hook them "into the lives and
work of others in relations of which most of us are not aware” (D. E. Smith, 2002:4). This aspect of the social is the problematic of IE. For Smith, the ‘problematic’ in research does not refer to a set of theoretical questions and related concepts, but is rather a point of departure that can be grasped from the standpoint of people’s everyday lived experiences, proceeding from there to explore the institutional relations to which they are linked. Development of the problematic takes the form of an inquiry which begins to question how things are organized, especially in terms of what is not contained within the local setting or its associated sense-making practices, and which can only be partially glimpsed from within it (Grahame, 2004).

The analytic framework of IE begins by exploring the textual mediation of ruling relations, and then provides an account of the way documentary forms of knowledge work to construct a ‘masquerade of universality’ in standardized systems of accountability. The ‘masquerade of universality’ refers to the way objectively and textually organized administrative systems assign universal characteristics to people or things that exist in reality with distinct particularities (Landes cited in D. E. Smith, 2005:14). Masking the distinct particularities of the actual lived world facilitates the management of people and things by textually organized administrative systems. By concealing the local and biographical particularities of people and cultures, administrative systems are able to apply law and social and economic policy universally, assuming universally experienced outcomes. This is not to suggest that IE views universality as inherently misguided, much less a static phenomenon in policy development. Rather, IE is consistent with Jordan and Weedon’s (1995) view that universal constructs have strategic political usefulness in their capacity to act in both positive and negative ways depending on context⁵⁴.

The problem IE takes up is that the institutional processes used to legitimate forms of universality (such as human rights and gender mainstreaming) originate with the premises of taken for granted bureaucratic authority which lacks transparency and accountability. This critique is not unique to IE but is rather part of a broader feminist critique of universalizing processes wherein Western feminist discourse has itself been

⁵⁴ Universal ethical standards and human rights have served, for instance, as a point of reference for marking hope for oppressed peoples.
criticized for its narrow ethnocentric lens, and its tendency to be, in certain contexts, a contemporary form of colonial discourse (Mohanty, 2003). Abu-Loghod (1990:48) has argued, for instance, that "power relations take many forms, have many aspects, and interweave...[When we begin by] presupposing [an] hierarchy of significant and insignificant forms of power, we [block] ourselves from exploring the ways in which these forms [of power work] simultaneously, in concert or at cross-purposes." For example, Mahmood (2011) illustrates in her study of the female Muslim subject, how Western 'universalist' human rights discourses come to overwrite Bedouin women's own considerations of their human dignity, and thus to dismiss alternative local forms of agency. There is much of value in the work of Mahmood and others who have broken out of the confines of Western feminist epistemology and normative discourse to create more nuanced subjects. The central problem of IE is not, however, to create more nuanced subjects by expanding the categories that universalize. The primary interest is, rather, the way universalized categories come to stand in for the actual day-to-day work that people do in different places, at different times, and with different capacities, and the way their work is drawn into common institutional complexes. The concept of universality thus refers to a set of standardizing managerial practices that come to mask the distinct particularities of people's actually lived worlds.

3.6. Issues of representation in IE

3.6.1. IE and standpoint theory

Issues of representation in social research are imbued with ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns that pose dilemmas both in the field and in writing about encounters. How truths are constructed and mediated is largely a product of the way relationships among researchers, participants and the broader socio-political contexts in which research encounters occur are first of all negotiated, and then how they unfold in practice. Accounting for issues of representation is central to ensuring the soundness, legitimacy and relevance of ethnographic accounts of social life, especially where they place boundaries around the messy corporeality and materiality of women's lives and the transformations happening in and around them. Relevant to my research
are feminist concerns with epistemic privilege and 'voice' that arise in the context of both women's research and the research of women.

Smith's early efforts to develop a 'sociology for women' emerged alongside of, and contributed to, a set of feminist political, scientific and philosophical debates about the invisibility of women in social research that came to be known as feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint emerged in the 1970s in response to concerns that feminist issues were being "ignored as only women's issues, [despite their important contributions] to informing theoretical, methodological, and political thought in general" (Harding, 2004:2). Smith's (1987) notion of standpoint calls into question the organization of sociological discourse in general, the location of discourse in the world, and the social relations organizing the positions of its subjects that its objectifying practices conceal. Smith's standpoint of women does not imply a common viewpoint among women. Commonality is rather in the organization of social relations that accomplish women's exclusion from ruling practices. By focusing on sequences of action that link local activities to a complex of relations located elsewhere, the standpoint developed explicates the wider project of colonization of knowledge in the interests of a ruling complex.

In IE, women's knowledge and experience are not treated as categories separate from the contexts in which they are lived, nor are they considered in terms of concepts such as 'gender relations'. Rather, they are explained in relational terms that capture the 'wholeness' of knowledge production in process as it works to affirm and reaffirm particular taken-for-granted expressions, while erasing, delegitimizing or co-opting others. The knowledge produced in IE is collaborative in that the IE researcher keeps checking their understanding as it develops, confirming and correcting with the informant's help along the way (Devault & McCoy, 2002:758). IE is thus able to pinpoint the particular work processes through which women's inclusion and exclusion from decision-making and policy development processes happens. For example, Dankevy (2002:101) was able to develop a set of recommendations for improving the International

55 Feminist standpoint theory, at its heart, was concerned with the invisibility of women, but was comprised of diverse views that were highly contested and debated from within. See Harding's (2004) edited collection for key contributions to the debates.
Development Research Centre's (IDRC) corporate commitment to a gender perspective by explicating the way IDRC institutional procedures were creating "a disjuncture between the original project objectives that address gender considerations and what actually occurs in practice." Eastwood (2006:182) was able to make "the UN ethnographically accessible" by opening up and analyzing the practical politics and wording of United Nations Forestry Forum documentation. Her work explicated how documentation enables Indigenous People to speak their experience, yet confines what can be said to terms under the discursive control of the documentation. Campbell and Teghtsoonian (2010) applied IE to explore how goals towards gendering aid effectiveness in Kyrgyzstan come to be subordinated to the integrative practices of gender mainstreaming and other institutional discourses.

My own view of standpoint is congruent with that of Ng (2006:179) who asserts that using the term 'standpoint' implies a stronger position "than perspective because it indicates a political vantage point from which one views the world and identifies the 'see-er' as an interested and invested knower rather than a disinterested, neutral and 'objective' one." Standpoint, as I see it, is not an ascribed position available to be claimed by a given oppressed group, but is rather an achievement gained through struggle (Harding, 2004; Mackinnon, 2004; Mies & Shiva, 2004; Ruddick, 2004).

3.6.2. Marginalized standpoints and dialogic relations of learning

In IE there is an explicit awareness that both the author and the participants are implicated in and subject to ruling relations. 'Those under study' are the relations of ruling, rather than interview participants themselves. What IE analysis discloses about those under study cannot be separated from the social scientist who produces the accounts as part of the relations of ruling. Nonetheless, Pels (2004:279) argues, "all major variants of standpoint epistemology confront a 'spokesperson problem' [in that] all standpoints need to be spoken for in order to become constituted as standpoints in the first place." Marginalized standpoints do not just present themselves in the final product - they are necessarily intellectualized and passed through theory and always imply "the guiding presence of the professionals of theory themselves" (Pels, 2004:281). In any kind of ethnography there are always questions as to who can speak for whom, and
why, or how and when they can speak, that need to be accounted for if marginalized voices are to be authentically represented.

Ortner (2006) points out two processes of what she calls 'ethnographic refusal' that arise from failure to reckon adequately with the capacity of the subaltern\textsuperscript{56} to be heard. The first refers to timidity or the sanitizing of ethnographic inquiry such that engaging with questions of the internal politics of dominated groups and the ways they express their own authentic politics and their own authentic culture results in accounts that appear merely reactive. The second is a form of textual resistance - an interpretive refusal that silences the knowing or the possibility of it through ethnographic inquiry by its insistence that subalterns cannot speak (Spivak, 1988)\textsuperscript{57}; or that a priori discourses make it impossible to know anything 'real' (Said, 1978)\textsuperscript{58}; or that ethnographies are in fact nothing more than 'fictions' (Clifford, 1986)\textsuperscript{59}. For Ortner (2006:59) however:

ethnography is never impossible…because people not only resist political domination, they resist, or…evade textual domination as well. The notion that colonial or academic texts are able completely to distort or exclude the voices and perspectives of those being written about [endows] these texts with far greater power than they have.

This, she argues, is because "as we attempt to push [people] into the molds of our texts, they push back. The final text is [thus] a product of our pushing and their pushing back, and no text, however dominant, lacks the traces of this counterforce" (Ortner, 2006:61).

\textsuperscript{56} Ortner in invoking the term 'subaltern' refers to a particular postcolonial subject situated outside of hegemonic discourse who, though ascribed with lack of human agency has the capacity to subvert the authority of hegemonic power.

\textsuperscript{57} Spivak points to the paradoxical contradictions of the discourses which produce aporia (blind-spots where knowledge and understanding are blocked) in the place of subject positions. For Spivak it is not a question of recovering an authentic voice or lost true speech of the silenced other. Such a subject is only constituted through the positions that have been permitted anyway. After the 'epistemic violence' of imperialism there can be no nativist position anymore and thus no nativist alternative history - all is in motion – we cannot just go back and retrieve it.

\textsuperscript{58} Said's critique is similar to that of Spivak, but refers to how Orientalist scholarship is suspect due to its inextricable ties to the imperialist representations that produced it.

\textsuperscript{59} Clifford is noted for literary critiques of written ethnography.
George Smith (G. W. Smith & Smith, 1998) understands the agency of the subjects of ethnographic inquiry in relation to textual domination a little differently. He argues that those directly quoted in his work speak directly from his text to the reader and are thus not reinterpreted in terms of concepts or theories imposed by the ethnographer in the first place. There is merit to his argument but the question remains as to how the speaker comes to say what is quoted in the first place. In IE, this is an issue related to the notion of dialogue in interviewing. Dorothy Smith (2002:15) explains that

the formalized structuring of questions used in survey research and some forms of qualitative research suppresses the effect of dialogue, aiming at the outset to produce a monologic in which the respondents' part is subdued in terms of the pre-set questions and the pre-coded responses.... Dialogue is concealed either by the use of data that has suppressed dialogue before it arrives at the analytic site or by deploying theory that converts the many-voiced into the monologic. Recognizing interviewing or observation as essentially dialogic recognizes the researchers' interests in the research as integral to the dialogue while at the same time relying on the other to teach...what the researcher must learn from her.

Looking at it this way, Smith uses the example of how conceptions built into the interview strategies that she and Allison Griffith employed in their study, *Mothering for Schooling* (2004), presupposed a mothering discourse that shaped the kinds of stories that got told. They discovered, in retrospect, that the discourse had presumed a particular orientation of priorities where mothers and their children's schooling was concerned, that had mediated a single version of what could be known. The problem became visible when they analyzed an interview dialogue in which the respondent simply did not respond to what the interviewer was taking for granted. Unfortunately it was too late for Griffith and Smith to modify their approach by this time. Thus they were unable to learn fully from the respondent just how she was experiencing her relation and that of her child to schooling. In the interview relation, both interviewer and participant bring a shared discursive competence to the conversation that can work to preclude attending to alternative possibilities. Griffith and Smith learned that in their role as interviewers they had failed to engage in the kind of talk that might have opened up other ways of thinking. They found that by presupposing a mothering discourse at the outset, they had
precluded the process through which dialogic learning could occur. The idea of dialogic relations of learning is thus key to issues of representation in IE.

**3.6.3. Issues of generalization in IE**

A common problem in social research is that "webs of articulation and disarticulation...between dominant and dominated" (Ortner, 2006:62) make for ambiguity and ambivalence in the categories social researchers use. In IE rather than investigating *categories* such as 'resistance' or 'domination', the task is to systematically explicate processes that can be discovered in the day-to-day work people do and the complex of coordinated activities that work is connected to. In this way IE overcomes, to some degree, the ambiguousness and mystification that conceptual categories conjure when imposed to explain what is happening. Nonetheless, IE is limited in its capacity to fully overcome ambiguousness and mystification because it is inherently incapable of representing an all-encompassing account. This is not necessarily a weakness of IE, but is more so consistent with its overall critique of universalizing processes. IE is a piecemeal process of bringing into view the mosaic of ruling relations. While each piece contributes to the combined analytic frame of IE research, institutional ethnographers also learn from the research and methodological discoveries and innovations of others (IE Chapter, Draft 2, Comments from Dorothy Smith). As the analytic frame is assembled "different moments and aspects of the same generalizing set of relations" (Devault & McCoy, 2002:19) come into view.

It is because ruling relations are pervasive that no single study is able to represent a comprehensive view of the way they operate. In any case, for Smith (2002:12) the point of IE is not

> to make statements of relations among variables that can be generalized from a sample to the population it represents. Institutions are themselves generalizers and their ethnography looks for the way in which the particularities of people’s everyday doings bring into being the distinctively generalized forms of the institutionalized order.

People engage in taken-for-granted practices mediated by standardized and replicable texts to produce and reproduce the institutional character of the social relations that coordinate the local settings of their work. Generalization in IE thus refers to the way a
particular set of relations (the 'institutional' writ large) is generalized across individual situations and experiences, such that variously located individuals come to produce, and activate together, objectified forms and relations that transcend the individuals themselves.

The point of IE analysis is to bring into view institutional processes that we may or may not be aware of. Congruent with Ortner's (2006:58) ethnographic stance, IE presumes that "the importance of subjects lies not so much in who they are and how they are put together, [but rather in the formulation and enactment of projects through which people] both become and transform who they are, and...sustain or transform their social and cultural universe." In IE, the "ethnographer...actively [seeks] to be changed, to discover not only what she did not know but, as she goes about her work, how to think differently about what she is learning" (D. E. Smith, 2002:16). Issues of representation in IE and its analyses are not about refusal of subjectification, or the freely choosing individual as an ideological construction, or whether or not people accept textual representations that underwrite their own domination. They are rather about revealing textually mediated institutional processes that do indeed have the capacity to wield enormous amounts of power regardless of whether to any extent we are aware of the way they organize our day-to-day lived worlds, including those where we engage in academic writing. The aim of IE is to understand just how things are coordinated so that they happen the way they do so that we can effectively understand how and where to make changes to the way things are done. IE is thus not only a study of representation, but is also a political response (Harding, 2004).
4. How I Applied IE as the Framework of Inquiry in my Research

The overall aim of IE inquiry is to explicate the institutional processes that account for what happens in the everyday world. This is achieved by observing the actual ongoing practices of individuals in the everyday sites where the activities occur, and as they happen (D. E. Smith, 1999). This may sound straightforward, but staying focused on the actualities of people's doings is one of the most challenging aspects of putting IE into practice. I found this was so to a lesser extent in my research design and fieldwork, than when I attempted to translate what I knew from the field into the structure and requirements of a dissertation. As academics we do a lot of reading, and I found the problem with reading was that whatever I happened to be reading kept taking over the agenda. The academic expert kept overriding what I knew in terms of local knowledges and experiences, and collapsing my learning into terms given by discourses (i.e. capitalist, modern, traditional, etc.) that obscured the local particularities and perspectives that had informed my work. I could see that ruling relations were not only active in the work processes of the participants we interviewed, and the field where we conducted our investigations, but simultaneously in the academic institution organizing my own activity in ways that I was not always aware of, and in sites where I was working on investigation and writing. It became clear to me that in IE, similar to other feminist and critical research traditions, both researcher and research subject must be considered "interested parties who view the world from a particular vantage point" (Ng & Mirchandani, 2008:38), and that each vantage point is itself subject to the influence of ruling relations. Since the researcher is also drawn into relations of ruling that may not

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60 I was surprised to find this to be the case even as I wrote up the IE chapters. At one point I had finished what I considered to be a well-revised second draft. When I returned to it a couple of days later, I realized there were no people in it - only 'academic speak.' When consulting with Dorothy Smith, her first critique tends to be 'where are the people in your research?' I knew this draft would not be acceptable so I had to start afresh with where people actively appeared in my data.
be immediately apparent or relevant in local sites of investigation, they must also be considered in the research problematic of IE.

4.1. Understandings and misunderstandings

Ethnography, no matter how it is practiced, is an attempt to understand another lifeworld using the self as the instrument of knowing. I believe, similar to Ortner (2006:42), that ethnography involves fieldwork "in which the whole self physically and in every other way enters the space of the world the researcher seeks to understand." In the case of my research, "physically and in every other way" included attitudes and emotions that I brought to and was made aware of in fieldwork that included my day-to-day encounters in Bishkek. Below I have inserted a vignette composed from the daily journal I kept while in Kyrgyzstan. My rationale for including the vignette is that although I was investigating women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan, my field learning actually began with my entry into Kyrgyzstan, and continued in the day-to-day encounters I had while living in Bishkek. The journal I kept of day-to-day happenings is rife with accounts ranging from mild frustration to utter exasperation as I tried to understand, cope with, and at times simply endure what variously appeared to be complete incompetence, incomprehensible purpose, or simply a comedy of errors. Even before I began to write I knew that to express what I was seeing and experiencing was going to be very challenging indeed. Not only were ordinary events laden with complex relations that I did not understand, but many of my own taken-for-granted assumptions about how things work were also proving faulty. I could see that in order to get along here, it was me who was going to have to change. In addition to my own attitudes and emotions, "in every other way" for me included having my 19-year-old daughter, Margot, who accompanied me (with all her attitudes and emotions) for the duration of almost a year's stay in Bishkek. Following below is a description of our first encounter with misunderstanding at the airport, and a description of how we settled into our new home in Bishkek. I conclude by reflecting on how difficult it was to select from all my experiences content that would suit the confines of a dissertation.
4.1.1. **Arrival in Bishkek, August 2010**

I was grateful, for a number of reasons as it turned out, that I had taken the advice of a good friend and ordered up a VIP Lounge Pass for our arrival in Bishkek. Flights typically arrive around 3:30 a.m. and processing goes a lot more quickly with a lounge pass. In our case we were quickly cleared but our driver (who had all the details about our accommodations) was not there to pick us up and take us into Bishkek (about 30 minutes away), nor was I able to phone anyone -- all I had was the first name and e-mail address of the woman who was handling our arrangements. So Margot and I spent our first night in a secluded area of the VIP lounge where we managed to get an hour or two of sleep. Later in the morning, airport staff miraculously located our driver who was profusely apologetic, having misunderstood 3:30 a.m. Friday to mean Friday night.

Driving into Bishkek I could not believe how different it looked -- how beautiful it was in the summer! Margot and I spent our first day settling into our apartment, a two-bedroom fifth floor walk-up located in an apartment complex surrounding a courtyard. The road into the complex was in such poor repair it was a wonder the car made it to the front door. I was grateful to the friend who had also advised me to ask for air-conditioning -- it was at least 40 degrees outside and I thought we would expire before we climbed the five flights of stairs to our door.

Our apartment overlooked a courtyard where a woman was beating a rug on an iron rack that seemed to be there for just that purpose. The branches of a tall graceful tree reached up past our enclosed balcony. Beneath the branches I spotted a few wooden benches where small children were playing on equipment reminiscent of playgrounds I had visited as a child. In the evening as I prepared lessons for the next day, I heard Margot softly singing the Elvis tune "...in the ghetto..." from where she stood on the balcony. I smiled -- it was interesting to me that this was how she was interpreting what she saw. What I saw was too complicated for my overactive sociological psyche to translate into 'ghetto', - five decades of life experience, including a childhood imbued with traditional Doukhobor, (and thus to some extent Russian) culture, and years immersed in sociological inquiry had shaped my perceptual lens differently. There was a kind of longing that accompanied my 'seeing' that I could not explain and that stayed with me a long time after I returned home to Canada. It was difficult to translate all that I (we) had seen and done -- all my fieldwork and interviews, the
teaching experiences at AUCA, the streets of Bishkek, the excursions into the
countryside, the family tragedy that happened at home while we were away, the
immense grief I felt as I looked back at Bishkek through the window of the taxi crammed
with two friends and my excessive baggage, wondering if I would ever return -- into the
confines of a dissertation. Not only was my 'knowing' partial, but the requirements of a
dissertation were also going to demand I translate only particular parts of that partial
knowing into sociological knowledge. The learning I had done was not simply an
academic exercise -- it was something I lived every day and every night for almost a
year. It took me a long time to come to terms with how I could possibly do justice to
writing something that would honour all the experiences I had, and all the people who
had been a part of them and who continue to stay in touch, and still meet the
requirements of a dissertation. In this chapter I set out to explain why I found Dorothy
Smith's Institutional Ethnography (IE) to be the most effective method of inquiry and
framework for producing, to the extent possible, such an account.

4.2. Research design and the problematic of IE

4.2.1. Informing the researcher's ignorance

The challenge of writing up a methodological account of IE is that the research
process “follows the shape of the problematic in the everyday world that the researcher
explicates, not the shape of a plan developed prior to the undertaking of the inquiry”
(Campbell & Gregor, 2002:56). Rather than being predetermined at the outset, the
direction the research will take, the questions to be asked, the interview guides and the
choice of informants emerge out of the research process. The absence of a fully
developed research plan is not a phenomenon unique to IE, but is rather a common
feature of ethnographic inquiry. Participant observation and open-ended interviews, for
instance, do not begin with a fully anticipated mode of inquiry. The rationale is that if a
researcher enters the scene knowing what to look for, they may find it, but overlook
more significant aspects that a rigid plan did not account for (Cresswell, 2003; Esterberg,
2002). Thus an institutional ethnographer enters a research setting knowing more or
less what she wants to explain, but an understanding of who needs to be interviewed,
and what texts and discourses need to be examined, is developed step-by-step in the
process of the research (Devault & McCoy, 2002). Smith is adamant, however, that institutional ethnographers ‘get it right’, and that IE be conducted respectfully and purposefully in consideration of the people involved. In this regard the overarching goal is to inform the researcher’s ignorance. How I confronted my ignorance is thus an appropriate and necessary starting point for explaining the processes through which my research design evolved.

My earliest confrontation with my ignorance came while writing my historical chapter, after which I changed the title of my dissertation from Building Fair Trade Networks in Post-Socialist Economies to Building Fair Trade Networks in Post-Soviet Economies. Even before I went to Bishkek, I began to understand that there was an important conceptual distinction between post-socialist and post-Soviet and this distinction became more and more interesting to me as I began to think about an overarching theme for my dissertation. The next confrontation came during a conversation about my historical chapter with Gulnara Ibraeva, a highly respected colleague in the Department of Sociology at the American University of Central Asia. Ibraeva is a political activist whose efforts I came to greatly appreciate over the course of my time in Bishkek. During our conversation she became impatient with my proposal to study ‘Muslim’ women’s experiences, explaining to me that this identifier was of little relevance to women in Kyrgyzstan and that it was inappropriate to use it (Journal, Sept 24, 2010). I was at first taken aback by what she said, but then contemplated how I would react to her coming to Canada to study ‘Christian’ village women.

I suppose depending on the setting this could be an appropriate frame. It would be appropriate, for instance, for her to go to rural Saskatchewan and study the experience of Doukhobor women. Notwithstanding that for many reasons Doukhobors could hardly be considered representative of the Christian faith, as a Doukhobor raised in rural Saskatchewan I know that this is an important identifier. Indeed for my grandmothers, it would be the essence of who they were (though not so much for me). Why would this not be so for Kyrgyz village women? Did my historical chapter get it all wrong? Did ‘Muslim’ really not have much to do with the way women thought and behaved here? I clearly had much to learn about the local situation, including the extent to which my initial intention to do a study of fair trade in the Kyrgyz context was inappropriate. Aside from the local research partner I was working with telling my
research assistant and translator outright during our second meeting that I did not understand the local scene (WESA Fieldnotes, Nov 4, 2010), in my daily transactions I began to realize that in a bazaar (and bizarre) economy, where almost everything was up for negotiation on a face-to-face basis, and where ‘authenticity’ was systematically bought and sold in the course of day-to-day transactions, to apply the concept of ‘fair trade’ as I understood it to investigate anything was going to be practically and conceptually inappropriate. Thus, I entrusted my local partner with the task of steering the direction of the research so I would not embarrass us both as I headed into the field to do my research.

4.2.2. Accessing the research site

International aid and development is organized by a set of social relations brought into being through the activities of actual people who are variously located and who hold different perspectives and interests in the project. My research partner Gulnara Baimambetova, chair of Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA) and the staff at WESA have spent years working with partners from international aid and development organizations to design training courses that provide locally-adapted instruction to assist women with starting and operating small scale social enterprises in baking, curtain design, needlework, hair-styling, fruit, vegetable and milk processing and customer service for restaurants and cafes, to name a few. WESA’s courses, available to beginner and experienced entrepreneurs of all ages, have been especially valuable to middle-aged and older women living in remote agricultural areas where few economic opportunities exist. My formal fieldwork was for the most part carried out in collaboration with WESA as part of a research project for which we hoped to secure funding (in vain as it turned out) to investigate opportunities and prospects for the efficient delivery of informal adult education in diverse rural regions.

I had the good fortune to hire two students from the sociology department at AUCA to assist me with many aspects of my research. My principal research assistant and interpreter, Aikokul Arzieva accompanied me on all fieldwork excursions except our final trip to Kara Balta village. Her contributions to the project were invaluable, not only in terms of her interpreting and organizational skills, but also the informal conversations we shared about what we were observing. Vasilii Lakhonin fulfilled the requirements of
an internship\textsuperscript{61} by providing Russian translation during meetings at WESA headquarters and helping me prepare and translate documents related to those meetings. He also accompanied us on our second village visit. Both assistants were invaluable to me as local reality checks on many fronts, in situations both directly related and completely unrelated to my research.

Some particular aspects of how the research design evolved are worth noting. Vasily and I met with Gulnara at WESA headquarters on October 27, 2010 where it was decided we should write a grant proposal to investigate some of the challenges WESA encounters in its work and to formulate a set of recommendations for how to resolve them. We decided that I would write the proposal and WESA would help with its budget and fine-tuning the proposal. What ensued was another opportunity to inform my ignorance -- not only of the grant writing process but further in identifying the salient objective for our proposal. I wrote up a set of objectives and an analysis aimed at demonstrating the challenges and effectiveness of WESA's training program as a model for adult education, practical skills training, and sustainable development (especially for women in remote rural regions) that WESA could present to government ministries to convince them of the value of integrating WESA courses into their economic development programs (See WESA Notes, Oct 28, 2010: Appendix B). When Vasily presented the proposal at WESA headquarters, Gulnara explained that she understood my needs and motivations, but that she had something else in mind. She said she would send me her ideas in a revised outline for the proposal (See для+продок English Translation, Appendix C). In the meantime, she invited us to observe WESA staff and interview participants during the final three days of a set of training programs being given in mid-November in Jerge-Tal village (WESA fieldnotes, Nov 4, 2010). Aikokul and I made the trip to Jerge-Tal where we had an opportunity to observe a sewing class and a leather craft-making class\textsuperscript{62}. We also attending an exhibition held in Naryn city on the

\textsuperscript{61} All students at AUCA are required to complete two internships in order to graduate. These are often fulfilled working for INGOs or local NGOs, but it is also possible to fulfill them assisting professors with their research. I was rather conflicted about the arrangement as it seemed highly exploitative to me (as indeed in many cases it was, based on the stories I heard). Nonetheless it was also an opportunity for students to acquire some practical work experience while doing their studies and helped them develop strong CVs and resumes.

\textsuperscript{62} Details of this trip are written up as an ethnography in Chapter 6.
final day of the courses at which all students presented the products of their new skills and talked about what they had learned from the courses.

4.2.3. Identifying the problematic of the research

WESA’s work with women entrepreneurs emerged in part from a development strategy initiated in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)\(^{63}\). However, access to ongoing funding requires WESA to adjust their priorities from year to year to ensure they coordinate with the shifting discursive frames and priorities of UN Women (formerly UNIFEM) and other international donors working in the region. I was able to trace the concept of informal adult education back to a global program called *Education for All*. The program was initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as part of its effort to achieve Millennium Development Goals related to universal primary education and gender equality in education. The Kyrgyz government produced a national report on adult education in 2008 as part of its obligations and commitment to UNESCO’s programming\(^{64}\). In practice, informal adult education is basically training and skills development provided by professionals outside of formal education systems. WESA’s work with women entrepreneurs can thus be understood as a concept classified as ‘adult education’ in international funding proposals, but also as the actual provision of training and skills development by WESA professionals. It is through such discourses that Gulnara Baimambetova and her staff have come to understand in a particular way, that a widespread project of informal adult education programs for women and youth has great potential to foster participation, cooperation and sustainable community economic development in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan.

\(^{63}\) A number of UN initiatives including UNIFEM merged into UN Women in 2011.

\(^{64}\) The Introduction to the report states that it was “prepared in the framework of implementation of international obligations of the Kyrgyz Republic on realization of the Global Programmes such as “Education for All” and “Millennium Development Goals”, the UN Literacy Decade, UN Decade on Education for sustainable development, and also in the framework of preparation of materials to the VI International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which is being conducted by UNESCO on policy of dialogue and assistance to Adult Learning and Education to be held in 2009” (Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2008).
From my experience attending events at WESA headquarters, I could see that a number of highly committed people, with expertise in a variety of fields, met on a frequent basis to discuss independent ideas. Translating ideas into action, however, requires writing grant applications for funding to implement them. Writing a successful grant application means being able to talk about local needs and issues in ways that coordinate with the policy discourses of international organizations. It is not that WESA staff ceases to understand needs and issues in terms of the local experience of them, but rather that the frames in which they are able to express what they know from their own experience are limited by the pre-given concepts and categories of international development policies and discourses. Technologies (such as online applications) used to standardize the application process further preclude the possibility of a dialogic interchange. Standardized application processes do not respond to local variations. Rather, they require local variations to sculpt themselves so that they coordinate with managerial processes that originate elsewhere. This results in disjunctures between the reporting requirements and representations of standardized programming, and the actualities of experience and accountability it stands in for at local levels.

In the case of our research, the problem with informal adult education programs from WESA’s point of view is that such programs need to be more comprehensively developed to adequately serve local needs. In consultation with Gulnara Baimambetova about our observations at Jerge-Tal village, we identified four problems with the delivery of existing adult education programs:

• They are not very well adapted to the needs of the current labour market or to the diversity of community needs in rural Kyrgyzstan where other forms of economy may be more locally appropriate as a starting point than conventional ‘market skills development’.
• Training and professional development programs for women entrepreneurs have tended to focus on the theoretical basics of entrepreneurship without giving adequate attention to the practical implementation of knowledge and skills.
• Where practical skills training has been provided it was not accompanied by the timely provision of equipment and resources needed to carry those skills forward into economic activity.
• Universal access to programs is hampered by application and selection processes in the regions or villages where they are offered.
The question was: Where to go from there? It was at this point that my research efforts were drawn into a process of grant writing that came to organize the direction of our work, right down to the wording of it. Whereas I had envisioned our research to be an analysis aimed at demonstrating the effectiveness of WESA’s training programs, Gulnara Baimambetova envisioned things differently. She understood the purpose to be twofold: to identify obstacles to the efficient delivery of informal adult education in diverse rural regions, and to identify opportunities and prospects for the delivery of a more comprehensive program of training and skills development than existing programs currently offer (See Grant Application II- Draft 3 Appendix E versus Grant Application I-Draft 2, Appendix D65). Over the course of negotiations with Gulnara Baimambetova, she had succeeded in training me in the art of ‘grant-speak’ so that not only were our objectives mutually clear (despite language barriers) but we could also use them to develop proposals for funding. My student interpreters also seemed well versed in the language of ‘grant-speak’. Moreover, they were able to use it to make our intentions comprehensible to participants at the village level, where people also seemed well versed in the art of ‘grant-speak’.

4.2.4. Applying the analytic framework of IE

In IE, the ethnographer approaches the research relation with an attitude of learning and an understanding that learning is a dialogic relation wherein the ethnographer must always be open to change. This means that rather than imposing presuppositions from our own discourses on what others tell us, we are always in dialogue with those from whom we learn (IE Chapter, Draft 2, Comments from Dorothy Smith). At the heart of IE’s intent is the aim to investigate how things are put together so they happen the way they do. IE “begins by locating a standpoint in an institutional order that provides the guiding perspective from which it will be explored. It begins with... issues, concerns or problems that are real for people” (D. E. Smith, 2002:10). I just described the basis on which WESA and I came to develop the objectives of our working

65 In my experience it was important to cite appropriate academic sources when writing a grant proposal, thus I cited several academic sources in Grant Application II-Draft 2. Gulnara asked me to remove them in Draft 3 because, she explained, they were of no interest to potential funders and only served to mystify our intentions.
relationship, and how these objectives coordinated with and were comprehensible to others external, but connected to our relationship. My next step was to further develop the problematic by asking this of our preliminary findings: How are training programs for women entrepreneurs put together and delivered so that things work out the way they do? If I was to make recommendations for developing a more comprehensive education program and system of delivery, I would first need to understand how the current system functions. Control of knowledge production in the development and delivery of training programs for women entrepreneurs is tied to institutional processes such as accounting systems, accountability systems, and computerized technologies that produce forms, assess compliance with contractual obligations, track expenditures, and so forth. To understand how things work I would need to explicate the institutional processes that connect the development, delivery and outcomes of training programs for women entrepreneurs.

In IE, "investigation builds from one stage of research to the next on the basis of interviews" (D. E. Smith, 2002:11), but sampling is concerned with access to institutional processes rather than to representative populations. Since we had chosen the training of women entrepreneurs as the standpoint from which institutional relations would be explored, I began by interviewing women who were taking the WESA courses in Jerge-Tal village. Our village host and a local INGO representative were helpful in identifying and setting up interviews with other participants, that is, kindergarten staff, school administration, municipal officials and employees, a social worker, etc. My rationale for using a range of interviews was not, however, to develop a range of standpoints, but rather to understand how institutional relations present in the work of women entrepreneurs are also present in the work of others in the village and beyond.

Once I identified how work processes were being mobilized and organized in the lives of women entrepreneurs, I began to look for how their work was connected to work being done in other sites local and external to the village. I looked for how things get ordered and scheduled to achieve regularity or other forms of predictable results, and how ordering puts strains on local realities or is itself constrained by them. I also looked for how processes of accountability were involved in the ordering. Once I identified how particular work processes connected aspects of local work practices to the function of intentional (and unintentional) external interests, I was able to identify points at which
disjunctures appeared between stated intentions and: 1) the textually mediated processes and activities developed, though perhaps not designed, to accomplish them; and (2) measured (as opposed to experienced) outcomes in immediate local, as well as broader external contexts. In the final analysis I was thus able to explicate some of the broader objectives of the standardizing practices of rural 'development' work, whether or not they are consciously recognized or intended as such. I am thus able to show how the standardizing practices of rural 'development' come to preclude alternative practices and functions from entering the scope of what can legitimately be imagined.

4.3. Data collection and analysis

4.3.1. Data collection processes

Like other ethnographic methods, IE is a form of story-telling that "selects from raw material, shapes it, and creates discursive order… [of a] lived world that can never be exhaustively described or enumerated. [The lived world] is always more and other than anything that can be said, written, or pictured of it" (D. E. Smith, 2002:10). To account as much as possible for the 'lived world' I had observed, I employed a number of data collection strategies to incorporate a balance of 'say', 'write', and 'see' in my ethnographies. I used historical accounts, interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes, autoethnography, and photographs to produce a narrative account primarily focused on the 'everyday' because that is where ruling relations can be discovered. I found it difficult to express in language the complex contours of what I was observing, for instance, things I interpreted as gender privilege, poverty, breathtaking landscapes, etc.; but also the 'everyday' contexts in which interviews were taking place, that is, physical sites, the ritual of serving tea, etc. I have thus used photographs in an effort to allow the reader to see just what I had seen, and also to account for, in a sense, how my privileged white Western gaze was seeing.

Ethnographic field notes (including those of my research assistant) and a journal I kept about my day-to-day experiences were also useful in this regard. My day-to-day life was a constant process of participant observation, some of which I inserted into 'personal learning vignettes' throughout my ethnographies to indicate learning
experiences that were not directly connected to the ethnographic moment at hand, but were influencing how I came to 'know' and 'see' the things I talk about in that moment. These include field observations beyond interview contexts (i.e., conversations with village hosts, taxi drivers, etc.); conversations with colleagues about daily life happenings; things I learned from interactions with my students at AUCA; and things I discovered from experiences my daughter talked about and the ones we shared together during her 10 months in Kyrgyzstan. I am very much a visual learner and I feel the vignette boxes make a good visual representation of the layers of me as an outsider trying to make sense of fieldwork situations through the interpretations of a translator. In the interview situation I was physically present and could observe what was going on but was cut off from making linguistic sense of what was being said for myself -- I felt always just outside of what was going on. My translators too were on the outside in some sense, so some of their thoughts likewise appear in text boxes. In terms of IE, these boxes serve to represent my position in ruling relations that reach in from outside to order things, but that also reach in to order my own observations and interpretations for an academic institution and a Western audience. The boxes serve as a constant reminder of what this whole exercise is about (i.e., translating the actual into the textual).

4.3.2. Interviewing

Although I employed a number of techniques, my primary source of data collection was interviews. The aim of my interviews was not to explore my informants' inner experiences, nor was I necessarily interested in the accuracy of their accounts. My interest was more in how they talked about things and the social relations and organization present in their telling. IE interviews proceed somewhat as a process of co-investigation in which both the participant and the interviewer construct knowledge together. An important aspect of my research was that I had to rely on my research assistant, Aikokul Arzieva, to be co-investigator, both in terms of the interview relation with participants, and in terms of building mutual understandings about what we were discovering during our village visits. My research was thus subject to a common concern with mediating interviews through a local interpreter, about how to ensure that the words and concepts used are being interpreted in the same way by interviewers, interpreters, and participants. Verifying an account of how things are put together by talking to several different people was one of the strategies I used to address this.
Another was to involve Aikokul in helping me compose the interview guides so I could get a sense of what she understood about my research objectives. This also gave me some insight into her perspectives on my objectives and gave her an opportunity to provide some input into them. In order to get the information I needed, it was crucial that Aikokul understood exactly what the research objectives were and why participants were being asked particular kinds of questions. To this end, I added some notes to some of the questions on the interview guides to clarify what exactly I was looking for [See Appendix F, WESA Participants Q.1 and Village Administration Q.6]. Initially Aikokul would ask the question and then translate the response. However, we found that the responses were often long and involved and that it was interrupting the flow of the interview to have to stop this way after each question. Moreover, if we proceeded this way, the interviews were going to take more than the hour we had asked for. Thus, we decided Aikokul would occasionally stop to summarize what was being said so I could get a sense of how things were going. She also paused from time to time to clarify some points with me, or to see if she should ask a question on the guide that she sensed had already been answered as part of an earlier response.

4.3.3. Interview analysis

Where interview analysis is concerned I worked with translated transcripts. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed for the most part by Aikokul, but also by other students from AUCA due to time constraints. In IE, informants’ stories and descriptions are used to identify some of the translocal relations, discourses, and institutional work processes that shape their day-to-day work practices. In order to get at these it was crucial that my research assistants understood what I needed to learn from the interviews. I was pleased to find in the transcripts not only reference to some of the terms participants used, but also when, where, and how they use them to talk about their work in specific situations. Aside from correcting obvious typos I left the English as written in the translation when I inserted excerpts from the transcripts into my ethnographies. This was to avoid inadvertently changing the meaning of what was said by correcting the English, and also to remain true to the limitations I had to work with in analyzing interview data that had passed through several layers of interpretation on its way to being made comprehensible to me in the English language. As I was writing up
my ethnographies I also sent them to Aikokul for a local reality check to make sure I was accounting for things properly according to the transcriptions.

Before I began to write up the ethnographies I first read through all of my fieldnotes (daily journal, journal of WESA meetings, notes taken during village visits, fieldnotes from my 2008 trip, e-mails to RAs and saved Facebook posts). Then I read through all the interview transcripts: 3 visits to Jerge-Tal village, interviews from Osh visit, and 2 trips to Kara Balta village66. The transcripts were placed into folders for each trip we made, along with fieldnotes, interview guides and any other written information I gathered during the visits; three sets of transcript translations came to me several months after my return home -- an ongoing lesson in patience! I proceeded to process the interviews in batches according to village visits. I then assigned a colour code to each respondent. As I read through each of the transcripts I made note of themes that emerged. I listed the themes in a table and extracted relevant excerpts for each theme from each set of colour-coded interviews. I then combined the themes and extracts into one collated list of interview excerpts. I proceeded the same way for each village visit, eventually combining the three Jerge-Tal visits into one list. In the end, I had 45 pages of collated and thematically arranged excerpts to work with, plus the collated excerpts from the other two regions I had visited.

My ethnographic account begins by describing how we got to Jerge-Tal village, our stay with village hosts, and the general condition of the village. My analysis of village processes is divided into three categories: formal education processes, village governance, and WESA courses. To explain what I learned about formal education processes I used transcripts from interviews with participants from the village kindergarten and local school. From the kindergarten I was able to learn how processes of formal education were connected to administrative processes at the village and national level, as well as to funding from international organizations. Our visit to the school gave me insights into the aspirations and frustrations of youth in the village, their perspectives on opportunities for the future, and their views on village decision-making processes. My account of village governance examined, with an administrator, the

66 See Appendix G for a list of interview participants.
function of four key sets of documents that guide the business of village administration. The rest of my account of village decision-making processes is put together from accounts of the numerous village residents whom we interviewed about governance processes in the village. To analyze these findings, I looked for instances where local work practices were linked to institutional processes external to the village, and for how reporting requirements were organizing the way things got done. In my write-up I incorporate translated excerpts from the interviews as much as possible to provide a sense of the kinds of discourses people are familiar with, how they use them, and what they understand about institutional development processes and the way they operate in determining and meeting people’s needs.

4.4. Pragmatic limitations and ethical concerns

4.4.1. Funding

Thus far I have focused primarily on theoretical and methodological concerns. I now turn to pragmatic ones. An overarching limitation in what I was able to achieve was funding for my research and fieldwork. I supported my 11-month stay in Bishkek by teaching full time at the American University of Central Asia67. Funding for village fieldwork came from two travel and research grants from the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at Simon Fraser University: $250 in the fall of 2010 and $500 in the spring of 2011, and a generous donation of $200 from a local micro-credit provider (an American ex-patriate) who was interested in my study. Thankfully, travel expenses to the villages were relatively modest so the funding I received was adequate to cover most of the costs for the trips to Naryn and Osh region. WESA covered some of the travel costs associated with our first visit to Jerge-Tal village. The costs of translation (both on-site and interview transcriptions) and the trips made to Kara Balta (two day trips) came out of my wages from AUCA. The upside of all this is that while lack of funding may

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67 The pay scale was abysmal compared to Canadian wages. For instance, I was paid as much to tutor-mark one online course at my home university as I was paid to teach four courses a term plus supervise five thesis students at AUCA. Even so my wage was astronomically higher than local professors were being paid.
have imposed practical limitations on what I was able to do, it also meant that the work I completed was not subject to the agenda of funders.

4.4.2. Informants and fieldwork

We had established good relations with key people during our initial visit to Jerge-Tal village to observe the WESA courses. Thus we were able to organize two additional research visits in January and April of 2011. Aikokul was instrumental in setting up the arrangements for these additional trips. She also organized two visits to Kara Balta village in Chui region where, with the help of the local WESA representative, we interviewed women who had been involved with WESA as trainers or partners, women who had taken WESA courses, and a few other local residents we interviewed using convenience sampling in the marketplace. It was quite challenging gaining access to research opportunities in the Osh region. Although WESA was involved in a tremendous ongoing effort to rebuild community relations and infrastructure after the devastating ethnic clashes of June 2010, for reasons that remain opaque Gulnara Baimambetova did not want me to accompany their team there. The situation was rather volatile in the region and it could be she did not want to be responsible for me under those conditions. There was also a high degree of distrust between aid recipients and the agencies working there so it may not have been appropriate to bring a foreign researcher to the scene. In the end, I was able to organize my own independent trip to Osh region with the help of Aikokul and two of her friends, who also helped organize accommodations and interviews, and who accompanied us on a three-day field trip to the region.

As a research team we composed lists of possible participants and appropriate interview guides in advance of our visits to the villages. However, aside from our visits to Kara Balta, it was never possible to arrange actual appointments in advance. Arrangements were made on-site with the help of local elites, a strategy I found most unsettling given the distance we had to travel in hopes of getting interviews. That said, we nonetheless managed to gather input from rural communities in three oblasts: Naryn (a remote mountainous region in the north), Osh (a southern region, devastated by ethnic conflict in June 2010) and Chui (an area of high internal migration, near the capital of Bishkek). Ultimately, we consulted with a number of groups and individuals:
beneficiaries of current and former training programs, WESA trainers and consultants, educators and youth in the school system, people who had not had access to training programs in their region, and local authorities and representatives of INGOs. The most comprehensive set of data came from Jerge-Tal village since we had an opportunity to spend the most time working with people there. I used data gathered from the other two regions for valuable insights and additional information to help round out my account and understanding of the local scene. I have written more detailed accounts of interview participants and fieldwork processes in later chapters.

4.4.3. Linguistic and cultural fluency

I agree with Lyn Stephen (2005:7) that “the beauty and meaning of a place reside in language and conversation” and that ideally, researchers should have some knowledge of local languages before beginning research in foreign language territory. Nonetheless, due to time constraints I was not able to achieve fluency in either Kyrgyz or Russian before I began my research in Kyrgyzstan. Thankfully my Russian heritage made it possible to engage in simple conversations and interactions, and also to understand some of the implicit cultural nuances (humour and inflection for instance) in my interactions with people in Bishkek. I found my conversational Russian limited for understanding the more technical aspects of the work I was engaged in with WESA, so I needed to bring along an interpreter for my meetings there. In the village my Russian skills were of little use given the primary language spoken was Kyrgyz.

While working with an interpreter may not be the most ideal approach for fieldwork, it is not an uncommon practice. In any case, fieldworkers commonly face problems related to understanding local nuances in the languages and cultures of their participants and have long used interpreters to help enhance their understanding. Limitations of linguistic and cultural fluency fall under three broad categories: contextual and verbal communication; nonverbal communication; and interview analysis. One of the advantages of the IE approach is that while people tend to describe their work using taken-for-granted institutional language, IE goes beyond discourse to actual descriptions of work processes. Inquiry in IE seeks to explain: how the text comes to an informant and where it goes after the informant is done with it; what the informant needs to know in order to use the text (create it, respond to it, fill it out, and so on); what the informant
does with, for, and on account of the text; how a text intersects with and depends on other texts and textual processes; and the conceptual schema that organizes the text and its competent reading (Devault & McCoy, 2002). Given the kinds of information I was looking for, I was able to minimize some of the limitations of linguistic ability by employing a well-informed interpreter. The intent of my interviews was to seek out a description of the actuality assumed by institutional discourses of development and to discern how these operate in local settings. The way institutional discourse overrides and reconstructs experiential talk and writing may have been more accessible to me because the process of interpretation itself requires seeking the kind of clarification about what has been said and how it is being interpreted that is required for IE analysis. In some instances, this kind of questioning may have appeared less intrusive because it was done in the context of language interpretation.

Cultural fluency had implications for how I was able to position myself in local settings, and also for how I represented others in the write-up of my ethnographies. Where contextual and verbal communication in the cross-cultural context is concerned, Ryen (2002:342) has remarked that "acquiring the ability to speak another language for purposes of cross-cultural interviewing…requires that interviewers learn more than vocabulary and grammar." In this regard at least, I found I could easily pass for 'Russian' in my daily wanderings around Bishkek. After all, it was only the insertion of a Canadian heritage that stood between me and my Russian-ness (at least in terms of genetic makeup). An important difference was the historical circumstances of my Canadian relation to Russia compared to that of people of both Kyrgyz (in all its variations) and Russian descent in Kyrgyzstan. I struggled with the question of what kind of 'colonizer' I represented here, and was often uncomfortably conscious of the degree of privilege I held no matter how I looked at things. On the one hand, my ancestors had suffered brutal persecution in tsarist Russia for refusing to bear arms in war, an act interpreted as treason by tsarist forces. They had been exiled to Siberia and later brought to Canada by Leo Tolstoy and Queen Victoria I. While Kyrgyz peoples faced similar persecution in the wake of tsarist colonization, my subsequent colonization took place in Canada where integration was eventually forced on us. Kyrgyz peoples, on the other hand, were subject to the colonizing forces of the Bolshevik revolution, Stalinism, and the forms of communism that followed, and were now subject to
neoliberal capitalism and Western ideals\textsuperscript{68}, which, whether I liked it or not, I was inherently a part of (if not by default then by the fact that I was, after all, supporting my stay in Kyrgyzstan by teaching local students how to think like Westerners at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek).

No matter what my personal beliefs, my position as a privileged white Westerner situated me as a cog in the wheel of the machine working to transform Kyrgyzstan from what it had been to what it was on its way to becoming. I took some solace in the belief that I at least had choices, if however limited, in how to imagine what transformation could look like, and how it could be understood, learned about, and accomplished. One of these choices was to have my imagination informed by local people. In any case, in the arena where contextual, verbal and nonverbal communication were taking place, I found myself, on the one hand, relating to and being related to as Russian, while on the other, being welcomed or despised for my privileged position as a Westerner. My Russian-ness has thus no doubt influenced what and how I was able to 'see'.

\textbf{4.4.4. Ethical concerns}

The purpose of interviewing in IE is similar to that of other social research that uses interviews to collect data on individual or collective experience. However, while IE investigates organizational and institutional processes where people are active, it does not study 'people' per se. It is not interested in people's motivations, intentions, personalities, mistakes, and so on (D. E. Smith, 2005). Its focus is rather on processes of social organization in which people are active. Nonetheless, because IE researchers use informant stories and descriptions in their analyses, IE proposals need to be submitted for 'human subject' reviews just as if people themselves were the subject of inquiry. In my research, informant stories and descriptions are used to identify some of the translocal relations, discourses, and institutional work processes that shape their day-to-day work. I examine not only what terms participants use, but when, where, and how they use them and how they categorize or classify events and objects in specific situations. This kind of ethnographic research involves practices that have ethical

\textsuperscript{68} I do not mean to imply that neoliberalism and Western ideals are exclusively influential today, only that I am part of this particular external influence.
implications: acquiring access to informants (consent forms, full disclosure); offering informants security and protection from any possible harm inherent in discussing their work (anonymity and confidentiality); and policies that inhibit access to certain kinds of documentation and thus may require negotiation and consent (Campbell, 2006).

Designing research to be of benefit to participants themselves is one way to minimize some of the ethical concerns raised by the kind of research I engaged in (Brown & Strega, 2005; Gallagher, 2008). Involving local people in the research design is another way. My research was designed as a collaborative effort with WESA staff who had vested interests in protecting participants from harm. My research assistants were also actively involved in designing the research. They were knowledgeable about and sensitive to local culture and traditions and were able to advise me about culturally appropriate behaviour (for instance, whether I needed to cover my head when visiting villages). In terms of benefit to participants, I intend to have my dissertation translated into Russian and Kyrgyz so that it can be read by WESA and the people they work with, Kyrgyz academics, and international organizations working in the region.

Before beginning my research I obtained formal approval from the Ethics Review Board (ERB) at Simon Fraser University. I received approval to collaborate with Gulnara Baimambetova on my research project after obtaining her informed consent and an official letter authorizing me to conduct research with WESA [Appendix H]. Consistent with ERB requirements, I had initially composed lengthy consent forms to give to interview participants. However, we found these to be inappropriate at the village level so I negotiated with the ERB to use a shortened version that was read to participants with oral consent recorded at the start of each interview [see Interview Guides, Appendix F]. Most participants consented to the use of their names and photos, however, I chose to use codes and general descriptions to maintain their anonymity, and also blanked out faces where people could be identified in photos. I decided I would name Jerge-Tal village because all participants consented to my doing so, and also so that participants could appear with more substance than the generalized anonymity that would otherwise represent them in my write-up. Both my primary research assistants consented to being named in my work. Given the vital role they played I have acknowledged them by using their actual names.
5. Heading Into the Field:
A Visit to Jerge-Tal Village and Schools

5.1. Fieldwork background

One of my aims in the ethnographic accounts that follow is to convey in academic format, how processes of learning, including my own, come to be transformed through a common set of institutional processes. Ethnography, no matter how it is practiced, is an attempt to understand another lifeworld using the self as the instrument of knowing. As suggested earlier on, in ethnographic fieldwork "the whole self physically and in every other way enters the space of the world the researcher seeks to understand" (Ortner, 2006:42). With respect to my research, entering the space of the world I was seeking to understand included all observations and experiences I was encountering in the course of my day-to-day life in Bishkek. Ordinary events like following a map, going to the bank, getting my visa extended, and shopping at the bazaar drew me into complex relations that I did not understand. Moreover, I knew that the day-to-day lives of women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan were somehow connected to these relations in ways I needed to understand. In seeking to understand I discovered how people living in different circumstances, with different perspectives or interests, are drawn into a common set of institutional relations that come to organize the work they do. I also came to see how my own work was connected to and organized by that same set of relations. In this chapter I begin to describe some of the fieldwork processes and experiences through which I learned about Kyrgyzstan, its people, and the relations that organize their day-to-day lives, and that also organized mine.

As previously mentioned, my research assistant and interpreter, Aikokul Arzieva, accompanied me on all fieldwork excursions except one final trip to Kara Balta village. Aikokul, in her senior year of studies in sociology at the American University of Central Asia where I was teaching, brought years of experience working as a tour guide and interpreter to the project. She managed the logistics of all our travel and
accommodations, and most importantly, arranged all the onsite interviews. Her contributions were obviously invaluable, not only in terms of her interpretative and communication skills, but also in the informal conversations we shared about what we were seeing. Thus I refer to some of this research as 'our' work.

5.2. Getting to the village: First visit November, 2010

Figure 5.1. Map of Kyrgyzstan

Jerge-Tal village is located 25 kilometres from Naryn city, in the mountainous Naryn oblast of northern Kyrgyzstan. According to a local official, the population of the village is 5,378 (5,598 including internal migrants working in Bishkek). Naryn region is characterized by a semi-arid steppe climate with extremes in temperature ranging from average highs in the summer of 24°C to average lows in the winter of -18°C. Agriculture dominates the provincial economy (63.3% of GDP) but the short growing season limits activity to livestock production (sheep, goats, cattle, horses and poultry). Wheat, barley and sainfoin are also grown, but these are of poor quality. Much of the plowed land ends up being used for haymaking due to inadequately functioning irrigation systems. Subsistence agriculture is an important part of the local economy. People grow potatoes and vegetables in their home gardens and pride themselves in how they
are able to produce most of the food they need themselves. Jerge-Tal village has 675 hectares of arable land, of which "65% is used to grow grass, forage and fodder legumes, while 30% is used to cultivate wheat and barley" (Steimann, 2011:78). There are three villages in the municipality (the next closest village is 45 kilometres away) serviced by one school and one hospital. The nearest urban centre, Naryn city, is about 45 minutes away by grid road. Naryn region is characterized by poor roads into and out of villages. This hinders producers' access to national and international markets (Steimann, 2011).

Most of the arrangements for our first trip were handled by WESA so preparations primarily involved preparing interview guides and coordinating pickup times with our driver, for this trip a WESA consultant who was travelling to the site to do some work. He picked us up around noon in an older model 4-door Audi (older model Audis and Mercedes are popular in Kyrgyzstan, I would say more common than other brands). I had brought with me small Avon products to distribute to interview participants, but wanted to pick up a few additional gifts just in case (Avon is also sold locally – I was surprised when the office manager in the sociology department at AUCA passed around a catalogue). Aikokul suggested we bring something for our hosts as well -- we chose some chocolate and locally grown apples -- fruit would be a special treat since it was not grown in the region we were going to. She also suggested we bring along candies to hand out to village children – I discovered this was an especially important aspect of village visits as children were always eager to practice saying “hello” to foreign visitors. Remembering my childhood dismay when aunties would search their purse to find peppermints to give us when we met on the streets of the small town I grew

When shopping at Osh Bazaar with local people they would advise me to choose the small, slightly misshapen and scabby apples – “these are the good apples – they are grown locally." I found both young and older people felt there was something wrong with uniform offerings (any kinds of fruits and vegetables) coming from China – they were aware of and averse to genetically-modified food.

By this time I was using tap water in Bishkek for cooking, buying 4L bottles of water only for drinking and making coffee. Tap water left a powdery residue on the bottom of pots and I didn’t want to test what would happen if I ingested large amounts of it. I wasn’t sure how my system would take to village well water – I got sick after foolishly imbibing the ‘pure waters’ of a local stream during an outing in my first few weeks, so this time we decided to bring along bottles!
up in, I chose to bring along wrapped chocolate covered caramels. I also brought along some road treats to share – apples, some cut up pineapple, cookies and plenty of bottled water.

Jerge-Tal village is about a five hour drive from Bishkek. The first stretch of road passes through several villages and a large urban centre. The first hour or two of the journey is paved highway (albeit in poor condition), then we travelled by bumpy grid roads through mountainous terrain the rest of the way. On several occasions we encountered men on horseback herding sheep and cattle down village roads and in the countryside. When they surrounded the car – our driver repeatedly beeps his horn to move them out of the way. There was a rest stop about halfway up – a restaurant with outdoor squat toilets, the condition of which I found truly appalling. A worn towel hung beside a cold-water sink for public use in the entrance to the restaurant. When you leave Bishkek for the countryside this is what you can expect. Some of the stops charged 3 soms [about 7 cents] to use the toilet facilities, well worth the fee as these were generally kept cleaner (I learned to bring toilet paper and handy wipes along when I set out on subsequent village trips). While at the rest stop, we were told the highway ahead had been closed for several hours due to construction and we decided to wait at the rest stop until the highway reopened. I noticed bits of advertising dotted the mountainside across the road – company names printed in white rock on the mountainside, one in English. I passed around some of the apples we bought at a shop.

In Canada there would have been billboards posted months in advance, framed in an emotionally appealing catchphrase about government responsibility, announcing which company had been awarded the construction contract, a timeframe during which the work would take place, and at what cost. Once construction was underway signs would be posted well in advance to warn drivers. Only in unusual circumstances (snow or rock slides) would you find a highway closed unexpectedly for several hours. Where major road construction is taking place you might expect to be held up by single lane traffic guided by flagpersons trained to move traffic safely by coordinating movement with the use of walkie-talkies. I do not know who would be notified or what the rationale for notifying others about road construction would be in Kyrgyzstan, but the principal concern would not be moving travelers through in a timely manner with minimal inconvenience. I found over time that inconvenience was an accepted part of day-to-day life, assumed rather than held up as something someone must be held accountable for. Whether experienced as cause or consequence it was only people like me who seemed agitated by it.
in Bishkek -- small, misshapen and a bit scabby, but very flavourful. While I carefully bit off the scabby sections and placed them in a plastic bag, our driver savoured the whole apple, tossing out only the core. About two hours later we resumed our journey – it was now late afternoon.

Figure 5.2. Photos of highway to Naryn

As we headed further into the mountains the scenery was breathtaking. Small villages nestled along snow-dusted mountains gave way to miles of what was at times frighteningly rugged terrain. It takes an exceptionally experienced driver to manoeuvre around the large rocks lying on the uneven surface of the grid road – no side-rails along the steep slopes. It got very dark as we made our way up the pass with only a sliver of moon to light our way – the density of the starlit skies was magnificent! A tower stood at the top to announce we had reached the summit. About an hour later, around 8:00 p.m., we arrived in Jerge-Tal. Our first task was to locate the house where the WESA team was staying, not an easy task considering there were neither streetlights nor street signs

In my experience even if there had been street signs they would not have helped me find the place. Trying to find an address on my own in Bishkek was an exercise in exasperation. Street names changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and although your map may have the new names on it, the best you can expect to find is signage on a few of the main roads, or embedded here and there on the sides of buildings. If you ask people on the street for help they pause to consider what the street was called during Soviet times, or they simply direct you using Soviet street names to a street they assume you will know when you get to it. Sovietskaya becomes Batyk-Batyry on the other side of the overhead traffic bridge, and even though I knew this when I set out to find the Eye Clinic one day, it was only after someone directed me through a park and past an apartment complex that I was able to locate the Clinic [with a Batyk-Batyry address] in a bluff of trees in back of these.
to guide us in the village. Our driver located the house by asking a group of young men for directions. It was dark and very cold by this time – below freezing. We exchanged greetings with our WESA contact, then transferred our luggage to our host’s vehicle and drove to their house a few blocks away.

5.3. Settling into village life

Our host family was headed by a man (HM1) and a woman (HW1) in their mid-40s. We were invited into an unheated porch where we removed our boots and stepped into a warm kitchen. HW1, her head wrapped in a kerchief, wore a teal blue velvet bathrobe over her clothes as she prepared us a meal of mutton, potatoes and carrots (bathrobes appear to serve the purpose of a dress, perhaps a cultural adaptation to the colder climate). Three of their children lived with them, a 16-year-old son, and 6- and 12-year-old daughters. They have two older married daughters, one living in Naryn city and the other in Moscow where she migrated with her husband, leaving a 2½-year-old son in their care. Aikokul explains this is common practice because conditions for migrant workers are too harsh to bring along small children. Our host tells us they want to adopt the boy and give him their surname since they would be raising him, but the son-in-law has not yet given his permission. The family lives in a four-room house. The house appeared to be heated by a sort of stove or oven built into the kitchen wall. Although the top looked like it could function as a cooking surface, our dinner was prepared on a two-burner electric hotplate perched on a small bench beside the stove. HW1 left the room several times to fetch things from another room located off the porch where we had entered. Her 12-year-old daughter helped peel potatoes and prepare the meal, and to clean up afterwards. At one point she accidentally knocked a pot off the hotplate on to the floor. She and her mother quickly cleaned it up – no harsh words were exchanged. I picked my purse up off the floor where it had caught some of the splash – it was mutton lard – a souvenir to take back with me to Bishkek! The adorable 6-year-old with her long eyelashes was the spitting image of her mother. She and the 2½-year-old boy were an absolute delight, both to us and to their parents as we waited for dinner to be prepared. The small boy had a well-developed vocabulary and what he didn’t say with words he expressed with smiles and facial expressions that would melt
your heart. He crawled all over his delighted grandpa as we sat drinking tea. The older son came home just before we began eating.

Figure 5.3. Home of the host family

The rooms in the house were simply furnished -- painted white with Soviet blue\textsuperscript{69} trim and doors – we were invited to sit around a small wooden table covered with flower-patterned oilcloth. I admired the brightly coloured felt rugs lining the walls of the adjoining room. The floor of both rooms was covered with smaller felt rugs, decorated with what I have come to recognize as Kyrgyz designs. I was glad I had brought along the pair of Tajik knitted socks a student had given me, as there was a cold draft on the floor. I could see that the felt slippers so popular among tourists are actually a necessity in these parts. There were cartoons playing on a small TV in the corner next to a small daybed along the back of the room. (The next day I noticed this family had a satellite dish as well as a TV antenna on their roof – not many other houses in the village had either.) While we waited for the meal to cook, we were served tea and \textit{lepeshka}, a round flatbread which the host tore into pieces and placed on a plate in the middle of the table along with small bowls of jam – a colourful syrup with a few pieces of apricot or berries floating in it. I spooned some on to pieces of bread, others spooned a bit into their tea to flavor it. Tea is customarily steeped in a small pot from which one-half of a teaball strainer lined with a few leaves hangs at the spout. A host will pour a small

\textsuperscript{69} During the Soviet era, trim on buildings and fences was typically painted a particular shade of blue or green and these colors are still used in many parts of the country. A colleague from Poland informed me that 'Soviet' yellow and brown were more typical in her country.
amount of the strong concoction into small bowls (teacups) and top it up about half full with hot water from another kettle. I noticed both men and women serve tea. The flavour of the tea is always just right, neither too weak nor too bitter! I refused the warm milk that others added to theirs – the only food that had ever made me sick in Kyrgyzstan was yogurt so I was careful with dairy products. Tea was offered relentlessly over the course of the evening, a practice I found to be customary wherever I visited. Aikokul advised me it was okay to put my hand over the cup to refuse more.

The meal was simple but tasty and satisfying – a generous helping of potatoes with a few carrots and a piece or two of meat – all of which HM1 proudly declared they had grown themselves. I despaired to see that more meat had been put on my plate than that of the others. Serving guests, I came to understand over time, was very much a ritual. You would never find food delivered to the table and people serving themselves. It would have been rude for my hosts or myself to do so. To serve is to honour the guest. Serving is not, however, the sole responsibility of the woman who cooked the food. Both men and women serve. So my plate, like my cup of tea, was filled repeatedly, and just when I believed I could truly eat no more, I was given a plate of potatoes topped with the ultimate honour – several pieces of deep-fried mutton fat – a delicacy, Aikokul informed me, reserved for honoured guests. Although Aikokul assured me I did not need to take any, as an honoured guest I knew it would be very rude to refuse, however difficult it was to stomach. It had a very strong mutton flavour and it was all I could do to swallow the pieces without gagging. I tried to focus on their saltiness and gulped down two in my best effort to please.

Aikokul was amused when our host announced he would slaughter a goat in our honour the next day:

Excerpt from Aikokul’s reflections: One of the highlights of the trip was eating lamb’s fat with big pieces. Usually fat or fatty meat is served to honoured guests. Taking into consideration that it gets very cold in winter in such mountainous villages, I could understand why they fried big pieces of fat with potato. Although I am a part of this culture I could not stand the smell, probably my professor was shocked…. It was funny. I could not eat even a piece, whereas my professor ate two pieces not to offend host family.
I knew that...he would forget next day and indeed next day he was reminded about it by his wife. We have a proverb that says do not talk with big mouth...(reflection from Aikokul's notes).

HM1, it turns out, had replaced an old Soviet model car with a newer Audi that day and had been celebrating with some of the men that afternoon. He was also very proud of his potato harvest this year and kept insisting we accompany him outside to see it. Aikokul argued it would be better to do this in the morning, but after his fourth invitation, we followed him out into the cold of night using our cellphone flashlights to peer inside two sheds filled with sacks of potatoes. HM1 explained he had initially bought eight kilos of high-yield potatoes from (we believe) Helvetas, for which he paid 60 soms per kilogram (~$10 total). That crop produced eight or nine sacks of potatoes which he planted this year, and these yielded almost 150 sacks. He was very proud of his achievement and his wife was clearly very proud of him as well, affectionately commenting on what a hard-working man he was. Over dinner HM1 had explained how harsh the weather can be in Jerge-Tal. When snow falls unexpectedly before September people can lose their entire harvest – when this happens he sits on his field and cries. But, he said, the fields can also be very generous and that if one works hard enough it pays off. He told us international and local NGOs had been coming to the village to introduce new types of seeds and to offer micro credits and other things. He said what the village needed was credit with low interest rates over a longer period of time, not like the German NGO that offered credit with a time frame for repayment of a year and a half. Such terms were not suitable for them given the way weather can render a good crop one year and devastation the next. HM1 and HW1 also told us about their breeding cooperative – an agricultural project initiated by GTZ (a German NGO). We were unclear if they were breeding cattle or seeds, or both. The cooperative seemed linked to a network that had not yet begun working together (this information was taken from formal interviews with them about their cooperative when we returned for our third visit).
After our visit to the potato sheds we used cellphone flashlights to visit the outhouse (kept in very clean condition) before we made our way back inside. HW1 made up beds for us on colourful homemade mattresses laid down on the floor in a separate room off the porch. The family slept on similar mattresses in a room off the kitchen. All village families we stayed with had these mattresses. The women roll up all the bedding in the morning to make room for the day (my apartments in Bishkek had separate bedrooms where such mattresses were set upon bedframes, much like a futon). The room we slept in was adorned with the kinds of elaborate draperies I had come to admire almost everywhere I went. A hot plate and an electric oven of sorts had been turned on to take the chill out of the air; these were turned off after we settled in. The mattresses were piled two high and very comfortable. I was worried that I might get cold in the night but the blankets proved to be so warm that I removed my socks and the felt blanket I had brought along some time during the night. I was awakened once by the sound of a mouse scuttling about in the room - and I worried it might get into some of our snacks, but in the morning things seemed undisturbed.
5.4. Our tour of Jerge-Tal village

5.4.1. The streets of Jerge-Tal

I was concerned that we had not been roused for breakfast at 8:30 a.m. as I thought had been agreed the night before. Someone was supposed to be coming by at 8:50 to take us to the WESA courses, and by the time we woke it was past 9:00. No one else seemed too concerned. HW1 put out bread, jam and tea – such good bread – and so much tea. It was a warm sunny day and HM1 asked if we would like to walk over to where the courses were being held so he could show us some of the village. Given the way our morning had started, I decided to let the day lead me rather than trying to impose my schedule on it. We packed up a few things for the interviews and headed outside. Out in the yard we could see that our hosts, like many others in the village kept some livestock and a few chickens in a building made of clay and bricks. The roof was piled high with hay, reminiscent of a similar roof we had on the farm where I grew up (see Figure 5.6). There was a huge drum beside one of the sheds that I imagined held fuel for the car or farm machinery. Later in the day we found HW1 crawling out of it with a pail of grain to give to a woman who had arrived with her young son. We were told the woman was a widow who was unable to provide for herself without the generosity of others (see Figure 5.6).
There was a thin layer of gravel on the road that led to our host's house. HM1 talked to us about village life as we began to walk. The village was nestled in a backdrop of brown mountains with a row of snowy peaks looming in the background – I can’t remember when I felt such quiet. The front patios of village houses were surrounded by thick walls and gated, more so, from what I could tell, to keep cows, sheep and chickens safe from predators at night than to protect residents from prowlers and undesirables, though perhaps also for privacy. Backyards were enclosed with fences crudely constructed from tree branches and chicken wire. We passed by a woman washing sacks of grain at a station built for that purpose. Up ahead was a treed park where a number of cows grazed in the midmorning sun. Cattle, donkeys and small groups of sheep seemed to roam freely in and around the village during the day – others were herded to pastures by groups of young boys who brought them back in the late afternoon.

*Figure 5.6. Scenes from Jerge-Tal village 1*

- Poultry barn of the village home
- Grain storage
- Grain-husking machine
- Typical front gate of a residence
Figure 5.7. Scenes from Jerge-Tal village 2

Village houses  Livestock enclosure  Future Rec Centre

WW2 memorial  Woman cleaning grain  Cattle roaming freely on the streets

Village store  Water pump  Four mill building

Flour mill  Boy herding sheep
We came to a World War II memorial at the edge of the park. Next to it was a partially built brick building that HM1 explained would someday be a recreation centre for the village. We were now on the main road through town – it was much wider than the side-street and alley where we had been walking. There were not many people on the street at this time of day - those we met greeted us as we passed by – while Aikokul gave out candy to the small children. HM1 pointed out the village store – the top floor appeared unfinished to me - brick walls with windows cut in – perhaps it was used as an outdoor entertainment area in the summer. I now wish I had gone inside to see what was sold there. We passed by the village water pump – I vaguely recollect seeing one like it in my early childhood when we came to town to visit my grandparents.

We had to step aside from time to time to let cars pass – a few men also rode by on horseback. HM1 pointed out the municipal hall, and around the corner the village mosque. Across from this was a building that housed the village grist mill. Men were at work repairing it that day – Aikokul remarked on what an old fixture it was. HM1 explained that people in the village were buying their own Chinese-made mills these days so this one was not as widely used as it had been in the past. Next door to the mill was the community centre where the courses were being held.

5.4.2. The community centre

At the community centre we were greeted by the WESA program coordinator and the local United Nations Development Program (UNDP) representative who ushered us into a sewing room where 12 women were engaged in group work at various stations – sewing, cutting patterns, etc. We found out an earlier UNDP project had provided the community centre with three sewing machines. They were modern electric models. The woman in charge of training explained what the women at each station were learning to do – one of them posed to show off the skirt she had finished that morning. We were told the women were learning proper sewing techniques using a design that was fashionable, yet not too difficult to make or too costly to afford. We observed the women for a few minutes and then moved on to another room where eight men and two women were learning how to carve a Kyrgyz design into leather which they then fashioned into a bracelet (commonly worn by men), a pencil holder or a cellphone case. Each participant
would take home a training booklet they could refer back to after the training was completed.

Figure 5.8. WESA courses

The local UNDP representative (Jyrgalbek) and HM1 then took us to see the rest of the community centre. Both men were very knowledgeable about local statistics. They told us that in 2005 almost 90% of people lived under the poverty line, but that over the past five years the rate had dropped to 75 to 80%. Jyrgalbek attributed some of the decrease to increased investments from both the government and NGOs (600,000 soms – approximately $13,000 CDN) during the past year. He was not sure whether or how the national government had been involved in helping to obtain the funds. Most of the funds were used to establish the community centre which had been refurbished from an existing facility that had fallen into disrepair after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We were also taken to see a hairdressing shop, a photography studio, a shoe repair station, an electronics repair shop, and the village bathhouse. A UNIFEM poster hung on the wall of the photo studio which employed a young village woman. None of the shopkeepers were at work that day. We were told one had been ill for some time; it seemed perhaps that others came in only when they had clients to work with (we learned from the community centre director during our second visit that none of the rooms -- aside from the coal-fired bathhouse -- had heating for the winter). Jyrgalbek and HM1 also took us to see the back of the building and an area that had not yet been restored. They had not received enough funding to complete the whole project so
additional funds were still being sought. We could see from its condition how much work had been required to bring the rest of the centre to its current state.

*Figure 5.9. Photos of the community centre*

5.4.3. The village school and kindergarten

HM1 was eager to take us to see the village school. The school teaches around 650 students in two shifts – a lot of children in this village! We were taken to meet the school director, a middle-aged man dressed in a suit and tie. He invited us into his office
to talk for a while. He told us the school had recently received funding for seven projects, mostly infrastructure-related. I noticed the school smelled of fresh paint. Ten classrooms were rebuilt and four more were slated for renovation. Funding had also been received for the preschool next door. When I asked about computers he replied with some dismay that in the 21st century their school had only 10 computers. Our conversation seemed to end abruptly at this point (perhaps he felt he had said too much). Out in the hall we stopped to look at a wall of photos celebrating former students who had achieved great things (either academically or politically). We would return again in January to interview the graduating class about village life and their hopes and aspirations for the future. For now we moved on to visit the kindergarten/preschool next door.

Figure 5.10. Photos from the school and kindergarten

There was a playground in the front yard of the kindergarten. Children were playing on equipment reminiscent of what I had played on in elementary school – a
couple of slides, a merry-go-round and a monkey bar – they were painted Soviet blue. A
woman was in the yard supervising the children. Inside, the youngest group of children
were just waking up from their nap. We were introduced to the director, a woman I
would guess to be in her mid-40s dressed in black pants and a red sweater. She wore
winter boots. She gave us a tour of the place, pointing out from time to time
improvements made to the preschool with the help of the Aga Khan Foundation. Tables,
chairs, a refrigerator and stove had been provided – but no heating system. There was
a coal stove and an electric heater in one of the rooms downstairs. What we found
upstairs was disturbing. The coal stove had smoke spewing out of an ill-repaired
stovepipe into the room where a group of children (clad in their winter coats and hats)
sat for their lesson. I got a headache after just a few minutes in that room; I don’t know
how the children and their teachers could cope.

The director and her husband (who was the caretaker) agreed to be
interviewed. They invited us into a small room where we sat around a small table on
children’s chairs. The room was cold so we kept our jackets on to do the interviews. The
director was distressed that the school was still being heated with coal “like in Duishon’s
school”. They wished they could secure funding for a proper heating system but had
so far been unsuccessful. She pointed to where pictures had been removed from the
walls because smoky residue had been settling on them. They explained the
kindergarten had been closed for some time after the collapse of the Soviet Union (some
of the villagers privatized the building and had been renting out its rooms). In 2006, the
director, her husband and another person raised 30,000 soms (~$660) from villagers to
help establish the kindergarten. They also wrote a grant application to repair two rooms
in the building. In December 2007 they opened the doors to 20 children. Then with the
help of OBIER (an NGO – I am not sure what the acronym stands for), they wrote
another grant proposal that aimed to improve and equip two more rooms. The school
now accommodates 60 children in two kindergarten shifts (9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.) and 50 children in two pre-school groups. They were expecting

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70 The interview actually took place when we returned in January but I have included
observations from that interview here to round out the village tour.
71 The director is referring to sheds heated by coal stoves that children were taught in at the
beginning of the 20th century.
additional funding from the Aga Khan Foundation this year, but after the ethnic conflict in Osh (where the Aga Khan office is located) that spring, they lost contact with the people they had been working with, and it thus appeared those projects would not be funded.

We could see it had taken a lot of determination to get the kindergarten open and keep it running. Aside from issues of heating, which also meant low attendance in the winter months, our respondents explained that the teachers worked without pay for almost three years. It was only in April of 2010 that the government officially recognized the kindergarten and its employees became entitled to receive pay. Even so the pay for teachers is 2,000 soms per month (~$44) and the caretaker 2,300 soms (~$51 – he receives more because his responsibilities run around the clock). In the warmer months they work 9:00 to 5:00, in the winter 10:00 to 4:00. Some of the teachers have children in the kindergarten. Families pay a fee of 250 soms per month (~$5) to cover some of the cost of food for children at the kindergarten. The kindergarten also receives $12,000 soms per month (~$265) from the village municipality. This is still not enough to cover all costs. The calculated daily cost per child is 36 soms - the family fee and village contribution amount to only 26 to 27 soms per child. Parents and others in the village donate food items to help make up the shortfall (HM1, we were told, gives them potatoes). All the teachers have completed secondary and higher education, and have obtained certificates for teaching. The director, her husband, and a few of the other teachers have attended training programs in Naryn city 72. One of these programs was fully funded (accommodation, food and transportation) for two weeks – 62 people from the region took part.

We were treated to a performance of some of the songs the older group of children had learned from their teacher, a woman who seemed very highly esteemed by the other staff members. Each child then stood up to recite a short piece for us – one of the boys delighted us all by making three false attempts before he finally remembered his poem! I took photographs of each of the recitations and brought copies to give to the children the next time we visited the village. After our kindergarten visit we returned to the community centre to bid farewell to the WESA team and students whom we would

72 It seemed strange to me that the school caretaker would attend training programs for teaching small children!
connect with again the next day when they presented their newly acquired skills at a
gathering in Naryn City. Thus ended our first visit to Jerge-Tal village. We returned to
do additional interviews in January, 2011 and then again in April, 2011.

5.5. Getting to the village: Second visit, January, 2011

Preparations for our second visit to Jerge-Tal village were a little more
challenging since we did not have the WESA courses on which to piggy-back.
Fortunately we had made important contacts during our first visit and Aikokul was very
skillful in making use of them. She was able to reach HM1 by cellphone, whose family
would be glad to accommodate us again, and Jyrgalbek (UNDP rep) to arrange interview
contacts for us. My other research assistant, Vasiiliy Lakhonin, also accompanied us on
this trip73. We had hoped to organize this trip earlier in January when students were still
on their winter break, but the timing did not work out. Thus we chose the third week of
January when classes were just getting under way. I wrote letters to excuse both Vasiiliy
and Aikokul so they could accompany me without penalty and arranged make-up
classes for the ones I would be missing74.

The day before our trip I went to the market to pick up a few gifts for our
participants and local assistants. Again I chose lotions, chocolates and of course candy
for the village children, but I also picked out pens and colouring books for our host’s
children, and some extra candy to hand out to the Grade 11 (graduating) class that we
planned to interview during this trip. I had asked Vasiiliy and Aikokul to meet with me
late in the afternoon to finalize plans and revise and print new interview guides. Vasiiliy
came to my office at 4:00 p.m. but Aikokul, whom I had texted shortly before did not
show up, nor were we able to reach her to meet at my place later in the evening. This
caused me a great deal of concern since all the arrangements were entirely in her

73 Students are required to fulfill a 4-week internship in the Junior year in order to graduate. I
‘hired’ Vasiiliy (a Russian Kazakh student) for this purpose so he accompanied us as part of
his responsibilities. He used some of his observations to do a comparative study with a
village in Kazakhstan for his Bachelor’s thesis the following year.
74 Taking time off for research was allowed at AUCA as long as classes were made up during
the term.
hands. It turned out she had family issues to attend to and these had taken priority over our research plans. Although I was frustrated it gave me pause to reflect on how little family matters in the culture of the academic world I come from [indeed, perhaps the entire world of work in North America], where we are expected to set family aside as an inconvenience if we expect to succeed. Yet in Kyrgyz culture prioritizing family needs seems to be taken for granted in day-to-day life, at least for women. I witnessed a number of occasions where a staff member would take a few hours off to watch her sister’s children so she could go to an important appointment, or where concessions were given without questions asked to others who needed time to attend to family needs of one kind or another. There seemed always to be room in the workplace to accommodate life as it happens. In any case, late that evening we made arrangements to meet at my place at 9:00 a.m. to finalize plans, get interview guides printed and arrange for our transportation. By the time all was said and done, we were on our way by noon.

Figure 5.11. Buses and marshrutka service in Bishkek

To arrange transportation Aikokul and Vasiliy went to the Transportation Centre, a bus and taxi terminal of sorts located near the north eastern edge of Bishkek. Buses do not run on schedules here – rather there are various sizes from minivan to small buses parked at stalls that designate their destinations. Passengers pay their fare to the driver and he leaves when the bus is full. (City buses operate the same way – 5 soms for the old trolley bus, 6 soms for a regular bus where you pay the driver upon disembarking, or 8 soms for a minivan with a basic route that will stop where you ask along the way – this driver is paid when you board). We decided we would go by taxi for the sake of comfort and convenience. To hire a taxi, Aikokul and Vasiliy would approach the crowd of drivers who were yelling out their destination. They would haggle somewhat over the price – it was best if I remained out of sight because the price was sure to be higher for a foreigner. Although Aikokul had arranged taxis for us before, it seemed more culturally appropriate for a man to do so when possible. For this trip we would pay 2000 soms (500 soms per person, ~$44 total), very reasonable, I thought, for a five-hour trip. On some of our other trips we shared the ride with people we did not know.
5.6. An unsettling settling in

About halfway there, Aikokul decided to contact our host to let them know what time we would be arriving. She was told there had been an automobile accident and the family had to go to Balykchy for the funeral so they would not be able to put us up after all. I tried [unsuccessfully] not to panic as Aikokul called Jyrgalbek to see if he could find us alternate accommodations. He was able to do so but told us it might be difficult to get interviews the next day because there was a funeral in the village that all the men would be attending, and many of the women would be busy preparing food. I was completely dismayed – I had visions of this whole research trip amounting to nothing. Since we were already on the road, we decided to complete the trip and at least try to talk to the highschool students we had planned to meet with and perhaps get some random interviews with people in Jerge-Tal or Naryn city while we were there. Once again, for all the planning we had done we had to go with what was going to work in the moment – a phenomenon that I came more and more to realize was just the way things work here. This was always unsettling for me. Though I consider myself to be a rather spontaneous person, in my well-ordered life there appears to be a particular time and place for spontaneity.

The road through the mountains was covered with snow at this time of year but our driver managed to bring us safely to our destination in good time. We arrived in Jerge-Tal around 5:00 p.m., and Aikokul and our driver used cellphones to locate our new host family’s home. This time it was on the main road running through town. The family greeted us at the gate and we were invited into a room where we sat drinking tea for a couple of hours until our supper was ready. This family had three sons: a pre-schooler, one in an elementary school and the oldest was in his final year at school. He was planning to attend university in Bishkek. Their mother brought us the customary tea, bread and jam, and then went out to prepare our supper (the kitchen was in a separate building on the other side of the driveway). The room we gathered in was quite cold – evening temperatures drop to minus 30º at this time of year. We kept our coats on while visiting and eating dinner. Once again I was glad I had brought along warm socks and felt slippers. Our male host kept us entertained while we waited for dinner – at one point he suggested he could find good marriage partners for both Aikokul and
Vasiliy. Although we laughed heartily at this, Aikokul had taken precautions and wore what appeared to be a wedding ring for this trip since bride-kidnapping is notorious in this region. Turning to more serious topics our host offered good insights on the situation of youth, most of whom he said were eager to leave the village these days. Since there are no opportunities for them, they go to Bishkek to work construction for the summer. When they return for the winter there isn’t much at all for them to do. Our host was quite nostalgic (like so many people we talked to) for the Soviet days. He was angry that “my democracy” had destroyed their lives, and although I didn’t really feel that it was my democracy, I knew I was complicit as a Westerner. Like our previous host, he talked about how old technology and unpredictable weather made agricultural production difficult in this region. Farmers are further disadvantaged by limited access to seeds and a dearth of information about prices. They sell their crop cheap (he lamented that the best potatoes in Kyrgyzstan are grown here) only to find out later that the price has soared and they could have done much better.

Our dinner was the usual fare of potatoes and carrots with a few pieces of meat – simple but satisfying. After dinner we moved our luggage into a room the three of us would be sharing upstairs. Three mattresses were made up and ready for us – an electric heater had been turned on to take the chill out of the air and would remain running throughout the night. Our visit to the outdoor squat toilet in frigid Arctic-like

Russ Kleinbach, a visiting Fulbright scholar, was doing research on bride kidnapping during the time I was at AUCA. In a previous study, he had found that about half of all marriages include some form of kidnapping, ranging from forcible abduction and rape, to elopement and mutual consent (at least two-thirds are believed to be nonconsensual) (Kleinbach, Ablezova, & Aitieva, 2005). Although illegal in Kyrgyzstan, kidnappers are rarely prosecuted. Women are abducted by force or deception and taken to the man’s house where a female relative attempts to put a kerchief on her head - wearing the kerchief is considered to be the bride’s consent to the marriage. The kerchief is sometimes accepted with little hesitation, but at other times it might be refused for days while the woman is held captive (there are reports of young women committing suicide under these conditions). Consent is often given on the basis that it would bring the girl’s family great shame for her to refuse; many families do however support refusal as well. Kleinbach’s latest research set out to show that bride-kidnapping was not a traditional Kyrgyz custom (as is often the touted rationale for its practice) but rather a practice introduced more recently, partly explained by a need to avoid the high costs associated with hosting a wedding and paying the bride price (kalym).
temperatures was memorable\textsuperscript{76}. Back in our room I chose the middle mattress (though it seemed there were not any improprieties about Aikokul and Vasily sharing the same room). At this point we still did not know if there would be any interviews to do the next day – we could only hope for the best!

\textit{Figure 5.12. Kitchen stove with dung fuel}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kitchen_stove_with_dung_fuel.jpg}
\caption{Kitchen stove with dung fuel}
\end{figure}

\textit{I had been reading about a program that taught villagers how to convert dung to fuel for their cookstoves and noted with great interest a bucket beside the stove for this purpose. It seemed to work very well as it was very warm in the room and there was neither woodsmoke nor the smell of dung to contend with. I found the television, old cookstove, and dung fuel to be an interesting combination of new and old technologies.}

In the morning we were taken over to the kitchen. Felt and canvas mats were draped over the door to keep the cold out. Inside it was warm and cozy. Our host served us \textit{kasha} (cream of wheat) for breakfast – one of my favourite childhood foods, yet one I never cook for myself at home. The kasha was especially delicious with some of the syrupy jam mixed in. Our host had also prepared fresh baked bread – an extra special treat to have with our bottomless cups of tea. The pre-school son emerged from a bedroom off the kitchen and joined us for breakfast. I gave him a colouring book and some crayons before we set out for our day. He was delighted, though he also seemed a bit puzzled – I wasn't sure if this was because I had given him gifts or because he didn't know what to do with them. We stepped outside into a bright and sunny day. It

\textsuperscript{76} We still used an outdoor toilet on the farm where I grew up, but there was also one set up inside to use in the winter. Of course my Mom had to haul that pail out every day. I can see that would have been a most unpleasant task.
was not nearly as cold as the night before, but still well below freezing. We dressed warmly for the 10-minute walk to the school, which we decided would be our first stop.

5.7. Formal education in Jerge-Tal village

We met with the principal, a well-dressed middle-aged woman, and told her we would like to talk with the Grade 11 class about life in the village, the kinds of training programs they thought the village needed, and their aspirations and hopes for the future. We were relieved to get permission but were asked to come back around 11:00 a.m. I smiled at the effort it had taken to accomplish this, knowing that in Canada I would not have stood a chance gaining access to students through a school administrator. It would have taken months of negotiations with multiple Ethics Review Boards to get permission to enter a classroom to talk with students. Parents would also likely have been notified and involved in granting permission.

We visited the kindergarten again while we waited to meet with the students (details of this visit have already been discussed). When it was time we were led by a couple of girls to a classroom where some 30 students were eagerly waiting to meet us. This room was heated so we were able to take remove our coats. I noticed students had hung their coats on hooks at the back of the room. The girls were dressed in uniforms – a black dress with white collar and white cuffs around their wrists; some also wore a white bodice. They wore black tights with their dresses. I noticed only one girl wore a headscarf, others wore scarves around their necks, and a few wore earrings. There were various hairstyles, mostly pulled back off the face in a ponytail, some with bangs. The boys were dressed for the most part in suit jackets, dress shirts of various colours, with or without ties, and pants – many wore jeans and some a nice sweater instead of the suit jacket and shirt. Hairstyles ranged from very short to medium length – much like you would see anywhere in Bishkek. The students were seated two or three to a wooden desk with a narrow flip-up top. The desks were of modern design, though not one I am familiar with.

When the principal entered the room to check in on us, though her demeanour was quite friendly, the students quickly jumped to attention beside their desks. I noted
with interest that when Aikokul posed questions students would also stand up to respond. Both boys and girls contributed to the conversation. Aikokul tried her best to make notes and to occasionally summarize for me and Vasily what the students were saying in response to our questions. Aikokul was a masterful facilitator and was able to build very good rapport with the class, perhaps a reflection of her sincere interest in the students. The following are observations derived from interview transcripts, Aikokul’s notes, and conversations we carried on as a research team.

Figure 5.13. Photos of the highschool

Overall the students seemed well-informed about the prospects and limitations their village faced in providing them with viable opportunities. Contrary to the impression we got from our host that youth wanted to leave the village these days, it seemed that many would in fact prefer to remain in the village if only they could find paid work. The students told us that primary sources of employment in the village are limited both in opportunity and in pay. Teachers and doctors are low paid, and the teachers currently working will work until they retire; village administration offers limited opportunities, especially where youth are concerned; and the post office employs only a handful of people (we did not see this place so I am not sure how many people it actually employs). Students were well informed about the way funding imposes limitations on improving the condition of village life:

Our third visit came about as a result of a project organized independently by Aikokul to bring the students information about various universities in Bishkek.
Res (b): Our village is small and I also realize that small factories that could provide people with job opportunity would help a lot, but I don’t believe that it is possible. It will require a lot of funding.

Students were also aware, in various ways, of the value and limitations of a good education. Since opportunities for training and education are limited locally, many youth go to Bishkek to receive it. There seemed to be a great deal of regret that youth were forced to leave the village these days to get an education. Education seemed highly valued but what was available in the village was not adequate78. While some saw the establishment of sewing manufacturers and the rebuilding of abandoned factories as possible opportunities for employment, one student nonetheless declared:

Res (b): Well, you girls, boys are saying that if we had sewing manufacture or factories that could provide us with job, we would stay here. But what about education, we didn’t have good education in the village. Why we want to go to the city? ...to get an education, to learn languages and computer skills. Without good education youth won’t stay here, I believe... Will you stay?

It is unclear to what extent attitudes towards postsecondary education in the village are linked to Soviet times, when it appears to have been widely available locally. In Soviet times economists and lawyers were employable locally, albeit as lower paid women’s work. The kinds of skills that are necessary for young people to succeed in their emerging modern world are much different now. Youth are aware that they need credentials to get a job and that professional colleges are certificate-granting institutions:

Res (g): Aikokul eje listen to me, ...one needs qualification to get a job, right? To apply for job one goes with diploma.

78 The village administrator we interviewed mentioned there was a local college (considered to be professional) that provides training programs in agriculture and milk processing for youth, men and women. Unfortunately we did not have an opportunity to pursue further details about the college.
In any case having education programs that are adapted to village life seemed, to those who preferred to remain in the village, the most promising prospect for them to be able to stay. And there were good reasons for them to want to stay, as we found during our third trip to the village.

The third trip to Jerge-Tal was not organized for the purposes of fieldwork, though we did manage to work in a couple of interviews on the last day. This trip was organized by Aikokul and four of her friends to bring information about various universities to the graduating class. Aikokul had identified a need for this when we had visited the class in January. The day-long workshop included a session on how students perceived village life compared to life in Bishkek. I do not have transcripts from the presentations and since the exercises were conducted in Kyrgyz, my overall understanding was somewhat limited. However, one of the exercises involved making collages, and from what I could see and what was explained to me about them, students valued their clean air, the beauty of their mountainous terrain, locally grown food, and the close-knit community support (which they would miss in Bishkek). They were aware that as people from the village they would be perceived as backward in Bishkek. This was consistent with what an Osh respondent (SD) told us. He explained that in Soviet times urban and rural dwellers

Although locally grown food is valued over Chinese imports there is a sense that it is dirty because it had been handled by ‘village people’ - I was told such food needed to be carefully washed, and I sensed a certain degree of disgust in the tone and facial expressions of people who would tell me this. In contrast to the washing we do in Canada to get rid of pesticide residue this seemed absurd to me. During one of my tours a young man accompanying me as guide and interpreter brought his own soap and towel and seemed appalled that I was willing to use the soap and clean towel that had been put out for us beside the washbasin at our site. While teaching I also noted a sort of snickering that would go on about the way people from certain regions or villages would behave when they came to Bishkek. This too seemed odd to me given that most people in Bishkek were ‘from the village’ at one time or another.

My son Sam had just arrived for a month's visit and I asked Aikokul if we could accompany her team so Sam could experience village life in Kyrgyzstan. While wandering around the village we encountered HM1 who invited Sam and I for tea (over tea we managed some conversation in mutually broken Russian). The next day Aikokul came over for a brief interview with our female host (the host family Sam and I stayed with lived across the street from the school) and also with HM1 and his wife who insisted we come for lunch to try some roast camel before we headed home.
were equally valued and had many of the same services and opportunities available to them. The past 20 years have seen the devaluing of people ‘from the village’ alongside a massive reduction of services and opportunities in both rural and urban locales. Lack of opportunity in rural areas has forced migration to urban centres where opportunities are limited. Competition for scarce wage employment has thus developed between people from rural and urban regions. The following comment from one of the young men points to how a need to be competitive has begun to organize life choices for youth:

Res (b): We need sport place with training equipment, factories, computer courses, different condition for better and interesting life needs to be created. Also create places which prepare youth, in terms of capacity to the life in Bishkek, so that we will be more or less competitive.

What he is explaining here is how neither village life nor the education they receive prepares youth to compete for jobs in the city. At the same time, there is little incentive to stay. The kinds of incentives youth are looking for are not only economic. Recreation is also considered an important village need. Youth are not only leaving the village because of lack of work, but because conditions of life and work are hard. They believe the same conditions of work should be available in their village as in the city, as another student elaborates:

Res (b): Many youth want to go to the city because life and work in the village is difficult. Here many people are busy working on the field or looking after livestock. Many believe that in the city they will be sitting in the office. Such office jobs could be created here as well.

Not all youth aspire to work in offices, however, and they seem to have a keen sense of employment opportunities that would contribute to improving the overall condition of village life:

Res (b): Also now it is a time of construction. We could have brick factory here.

Res (b): I would buy necessary equipments to make agricultural work easier, I would buy combine that would be available for villagers in everyday life.

Res (b): I agree that there are so many economists and lawyers today. Too many chose these two professions to be able to sit in office. In my case I would like to study something
related to road construction. I think it is important and
needed profession now.

Res (b): I would start from cleaning up the village. Then I would
build better roads and regular bus from village to different
destinations.

Res (g): Yes, solving the issue of road is important.

Awareness of the importance of roads and transportation points to a growing
awareness that village life is no longer contained within its borders. Developing a
market economy requires effective means and modes of transportation to move goods
great distances from where they are produced. It may have been profitable to transport
a few sacks of potatoes by horseback or car to trade in the next village, but it is quite
another thing to reach markets in Bishkek and beyond. I will return to this in more detail
later on. What is important to note here is that the youth are frustrated by compounded
obstacles that work to their disadvantage, whether they leave the village or choose to
stay. They are also frustrated by unmet needs that would improve the village condition.
In addition to road and factory construction, youth have good knowledge about local
resources and how these could be utilized to provide employment for the village. They
are keenly aware of the availability of local resources, and:

1. Missed opportunities for value-added production:

Res (g): Yes, we have everything. But we wish we had a special place
where people could work together, process wool and leather, dow it. Girls could work there.

Res (b): One needs to look after livestock to have good wool, it isn’t
easy job.

Res (g): Here almost every family has livestock, it means they have
wool and leather.

Res (g): I would start with something taking into consideration what
resources available in the village: milk processing, meat, wool, leather, I would open professional colleges.

Res (b): In fact it is possible to find other job opportunities. I
support his opinion on renovating buildings that were left not
used after the Soviet collapse. They are not used at all now. We could do work on milk processing, meat processing
instead of just selling our sheep...

Res (b): Creating such working places from old buildings (repair) left
from Soviet time is good I think. We boys could produce saddles, souvenirs and other things from available resources
in the village.
2. Innovative ways they could use their resources:

Res (g): I wish we could develop tourism here, attract tourists from different parts of the world to our village. We have many beautiful places that can be visited.

3. The kinds of skills that are becoming essential in their changing world:

Res (g): We also need to have courses that teach foreign languages and computer programs.

They understand that leaving the village can also be an opportunity to bring back new ideas:

Res (b): Well, while studying you might think of what job places can be created, or hear about development projects that can be implemented in our village and bring them here.

The comment about developing tourism in the village may be one example of this. Community Based Tourism is a growing industry in the country and youth seemed to be aware of it\(^{80}\). In any case, it is evident that youth see the value of networking as a possible avenue towards changing their village condition.

While economic relations in the village and beyond play a role in determining choices available to youth, cultural expectations also play a role. For one, it is taken for granted that the youngest son will look after his parents so he is more likely to be offered opportunities to help him remain in the village (i.e., land and livestock). For girls, the prospect of marriage puts limitations on what they can aspire to do, especially if they are kidnapped (and many in this region are from what Russ Kleinbach told me).

Res (g): We are girls, we don’t know where our future will lead us. We can study economics but what if we get married and come to live in the village?

Res (b): Anyway when girls finish school they will be kidnapped.

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\(^{80}\) Aikokul in her capacity as an interpreter guide had worked for Community Based Tourism (CBT). We preferred to stay at CBT places whenever we travelled.
Nonetheless, it would be interesting to follow up on how things turn out for the girl in the excerpt below, given what appears to be gendered expectations about what kinds of work and life choices are suitable for men and women in the village:

Res (g): ... I believe every person should choose future profession taking into consideration his or her interests and skills. I would like to become an interpreter, it is my dream from childhood, and it is something I am interested in.

I am not sure if the above comment reflects changing attitudes or a family with less traditional views on the role of women in the family, or perhaps both. The girl quoted below may have a more realistic outlook, given the realities of village life:

Res (g): I don’t know what is suitable for boys, but for girls I wish there were sewing manufactures where we could produce traditional handicraft. I think it is just the right thing for girls in the village. I don’t think it is important to study four or five years at Higher Institution; if one wants to do something like this in the village, short training courses will do I think.

In any event, the discrepancies between these reflections indicate that there are a variety of choices available in the psyches of youth. It is unclear whether they have been instilled by parents who grew up during a time when there was a broader range of opportunities available locally, or if they are the result of youth who leave the village and return with ideas and observations about what they learned while away. Higher education remains highly valued among village youth, but this may be changing as youth become more and more oriented towards wage labour:

Res (g): I think opening sewing manufactures for girls would help a lot to the villagers. If they were taught good design of clothes that are tradable it would work well. Girls even could work in shifts. If I had job available like that with good salary, I would not leave my village.

Res (g): Yes, it is possible that we might stay here, without getting any higher education.

At the same time, youth seem well-informed about the limitations of wage labour in a market economy. One of the girls remarked that:
Res (g): If all ladies will be sitting home and doing handicraft who will be buying it? Will it be marketable at all?"

They are also aware of the way money changes things. I was surprised to hear one girl remark that:

Res (g): …not village municipality nor elders court can solve our issues, now money decides everything.

Religious belief also factors into people’s interpretations of why things turn out the way they do. One student exclaimed in a way similar to the adults we interviewed:

Res (g): We believe God will guide us. We can’t say…we will do this and that; we can say we will see.

 Nonetheless, religious beliefs offer only a partial explanation. People are also held to account for the outcomes of choices they make:

Res (b): Choose good profession that will help you to get a job, so you won’t stay home with diploma as many other people do.

Res (b): I agree with ______. There are many people who studied in Higher Education Institutions but don’t work and their diplomas are covered with dust. My parents say not to choose something that sounds cool, but something that can give me job upon graduation.

My final observation concerns the cynicism of youth who appear to be keenly aware of disjunctures between the written word and reality, and also the role of power relations in the way things turn out:

Res (b): We can say but solutions will be on papers rather than on reality.

Res (b): Even within projects implemented in the village there is corruption going on, it will always exist.

It would have been interesting to follow up on these comments but I only became aware of them when I read the transcripts. It would have been impossibly disruptive to have Aikokul translate every time someone spoke, especially since several students often spoke at once. The transcriber tried her best to capture what was said, but even so I am sure there was much that was missed.
Regardless, we were able to gain at least some understanding about the relations that organize the future aspirations and trajectories of village youth. Village life has shifted from being more or less self-contained, with choices determined and limited by local relations, to a kind of life that is increasingly ordered and limited by relations imposed from outside. Of course the Soviet state had also ordered and placed limitations on village life, but its pervasiveness had been of a different kind. The ordering practices came down from the state and the state could be held accountable for them, as indeed it was when the Soviet Union collapsed. In the next few chapters I show how the relations that impose themselves on the village today come from an unidentified 'somewhere' in the form of grant applications, 'democratic processes', documentary credentials, a need to be competitive, etc. This set of relations cannot be held accountable at the local level, yet increasingly organizes work processes at the local level. Village people at various levels find themselves accountable to processes that reach in from outside to organize their work practices so that people's experiences can be reported as poverty, poverty reduction, gender equality, sustainable development, and the like. I have described how some of these relations intervene at the level of kindergarten work and in the future aspirations and life trajectories of village youth. In the next chapter I show how the work of women entrepreneurs is drawn into and organized by relations that do not account for the actualities of their day-to-day life. The end result is disjunctures between the promise of opportunity and the realization of that promise.
6. Interviews with Women Entrepreneurs in Naryn Region

In the ethnographies that follow I investigate the processes by which WESA training programs are brought to and taken up by a variety of actors, especially women entrepreneurs in a rural region of Kyrgyzstan. I found people in the villages and local NGOs know how to talk the language of ‘development’. They can readily refer to the scripts used by international development organizations and they know how to write grants to get funding for piecemeal projects that are essential to the maintenance of at least a minimal level of village economy. In the next few chapters I will show that despite this knowledge, development processes do not operate coherently in this region, and that the organization of day-to-day life in the village does not line up neatly with processes of implementation and monitoring that have been developed and are legitimized elsewhere.

6.1. Interview with a WESA expert

To understand some of the context in which training programs are brought to women entrepreneurs we interviewed Erke, a WESA expert who has been providing training programs in milk and vegetable processing for WESA since 2003. I first met Erke at the business seminar WESA gave during my initial visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2008. We met again during the trip I made to observe WESA training courses in Jerge-Tal village. Erke was teaching courses in vegetable and milk processing in a village nearby so we did not get to observe her work (though we did get to see the products of her work at an exhibition WESA held at the conclusion of its set of courses). Our subsequent interview with Erke and a group of women she has worked with for a number of years took place in Kara Balta somewhat later. Although the interview did not take place in Jerge-Tal village, Erke is very knowledgeable about issues in the Naryn region relative to other parts of Kyrgyzstan. Erke received university training in agriculture during the Soviet era and was able to provide insights into what rural women’s employment was
like then, and also describe the shift from collective to individual farming. In Soviet times most women worked in the agricultural sphere growing sugar-beets and vegetables, or in animal husbandry. Agricultural production was divided between either sovkhozi, industrialized state farms under direct state control, or kolkhozi, collective farms typically divided along tribal lines and more locally controlled\textsuperscript{81}. The region where Jerge-Tal village is located was a kolkhozi region. Kolkhozi employed veterinarians, breeding experts and accountants so there was no need for labourers to have this kind of knowledge. Chemical and seed inputs were also centrally arranged and provided. This resulted in major knowledge gaps when agricultural production shifted from the brigade/collective system to individual ownership.

Agricultural production is a highly time-sensitive activity. Not only does it require a great deal of specialized skill, but it is also subject to environmental factors such as drought, hail and pest infestations, not to mention local and global price fluctuations. To succeed in agricultural production farmers need specialized practical knowledge and access to a great deal of information. The dissolution of kolkhozi involved the redistribution of land from collective ownership to individual farming families. This meant that farmers accustomed to having the expertise and inputs they needed readily available to them were now required to access these on their own. The types of seeds and chemicals available to farmers also changed so that any prior knowledge farmers had was no longer relevant. At the same time, the new system drew farmers into emerging institutional processes that they knew very little about, and for which information about such processes as property registration, markets, inheritance laws, land taxes, and so forth was not readily available.

\textsuperscript{81} Steimann (2011) explains that kolkhoz members were paid a share of the farm's product and profit and were entitled to small plots of land for home gardens and a limited number of animals, whereas sovkhoz workers were salaried employees. Kolkhozi were divided into production units called brigades, which were further subdivided into specialized farms with their own farm leaders and technical experts. Although it was men who usually held the positions of leaders or experts, women also served in these roles (Erke would have been one of them). Most women worked as farm labourers. Kolkhozi were intended to replace kinship groups and existing village structures as the primary form of social organization. However, since they were often established along already existing social networks (tribal units), they served more so to reinforce than replace them, at best superficially reshaping administration along Soviet lines.
Erke explained that sound agricultural technique involves understanding the whole cycle -- that the technology of cultivation includes: what, when and how to plant; when and how to water, fertilize, and apply pesticides; and when and how to harvest. To emphasize the urgency of timing, she cited the Kyrgyz proverb, *jazdin bir kyny - bir jilga da*, which translates to 'one day in spring is equal to a whole year'. Erke has a wealth of specialized knowledge not only about agricultural production techniques and institutional processes, but regional variations related to these. She shared some of her observations about the practical difficulties women confronted in the shift from collective to individual farming. First of all, there were gaps in practical knowledge about, for example, how to plant, apply fertilizer and pesticides, or the timing and duration of watering. Farmers are not able to plant just any seeds and expect them to grow, especially in mountainous regions like Naryn. A major problem for farmers was access to information about what varieties of seeds to grow in Naryn and how to obtain them. Even where home gardens were concerned, people previously had access to seeds grown on the collective farms. When the seeds they had left expired, they did not know where or how to get new ones. Farmers were also unfamiliar with how to calculate how many hectares of any given crop they would need to plant to cover expenses and make a profit, or where to sell their harvest, or how to negotiate for better prices. Even had all this information been available, there may not have been enough money in the village to buy seeds. Micro-credits were available, but women needed to organize into groups to take advantage of them, but were unfamiliar with the procedures required to do so. In order to unite into groups they needed to have a market -- and this required access to information and business relationships they did not have. Obtaining credit could thus also require having access to funds to pay bribes. Even when groups did form and become profitable, issues of trust led to problems with dividing the profits. Finally, there was the issue of learning how to save funds for the future so there would be money to buy seeds in the spring. These are some of the practical problems Erke and others at WESA have identified in consultation with local village people over a number of years.

There were also important knowledge gaps about the kinds of documentation the new agricultural system called for, especially with reference to land redistribution and taxation. Families were given land rights but were required to register their property with local authorities. Although both women and men were given access to land, when
women left their families to marry they not only surrendered their land, but also were not entitled to their own parcel of land in the new family. This became especially problematic when women divorced. Even though they were entitled by law to some part of their husband's property (especially if there were children involved), when women went to court the result often came down to who could pay more, "those who give more money win" [Erka, KB2 Interview]. There were also issues of inheritance. Many people never bothered to register their property so problems arose with transferring parental property to children (Erke admitted that even she did not register her land for almost a decade). Consider also the case of widows not knowing how to register a husband's property in their own name upon the husband's death.

In addition to establishing property rights, registration of property allows the municipality to collect land taxes. Farmers are entitled to release from land taxes in the event of significant crop loss due to weather conditions. In order to obtain a release, they need to initiate a claim. Many farmers either do not know that they are entitled to a release, or do not understand the documentary processes involved, or the math skills required to make calculations on the forms. Erke described her frustrations with teaching people simple math skills:

Erke: We teach them in class, they sit and listen, but when they come home they forget everything. They even do not know how to count. For example, wheat costs 3 soms, from one hectare will be 3 tons, thus 9000 soms. But Kyrgyz people cannot count -- no matter what you teach them they themselves do not count, thus bankruptcy again and again.

Documentary processes also require payment and people do not have accurate information about how much it will cost or where to go to put various documentary processes into action. When they attempt to do so they may be sent to several different
bureaucracies, each one involving a small fee, before they can accomplish what they set out to have done\textsuperscript{82}.

One final documentary process that organizes the work that farmers do is that of production standards. When products do not meet standards they are less profitable. What happens is that substandard products are sold at low prices at the bazaar or by street vendors, while higher quality products can be sold to export markets. To produce high quality products people need access to information, skills, resources and funding. Since these are seldom adequately available as a package, much of what is produced ends up being sub-standard. As a result people become disillusioned with market economy processes and end up producing for themselves or destroying raw materials. A legal expert Erke works with found that people were pouring excess milk into the river and burning high quality wool on their land. NA remarked that:

NA: We have many raw materials, we could live rich, but we don’t have the opportunity to process it all.... So, we sell our leather to China and then when the product is ready they sell us the leather for 20 or 30 times what we got for the raw material. We are exporters of raw material, that is why we live very poor.

Erke has spent almost two decades working with WESA and others to design and deliver the kinds of training people need to address these kinds of issues and gaps. She is knowledgeable about regional variations, and about important differences between remote rural regions and those closer to larger urban centres. For instance, she knows that the varieties of tomato that grow successfully in Issyk-Kul or Chui region where she lives will not grow in Naryn region. But she also knows how to find a variety that will produce in Naryn. She is able to do so because she knows about soil quality and hydration, and about how to properly fertilize and apply pesticides. She is also knowledgeable about markets. She knows that export production works well in Issyk-Kul, and where farmers can get the best price for their tomatoes in Chui region. Where

\textsuperscript{82} I experienced this myself on a number of occasions, most notably when I set out, thankfully with the help of the Sociology Department secretary, to have my visa extended. What I thought we could accomplish in an hour took at least three days, during which time we visited several different offices (in the meantime I had to pay a fine because my existing visa had expired). I can imagine how troublesome this would be for someone who has to travel great distances to file a claim.
milk production is concerned, Erke knows that cows in Chui region produce five litres of milk, whereas in Naryn they produce only three litres. This knowledge is important because her work with WESA involves working with resources that are already available in the village. In Chui region, factory production would make sense given good yields and proximity to Bishek, whereas there would be little sense in establishing a milk producing factory in Naryn where cows produce less, transportation costs are prohibitive, and climatic conditions would force operations to close for most of the winter. On the other hand, because cows eat mountain grasses, the quality of milk in Naryn is more conducive to cheese-making than that in Chui region. Here again, Erke knows that small-scale production and shorter preparation times are most appropriate because people do not have storehouses where they can keep cheese. This means producers have to seek out local markets or need training on how to prepare products for their own use so they will not have to buy them at the bazaar.

As a farmer herself, Erke also has firsthand knowledge about the realities of agricultural production and how they bear on women's lives. She understands that time, scheduling and transportation can be impediments to women's participation in training courses. Where agriculture is concerned she thinks it would make better sense to train families rather than groups of women. Agriculture training programs teach women how to plant but they still need men to plough. Disjointed training programs cannot account for the comprehensive set of skills and knowledge required for successful agricultural production. Erke is also aware that daily realities are such that women are not able to come to work if their families need them at home (for example, to care for the sick or prepare funeral feasts) Families work cooperatively in agricultural production and there is always someone in charge who will delegate tasks and get the work done. Moreover, there are fewer problems when it comes to dividing profits. Erke's sense is that the potential benefits one family can receive from training could far outweigh benefits that get divided among ten different households. She has discussed this with Gulnara Baimambetova at WESA, suggesting that one family could be trained one year and

83 One of the local markets identified in Jerge-Tal region was the kindergarten and school - both have a need for sour cream. I wonder, however, given that funding barely covers the salaries of teachers, where the money to pay for it would come from. Perhaps there is more to local interpretations of 'market' than the kind of profit typically anticipated as the end product of capitalist production.
another the next, and that eventually entire families would be raised out of poverty. These are examples of the important insights that Erke and the staff at WESA gain from observing what goes on in the field and then consulting with farmers and each other about their observations. The problem is that while local NGOs may have theories, ideas and expertise about what needs to be done in the field, their work processes are ultimately organized by and accountable to outside interests that fund their work. This often results in disjunctures between their understanding of what needs to be done, how ideally they would like to go about getting things done, and what in the end actually gets done.

6.2. Interviews with women entrepreneurs in Jerge-Tal village

After observing the training classes at the community centre we negotiated with our WESA contact, who in turn negotiated with Jyrgalbek (the local United Nations Development Program rep) and one of the trainers to set up interviews with some of the women taking the courses. It was decided that one woman from each course would be chosen to speak with us. Our first participant was from Jerge-Tal and she was taking the sewing course; the second participant was from a neighbouring village, one of two women learning leatherworking with the men. It was a warm sunny day so we decided we would do the interviews on the patio in front of the community centre. While we were organizing chairs, Aikokul noticed our interview participant consulting with Jyrgalbek about "whether she should tell about difficulty of her life." Jyrgalbek baike told her "at least today maybe you will talk about some positive sides of the life, whose life is easy nowadays." She said "maktap salaying by anda", which means shall I talk only positive sides of the projects then?" (Aikokul's research notes). Jyrgalbek sat in on the first interview and intervened frequently with his view on things. We weren't sure if he was there out of interest, or to make sure our respondent said the right things, or to make sure we were asking appropriate questions (perhaps all three). He did not join us for the second interview - and perhaps he was satisfied with how things were going, or maybe since this woman was not from his village there was less at stake for him.
R1 eje's motivations for taking the course are more complex than merely economic. While her husband was alive he supported her interests in learning new skills and was actively involved in the construction of the new community centre. Her motivation was thus, as she said, in part to carry on the work her husband started. Her family's involvement in the initial project is likely one of the reasons she was chosen to attend this training course. R1 eje told us she has participated in previous WESA sewing courses where she learned about curtain design. However, she added:

R1: Here I did not sew curtains for others to make money. I rather taught many ladies what I learned myself so they themselves can sew it (We know each other here).
Her motivation for taking the previous courses seems less about learning how to make curtains to sell in the market (though this may have been the purpose of the training program itself), than acquiring skills that women could use to make curtains for their own homes and families. As noted earlier, draperies seem to be an important part of home décor in Kyrgyzstan. All the homes we visited, whether in Bishkek or the village, were decorated with elaborate draperies. Thus R1 eje may have been selected to take the course because she was known to be a good instructor. In any case, she now works in the small 'sewing manufacture place' where she sometimes finds it difficult to balance her work and family duties:

R1: My family is more important for me than my work. I put first my family, then my work. When I work here, I constantly go home and come again. If somebody needs my services they can call me and I will go to work.

It seems to be acceptable (if not expected) that she would place her family's needs first. However, we encountered an interesting twist to R1 eje's beliefs. One of her reasons for wanting to make a better living was that:

R1: I want them [her children] to be proud with me. I do not want them to be ashamed of me that I only look after sheep.

It seems there is a hierarchy in what is considered to be respectable work in the village, though what such attitudes are rooted in is unclear. Aikokul seemed puzzled as to why the woman would feel this way (see textbox). One might be tempted to conclude that the woman's attitude is rooted in capitalist influences. However, I recall as a child that the sheep farmer in the farming community where I grew up seemed to be less
esteemed than grain producers or beef ranchers. My father kept a few sheep and the sheep farmer came to assist him with shearing every spring. How people judged him did not seem related to the man's work ethic. Perhaps there is an inherent stigma attached to looking after sheep, even in Kyrgyzstan where mutton is a dietary staple, and wool essential to surviving the cold winters, in which case one might expect it to be an honoured activity. Or perhaps tending sheep is associated with 'old ways' and a failure to adapt to 'modern' times. In any case, this is an example of how difficult it can be to discern between old and new attitudes, much less the processes that drive them.

Where old and new is concerned, fashion sense is an important motivating factor for taking sewing courses. Fashion sense today is influenced by the increased mobility of village residents and young people's exposure to what is fashionable in Bishkek. As a consequence, the designs used for training seem in need of updating, if only to make products more appealing at the local level. According to R1 eje:

R1: We learned many nice techniques that are very important in doing qualitative sewing. But it seems that both skirt and blouse was adapted more to the village style. Today our children are going to cities more often and new designs are being introduced, thus these types of skirts and blouses are not in demand now. We would be glad to learn updated styles.

This example of learning updated techniques by using outdated patterns is something of a metaphor for the disjuncture between village needs and the capacity of training programs to adequately meet them. The women make the best of it - rather than developing market economy skills, they learn new techniques for sewing clothing for their families. R1 eje knows well that working with outdated designs is not going to be profitable in her own village, much less the larger market, so she understands the limitations [perhaps even the absurdity] of the programs being offered. For others, it seems worthwhile for some to learn new technical skills because they can be applied to meet local needs in the present, while possibly leading to something more profitable in the future.

We interviewed our second respondent later in the afternoon by which time it was quite warm on the patio, warmer out in the sun than in the rooms where courses were being held. R2 eje was from a nearby village. She had to put her 16-year old son in
charge of looking after the three grandchildren she cares for in order to be able to come to the course. Her other two sons were away at school in Bishkek.\(^84\) R2 eje's sons are supportive of her attending the course -- she told us they had called to tell her to be a good student and not let them down! Her husband is also supportive, but he was working somewhere far from the village and was unaware she was attending the course this time.\(^85\) Both R2 eje and her husband are qualified teachers. They took up craft-making about 10 years ago, likely to augment the poor salaries teachers receive, or because they were unable to get teaching positions in their village. Initially ridiculed by family and colleagues for their efforts, as their venture became profitable, people started to talk about what they were doing as respectable work.

R2 eje and her husband have been participants in UNDP projects for 10 years and appear to have developed good product and marketing skills. They sell their products (headwear and souvenirs) in Bishkek, Kazakhstan and China. R2 eje believes their success is due to their exclusive design. She is learning to work with leather in hopes of adding to their product line:

R2: We sew “ak kalpak - traditional headwear”, caps with traditional design and souvenirs from felt. I am here because we would like to combine felt with leather.

R2 eje's cooperative was invited to attend the course by her village UNDP representative who was given a list of cooperatives to invite from the UNDP office in Naryn city. There are five members in R2 eje's cooperative. R2 eje was chosen to attend because she is the head, and others believe she can properly learn the new techniques so that she can

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\(^{84}\) As explained earlier, small children are often left in the care of their grandparents when parents leave to work or study outside the village.

\(^{85}\) He is likely in Russia or Kazakhstan since they appear not to have cell phone communication with him. See Figure 6.2.
teach them when she returns. R2 eje had initially signed up for the sewing course, but too many women had shown up to take it. Thus she and another woman agreed to learn leatherworking with the men. R2 eje thinks that men are more suited to leatherwork than women, but believes learning the new skills may nonetheless be profitable in the future.

Figure 6.2. Cell phone floor at Tzum Market

Cell phone technology operates on the basis of SIM cards that you are able to load up at bill-paying machines found almost everywhere in Bishkek (though access numbers [the first 3 digits] are not available at all machines so you may have to hunt for one that will accept your payment). In smaller villages payment can be made at the post office or local store. Service is relatively inexpensive -- 100 soms (~$2.20) for 100 text messages, all in-coming calls free, and calls made anywhere in Kyrgyzstan are local. The cell phone industry is huge -- one whole floor of the Tzum Market (Bishkek’s largest department store) is comprised of cell phone stalls where you can find any brand you are looking for (mostly refurbished models). Beeline and Megacom are the two main service providers. My cell phone costs amounted to about 200 soms/month (less than $5).

It seems the switch in courses was made upon arrival, rather than beforehand. Paperwork was required to register for the course. When asked what she would like to learn, R2 eje had written "how to carve leather." I do not know at what point the men were asked what they would like to learn, or if the questionnaire was open-ended, or whether they were asked to choose from a list of possibilities featured in the WESA brochure. What I do know is that learning how to process leather would have been considered a valuable skill given the abundance of hides in the region (cattle-breeding is a primary agricultural activity). Hands-on training was not, however, provided for that option, though handouts were distributed after a demonstration of the process:
Although we did not learn processing leather visually we received handouts prepared by WESA for us to refresh our knowledge if we forget it. We learned beautiful designs. I hope after the training we will put our own imaginations to work and start to produce products made by combining felt with leather. They showed us a way now we should continue this track. We are very grateful to project.

**Figure 6.3. Samples from leather-making course**

R2 eje is an entrepreneur. She believes her newly acquired skills can be applied to design products that combine felt with leather. She knows there is a demand for traditional designs and her cooperative is making products that respond to that demand. She also told us that clothing with traditional designs and patterns was becoming fashionable. She appreciates the WESA courses because they are able to teach participants how to do good quality work in just a few days. At the same time, R2 eje notes important limitations to what can actually be achieved in just a few days. Speaking with the experience of one who has ten years in skills development training, R2 eje explains:

We learned new skills, but 3 days is not enough to learn something new and start to practice. I mean it is difficult to master it. It is good we learned this, we are grateful. But when it comes to practice I feel like we will be coming across many difficulties. If we forget, it is possible upon request to repeat it and add some newer and more fashionable designs. Now when we are together with the group and trainer, we are asking from each other and seems like everybody is doing well, but when you are alone and you have nobody to ask, it will be difficult. Also we wish to have a separate training on designs; we are failing to catch up with modern/updated designs. It would be good if WESA would take this into consideration in their future projects. We are grateful to them.
It is clear that in a region of few opportunities, participants are grateful for any new skills they can learn, even when inadequately or incompletely provided. This is not, however, an indictment of WESA's efforts. These descriptions simply highlight some of the disjunctures that WESA and the women entrepreneurs they train encounter in working together. In Chapter Eight, I explain how the work they do is organized by an extra-local set of relations to which their work is accountable. In any case, there are many reasons why women learning new skills are unable to apply them in ways that substantially relieve family or village poverty. A number of factors can intervene to impede prospects for viable market economy production, including poor infrastructure. Villages in remote mountainous areas do not have reliable sources of power and are thus subject to frequent brownouts. Weather is another factor. We were told during our third visit that the community centre does not have a heating system, and is thus closed during the cold winter months when temperatures drop to the minus 30s. It is not only training and resources that impede the capacity of women to develop large-scale market production in their village. The cost, inefficiency and unreliability of electricity, combined with closure of the community centre during the cold winter months, make production untenable, and externally imposed deadlines difficult to meet. In any case, it is certainly not due to a lack of effort by entrepreneurs like R1 eje and R2 eje that outcomes are not more favourably guaranteed in the end.

6.3. Interview with a woman entrepreneur in Naryn city

After the interviews with the two women we returned to our host's house (HM1) and packed for the journey to Naryn city. Participants from courses taking place in the region were going to meet in Naryn the next day to showcase their newly acquired skills and products, and we were invited to attend. HM1 offered to drive us in his new car (for 500 soms to cover gas). Another man from the village joined us for the trip. HM1

86 Blackout is normally the term used to refer to a failure of the electrical system to deliver any power. Brownout seems to be the term more commonly used locally. Brownout is when demand surpasses supply to the point where the amount of voltage available is not enough to power TVs or lights properly. Although it is actually periodic blackouts that are imposed I believe brownout is used because it is not so much a failure of the electrical system as the shortage of power that is being compensated for.
insisted that we meet his daughter and her family, who lived above the restaurant they operated in Naryn. We were served dinner in his daughter’s kitchen upon our arrival in Naryn. After dinner Aikokul was able to find us accommodations through her Community Based Tourism contacts. She found us a relatively deluxe bed and breakfast suite for 1100 soms (~$24). The suite had three separate bedrooms, a living room, small kitchen, flush toilets and a shower. Breakfast the next morning was served on fine china, and we were treated to blintzi (Russian crepes) served with cheese. Our village hosts had been most hospitable with what they had to offer, but the city accommodations were a stark contrast to what was available in the village just a half hour away.

Figure 6.4. Accommodations in Naryn city
In the morning Aikokul contacted the local WESA representative to arrange an interview with a former WESA student in Naryn. We agreed to meet downtown to discuss logistics. It had been fully dark by the time we arrived the night before, so I was quite taken with the spectacular mountain vistas as we made our way by taxi to downtown Naryn. The city, with a population of approximately 35,000, is nestled in the Tian Shan Mountains, on one of the main roads linking Kyrgyzstan with China. Naryn city is the major administrative centre for Naryn oblast. It also hosts one of three sites of the University of Central Asia, an Aga Khan Foundation initiative undertaken to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia’s mountain societies.

Figure 6.5.  Mountains surrounding Naryn city

Our local WESA contact arranged for a meeting with our third respondent, a woman (HD) who had previously been involved in WESA’s hairdressing course and who operated her own shop in Naryn city. The shop was located on one of the main thoroughfares running through the city. One of HD’s employees welcomed us into the shop where we waited about half an hour for HD to show up. The shop had three stations for haircutting and stylist work (a mirror, a well-worn office chair and a ledge for

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87 The Great Silk Road at one time passed through Naryn.
88 The other two campuses are located in Khorog, Tajikistan and Tekeli, Kazakhstan.
the hairdresser’s equipment), a bathroom sink for washing hair, and a station in the front window where manicures were offered. It was very cold in the room. A woman was having her hair done while we waited for HD to arrive. When she did arrive, HD turned on an electric heater that helped take some of the chill out of the air. HD, I would say, was in her late 20s. She was married with three children, one in school, one in kindergarten and one almost a year old. HD’s husband is the youngest son so, as is customary, they are living with his father; his mother is deceased. HD began salon work at home after she had her first baby, offering manicures, nail and eye lash extensions, haircuts, and other beauty services requested by her clients. She was very skilled at her work, so much in demand that she soon outgrew her capacity to work from home:

HD: There were more and more clients, even late at night I had clients. My father-in-law started to say that I will turn home into salon and later decided to open this place.

According to HD, there is a shortage of good hairdressers in Naryn because many have left to work in Kazakhstan or Russia. HD herself was married in Kazakhstan and gave birth to her children there so her family could register to receive Kazakh government support. Neither she nor her husband believes there is much of a future for Kyrgyzstan. Although they have a house and job available to them in Kazakhstan they cannot leave until the father-in-law gives his permission. She hopes this will happen once the children are a little bit older.

HD’s husband and father-in-law have been very supportive of her business. The shop was initially in very poor condition -- the floors practically worn through -- and lacked running water. Her husband did all the repair work and her father-in-law bought the mirrors and chairs to help her get started. Her mother also helped by contributing some equipment to the cause. In addition to her salon work, HD sews and rents wedding gowns out of a room in back of her shop. She invited us to see a few she had brought back from washing (see Figure 6.7). She charges $1,500 soms (~$33) for the rental and a hairdo. People in Naryn cannot afford to pay much, she said, so she keeps her prices reasonable. Before we headed back into the salon she stopped to light a smudge and waved it around to drive out bad spirits from the shop (see Figure 6.8). I observed this practice on several occasions during my travels in Kyrgyzstan.
HD is a truly remarkable entrepreneur; she told us she not only manages the hair salon and bridal shop, but runs a small hotel where

HD: If there are people staying I have to make breakfast for them, clean and iron their linen.
In addition to all her businesses she is responsible for the care of her three small children:

**HD:** It is difficult to combine this work with family duties. At home I have to get up early, clean the house, make porridge for my children and when I go home from work I cook dinner, do washing and look after my children. But when I can combine and be good both at work and home it gives a feeling of pleasure, because when you come home tired seeing how your children are playing happily takes away my tiredness. Usually I give breakfast early morning. I hired nanny for my kids, she looks after them while I am here and cooks something for lunch (fries eggs or macaroni).

HD is fortunate to be able to hire another woman to look after her children. Childcare is considered the responsibility of women in the family, and it is usually other family members who would see to it that children are looked after when women have to go to work. HD appears to have no extended family nearby, and since the men in her family could hardly be expected to take on this role, they support her venture by allowing her to hire childcare.

HD's shop is well known in town which, in all probability, is why she was approached by WESA to use her shop for a training program:

**HD:** I have the biggest room among all hairdressing places. We put together some additional chairs and tables, brought board for writing and then we gathered ladies. There were five or six girls from here, one trainer from Bishkek and Gulnara eje. The training was supposed to last 10 days, but we finished in eight days. I have a small hotel and Gulnara eje stayed there. We used these three mirrors and did not work during training. All together with trainers there were 14 people. We learned some new techniques of cutting hair, dying it and curling.

When we asked if the course had much impact on her business HD was unsure since she already had a good reputation and many regular clients. She did however mention that after the training they started to use some of the new techniques and perhaps people noticed they were cutting and treating hair differently:

**HD:** Still it is difficult to say. Maybe as a result of training I keep my return customers (for using modern style).
More important than the training itself may be the certificates given to participants at the end of the training:

HD: Another thing is that we all got certificates at the end of training and usually clients pay attention to it. In addition I got a certificate from our city mayor, 8th of March (Women’s day) this year. I was the best woman hairdresser. I do not know how I was chosen, because we did not have any competition. Probably they heard nice words from people. Such certificates are given every year to the best teachers, doctors, etc. of the year and I got the nomination of the best hairdresser.

HD’s shop does not do any advertising so word of mouth is important, and it appears credentials enhance her clients' perceptions about their visit to her shop. Many of her clients come saying "the place was recommended." Moreover, HD enjoyed an additional benefit as a result of her credential from the WESA course. In March she was offered an invitation by WESA to enhance her qualifications by attending a 10-day training program in the United States. The program required documentation to support the level of skill and training of applicants, and the WESA certificate qualified HD as a participant from the Naryn region. Her husband would have allowed her to go

HD: But I could not go, because I had 4 months child.... I highly appreciate that I was chosen out of so many people to go for training in USA.

Figure 6.9. Certificates of course completion
HD keeps her reputation in good standing by maintaining high service standards. There are only the two of them working in her shop right now because she will not hire girls who do not have good skills. Many of the girls she trains quit because they get married or go on to open their own shops, but those shops only cut hair, she says, whereas hers is a salon offering many services. Like R2 eje, HD seems to have a good sense of her market and how to diversify to maintain and increase demand. She has two additional rooms in the back of her shop where she hopes to offer massage and cosmetic services some day. This will require either NGO funding or additional help from her family whom she believes will be supportive.

By offering a variety of services, including the bridal shop, HD has been able to build a loyal and growing clientele. At the same time, cultural changes have also contributed to her growing business:

HD: Today many ladies are taking off their headscarves, especially if they work for government jobs and organizations they are expected to come without headscarves and with nice hairdo.

Nonetheless, there are many challenges, among them headwear during the cold winter months:

HD: When it gets cold in winter people do not come at all, because they wear warm caps. It gets very cold in Naryn in winter... there are not many clients in winter.

Just as in Jerge-Tal, cold winters force shops to close, if not because of inadequate heating systems, then because of reduced traffic. Unreliable electricity is also a major concern:

HD: Electricity and water is cut off very often.... Usually, when the electricity gets off we are informed that it is because of weather, or because electricity generator was damaged. But I do not know what the true reason is. I know that electricity in winter is off quite often.... There is no heating system here, thus we can't heat this place with electrical batteries. Therefore during wintertime I close my salon.

I could understand why, given that it was early November and already very cold in the room before she turned on an electric heater for our comfort. The cost of electricity is
high and given what people can afford to pay for services, it would not be practical to heat her shop during the winter, when temperatures fall to the minus 30s, and people are less likely to leave their homes to access beauty services. While there are many advantages to setting up a business in the city compared to the village, entrepreneurs seem to encounter many of the same challenges when it comes to the practical operation of their businesses. Even though highly skilled in a well-established business, weather and electrical costs still seriously impact HD’s capacity to work or provide services.

By the time we finished our interview with HD it was nearly time for the WESA student presentations to begin. We thanked HD for taking time to talk with us and set out to find the WESA group. The post-course exhibition was taking place at the University of Central Asia just a few blocks away. There were about 50 people gathered and milling about when we arrived -- students, instructors, WESA staff, local officials, and some family members. Tables were set up displaying the products course participants had learned to make during the week. Alongside clothing from the sewing course and leatherworks table were displayed a variety of salads and processed dairy products. A few rows of chairs had been set up for guests who came to see the presentations. The exhibition began with two of the ladies modeling outfits they had sewn that week; they skilfully modeled with style and finesse for a couple of village women! Their demonstration was accompanied by a presentation by R1 eje during which she recited in detail the process by which almost every stitch in the garments had been made. She was a walking instruction manual -- and her presentation was evidence of a culture steeped in oral tradition. I now better understood why she was chosen to take the course even though she had been taking courses for years! The other presenters followed suit, showing their array of products and explaining how they had been made.

A few invited guests spoke after the presentations. The Naryn mayor's well-intentioned remarks about the pride participants should feel about their newly acquired skills, and his encouraging statements about what they needed to do to prosper were

89 I was charged under two dollars for the manicure HD did while we conducted the interview; Aikokul had her bangs trimmed for a few soms.
scorned by the group. People had worked hard to acquire their skills and were proud of their achievements. They were disappointed by the mayor’s empty congratulations in the face of their need for help with access to start-up funds and market support for their products in Naryn city. The Ayl Bank (village bank) representative criticized micro-credits offered at 29 to 31% (though even the Ayl Bank gives loans at 16%). Either option seems enormously high in a region where people are forced to close their shops during the cold winter months. In her fieldnotes, Aikokul reflected that most people seemed to have little understanding of what

*a business plan is (if almost 20 years of their life was spent by nomadic lifestyle), commissions, credit requirements and other modern concepts. People complained that there is a problem with electricity, weather, etc. and I just wonder how they are going to start their own businesses under such conditions with such high interest rates.*

One man also raised concerns about food safety in bringing dairy products to market. Even though the women assured him they had learned proper procedures he remained unconvinced.

In the end there seemed to prevail an overall sense of futility about how people would be able to move forward with their newly acquired skills without additional supports to help them get started and build markets for their products. Nonetheless at the close of the discussion, all were encouraged to stay positive and to keep working with their skills. We were then invited to sample and/or purchase the goods on display. I was most delighted when a blushing young man offered me the cell phone holder he had made, with his signature inscribed on the inside flap. I used that cell phone holder and received many compliments during the remainder of my stay in Kyrgyzstan. By this time it was past 5:00 p.m. so Aikokul and I set out briskly on the half hour walk it would take to get to the transportation terminal to arrange our taxi back to Bishkek. I will close this chapter with an excerpt I posted on Facebook about our return trip:

### 6.3.1. The trip back from Naryn, November 11, 2010

*It is common to go to the bus station and hire a private taxi to make the 5-hour drive, 3 hours of which are seriously bumpy ill-repaired mountain driving - it would cost about $22 for a driver who could not have been more than 18 years old. Halfway through the mountainous area the taxi*
broke down [and I mean seriously - the banging happening under the floor boards did not bode well for that car ever running again]. Anyway, another taxi coming by pulled over and fortunately had room for Aikokul and I - but he told us to pay the other guy the fare because he would need it to fix his car (he too was a young guy and had pulled over because the two drivers knew each other) - he said his passenger had already paid the full fare so he was OK with having us come along at no charge. Then shortly before we got to Bishkek we had a near crash as a car we were passing started to pull over towards us. After skidding all over the road we pulled over to the side of the road - the other car pulled up behind. Our driver got out of the car and I thought they were going to duke it out - but instead when the other driver got out the two embraced - then our driver got back in the car and we proceeded with our trip. No road rage like you'd expect in Canada, rather a forgiving hug and gratitude that all had turned out OK. And that's what people are like here - such generous spirits - so concerned not to let bad feelings take control and rule the situation....humbling... [Facebook post, Nov 11, 2010].
7. Outcomes in Village Economic Development: Disjuncture in End Results

Figure 7.1. The community centre  Figure 7.2. An area in back that has not yet been restored

Baike was proudly saying it is our past, pointing to the old part of the building and our future, pointing to the new part which was funded by UNDP. [Aikokul's field notes, November, 2010]

The excerpt above is a fitting metaphor for the way development work gets done in Jerge-Tal village, on many levels. It was taken from Aikokul's field notes wherein she reflects on the way HM1 described the condition of the recently constructed community centre, one corner of which had not yet been restored due to incomplete funding. It also points to the way people in the village rely on external funding which is never quite adequate to fully realize their projects, and the way some villagers regard their past as backward and in need of repair. In international development work, project 'success' is often measured and understood in terms of balanced budgets and program delivery, rather than in terms of actually lived outcomes, in either the short or long term. This can lead to disjunctures between policy objectives and their actual outcomes at local levels.

To apply for and receive funding for development projects requires knowledge of the discourses of international aid, and the processes required to obtain it. Access to aid for village 'development' projects is coordinated through documentary processes organized by international funding institutions. Village people in their various capacities
have received training in how to translate their experiences to make them comprehensible in terms of the application and reporting requirements of international development institutions. However, they also understand their village condition from the point of view of living it. Disjunctures occur when projects brought to the village are inappropriate to the actualities of village life, or when accountability for intended improvements is irrelevant to those same actualities, or when the measurement of success has no meaningful impact in the long term.

In the excerpt below, we can see that Jyrgalbek, the local UNDP rep, knows how to operate within the discourses of international aid:

J: I think that before implementing any training, be it NGO, business people, individual donors, they have to come and study what are the needs and to what extent something they teach can be practiced within the realities of village life. Do people in the village at all have need for particular training that is going to be offered.... It is so important if they want their projects to be something improving people's lives in the village.

This does not mean, however, that he understands his village condition solely in terms given by those discourses. People in Jyrgalbek's position are very much aware: of disjunctures between documentary intent and lived reality; of the power abstract documents have to impose upon and misrepresent lived reality; and of the flimsy form reality can assume in documentary representations of it. Thus while the quotation above sounds very much like the 'development talk' of someone whose understanding of their situation has been influenced by development program discourses and strategies, the comments may well be conclusions drawn from observed disjunctures between program delivery and locally-lived impact.

There is a great deal of material in my transcripts to suggest that village people are capable of seeing and understanding their lives in terms of the discourses given by international aid organizations, but this does not mean that they have lost their capacity to see and understand their lives as distinct from them. In the previous chapter, I described some of the disjunctures that arise in the work that WESA and women entrepreneurs do. I explained how many factors intervene to impede women who learn market economy skills from applying them to substantially relieve family or village
poverty. In this chapter, I explore disjunctures between strategies to develop a market economy in Jerge-Tal, and the capacity of market economy development to actually relieve 'poverty' in the village. I explore four particular instances of disjuncture: the first is between training and education and the actual opportunity the effort makes possible; the second relates to training that leads to increased production, but with inadequate technologies to support it; the third is between gender training and the appropriateness of it in local sites; and the fourth is related to ideas of individual achievement and its appropriateness for village development. In Chapter Eight I explain how these disjunctures are related to processes of village governance, internal and external to Jerge-Tal village.

7.1. Disjunctures between policy and practice

7.1.1. Training, education and job opportunities

"The walls are there, we need to clean the place, put roof, window and doors. I had planned it before but we didn't have enough resources to realize it into practice." (Jyrgalbek, November, 2010)

The excerpt above is a metaphor explaining how good ideas get lost in the process of developing them. International aid organizations have been working in the Naryn region for over a decade, yet their progress has been minimal, especially in terms of significant or sustained impact. According to Jyrgalbek, the poverty rate (whatever actuality the statistic stands in for) has improved over the past five years, but remains in the range of 80%. One of the problems is that processes for evaluating projects can produce disjunctures between the documentary reporting requirements of international organizations and the actual impact of training programs at the local level. Especially in the long term, there can be an overall disjuncture between effort and outcome, though it may only be recognized at the local level:

J: Well we are participating in various trainings, but then can't practice it after training finishes.... One reason because we lack all necessary things to keep those skill running. If it is not practiced one forgets it quickly. Some training is implemented once and then they even don't ask whether we are doing something, they have gone and never came back.
This way we cannot work. I think there can be productive work if the same training repeats itself with some variations. Productive work can be reached when after the training, training implementers come and see what is being done and not, why and what can be done to make it work. Cooperation is needed, we can’t do things alone. At least it would be good to follow once in six months, year, three year and five year how work is going on and respond to difficulties.

The criticism below similarly points to the limitations of accountability in training programs developed elsewhere and brought to the village, particularly their failure to account for locally available resources or knowledge of how to market products after skills are learned:

J: One weak side of this training is that trainers came with ready processed leather. Thus it was like half done work. Therefore I am saying that after project finishes it would be good if project implementers come back to see what the difficulties are and what can be done. If men could learn properly with leather provided from this village how to process it, what chemical to use, it would be for our people much easier to do their work. They could do souvenirs that could be put in oblast shop in Naryn city for sale.

Another problem is that providing training programs and developing skills does not itself lead people to the doorway of opportunity in a capitalist market economy:

SW: Different NGOs hold training programs, bring medicine, food, cloth and other things, but there is no job opportunity in the village. Thus I think it would be good if training programs were followed by the creation of job places...

Nor does a university education:

Res (b): There are many people who studied in Higher Education Institutions, but don’t work and their diplomas are covered with the dust. My parents also say to choose not something that sounds cool, but something that can give me job upon graduation.

Nor does training in trades:

Res (b): I agree that there are so many economists and lawyers today. Too many chose these two professions to be able to
sit in office. In my case I would like to study something related to road construction. I think it is important and needed profession now.

The youth in the last excerpt sees a more promising potential in practical skills training for road construction compared to a university education in his village. Given the condition of roads in Naryn region and the village itself, his thinking is sound. The problem is that employment in road construction does not depend so much on local needs (and in Naryn region there is great need), as it does on funding from both government and international organizations. If the condition of roads in Naryn region is not a priority for either, it is unlikely there will be funding for road construction, even if local youth have the skills.

The relationship between any form of education or skills development and the possibility that it will lead to employment depends on a broad range of relations, most of which lie beyond direct village control. This does not mean that skills and credentials are unimportant:

Res (g): Aikokul eje listen to me, what I want to say one needs qualification to get a job, right? To apply for job one goes with diploma.

Only that that their correlation with employment opportunities depends on sets of relations that extend well beyond the local level.

Even when projects do result in employment, being employed does not guarantee a living wage:

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90 I found the overall condition of roads in Naryn, Issyk-Kul, and even Chui where Bishkek is located to be very poor, even when roads were paved. I assumed the condition of roads in Kyrgyzstan was generally poor until I visited Osh region in the south of the country in the latter months of my stay. I was surprised to find in Osh, a region I had been led to believe was backward compared to more northern locales, to find well-maintained paved highways from Osh city to the village we visited. I was told China had funded road construction in this region. I remain puzzled as to why China has apparently not been interested in road improvements in Naryn, which borders China, and on whose roadways we passed numerous trucks loaded with goods destined (we were told) for Dordoi bazaar, one of the largest wholesale and retail centres in Bishkek.
Res (g): In our village there are only limited job places available. Many people don’t leave those places until they get retired. One can work as a teacher but salary is low. We know how many doctors that are also not paid well. We wish these jobs had higher salaries.

This is because in wage labour the rate of pay is often determined elsewhere, either by government bodies in the case of teachers and doctors, or ‘the market’ in the case of agriculture and most forms of entrepreneurial activity. The ‘market’ operates as an institution which, though it has no formal structure at the village level, functions as a mechanism of social order. Its social purpose (growth) transcends individuals and intentions by mediating the rules that govern cooperative living behaviour. While labour and economic markets demand that people be educated and taught skills to serve market growth, ‘the market’ is not obliged to reciprocate by providing viable opportunities or decent wages for all in return.

### 7.1.2. Training and technology

Market economies are comprised of a complex of technologies that further complicate any guarantee that sustained efforts will result in positive outcomes:

J: What happens in Bishkek directly affects what happens here in the village. Tax introduced to cattle, higher rents for land all affect our lives. Higher price for oil/gasoline during spring time makes our work on land difficult, late provision of it means we can’t grow our crop. The lack of tractors to the land on time, or if they do not provide certain medicine that is needed for our sheep and cattle, it means the life completely stops. Our life is functioning thanks to cattle and land we work on.

Jyrgalbek is describing above, the way taxes, rents and prices, all products of abstract technical processes organized elsewhere, come to bear on concrete lived conditions, including the land on which crops can be grown, the health of livestock, and the technologies required to ensure successful production.

In a market economy training and technology are also geared toward increased production. The problem with increased production is that when it is achieved without adequate technologies in place at all stages of production, the overall effort can be
frustrated. For example, while HM1 was very proud of his increased potato harvest, when it came time to harvest the crop, he did not have access to the kinds of technologies required to deal with such a surplus:

HM1: I want to say that if we have enough technology, our working, harvesting will be perfect. I know potatoes well enough. We should look after the land also. But all this work demands technological help, but we have none so we do those manually, by hand…. I work with my son without any help of technology, we get approximately 26 tons of potatoes.

HM1 has good knowledge of the land and the kinds of seed crops needed to increase production. However, harvesting 26 tons of potatoes requires new forms of technology to work the fields, gather the harvest, and bring it to market: tractors and harvesting equipment and knowledge about how to use and maintain them; access to fuel to operate them; storage facilities (sacks of potatoes stacked in an outdoor shed will freeze if they are not taken to market before temperatures drop in the winter months); trucks capable of transporting heavy loads of potatoes across mountain roads to markets in Bishkek; and roads suitable for transporting heavy loads to market. It also requires the coordination of local work processes with externally organized forms of technology such as pricing systems and market operations, taxation systems, government supports for agriculture, and so forth.

Access to technologies is also coordinated by institutional complexes that operate extra-locally through government and international aid organizations, and can involve relations between the two. As such, local knowledge about how to achieve surplus production can be frustrated by efforts made (or not made) elsewhere along the production chain. The village governor gave the following example:

VA: …the American organization brought wheat grains, but our social fund wasn’t working very well and so the grain did not get distributed. After a while people didn’t take any more because they said the wheat was getting bad. So such is the condition.
As this example shows, timely distribution of aid is also tied to the coordinating function of institutional complexes. When they do not function well, even when aid and resources are available they may not reach those in need in a timely and useful manner.

7.1.3. Gender disaggregation and community

Aikokul remarked in reaction to one of the chapter drafts I sent her that:

…you are looking at rural women's knowledge, NGO work done towards them and bureaucracy of institutions at local level. I think here information that you have on institutional bureaucracy and NGO work is related not only to women but to men as well.... Concerning their knowledge...yes I think we interviewed some ladies, but again I think what they say speaks not only to them but to general village life. (E-mail communication, October 12, 2012)

To report on village life in terms of gender-disaggregated categories requires abstracting the interrelated activities and life circumstances of men and women from the contexts (community, family, historic) in which they happen, and reducing them to the discursive understandings of academic and international development agendas. To assume the category 'gender' exists, when it has little to no currency in local thought and practice, or the idea that 'women' is a category separate from men, is to overlook the broader contexts in which oppression of both takes place. At the same time, to perceive 'community' as being inclusive of women and men together does not mean that gender equality prevails in the village.

In Jerge-Tal village, traditional patterns of gendered division of labour persist, meaning that women are expected to make housework and childcare their primary concern whether or not they are employed outside the home. However, attitudes towards 'ability' appear to be flexible and open to negotiation, at least where particular kinds of employment are concerned, and likewise conditions of employment appear to be flexible:

J: As for photo salon, so far we villagers thought that only boys can work, but during competition out of many boys we found very skillful young girl who knows almost everything. She is taking photos both black white and coloured, be it just for family or passport. She is working on computer well. But now she is working at home. In addition she was sick, thus
we allowed her to take all equipment home to meet people’s demands.

In the above example we can see that village authorities understand the local scene and can make local adjustments to accommodate difficulties as they arise.

A number of people were involved in the process through which a ‘gender perspective’ was brought to the village for the purposes of receiving aid from UNIFEM:

\[ J: \] As I said earlier, I and some other villagers attended UNIFEM’s training at Barskoon. There we discussed what the main difficulties faced by women in villages were and what can be done to ease their situation. Later after the training we came back and started to work with information received during the training. Well, how we worked in the village: We got together with rep. from village municipality, NGO people, rep. from unions (elderly, youth and women). We created focus groups to discuss issues in the village and then we discussed and started to identify what needs we have according to the people. People put forward certain needs and we started to line up which is more important than the other. People raised five main needs they want to address. Among them were: building milk processing factory, sawmill, confectionery and community place (we have today); then among all, community place was chosen as the most important need to be addressed. It was a decision that was taken together with all villagers. So this is how the idea of the community centre emerged and then we applied for the project.

Striking in this excerpt is how the notion of ‘focus groups’ enters into decision-making processes to describe the work of the village commission\(^\text{91}\). Though the work the commission engages in does not appear to have changed (at least on the surface), organizing and conceiving of decision-making processes in terms of ‘focus groups’ has both a literal and a figurative effect. It literally destabilizes the authority of the village \textit{jamaat} by re-ordering decision-making processes to fit the external criteria of a funding agency, while figuratively legitimizing an external authority that decides how decisions will be made and to whom things will be held accountable. It is also noteworthy that in

\[^{91}\text{The village commission is the local decision-making authority. A detailed account of how it operates is found in Chapter Eight.}\]
the end the needs identified by the village commission, many of whom had received ‘gender training’, were not particularly ‘gender’ specific.

The newly established community centre employs and provides services for both men and women, but there is no evidence to suggest that women’s needs would not have been taken into account without ‘gender training’. In fact, ‘gender training’ may have been responsible for the one initiative introduced to the community centre that was not successful, a laundry service intended to assist female teachers who work two shifts and may not have time to do their own laundry:

J: The only service that didn’t work well, is laundry.... But when we were starting up there were requests for such service that some women teachers don’t have enough time to wash children’s cloth, linen and other things because of working two shifts, but then somehow it didn’t work out.

It is one thing to recognize and name a ‘gender’ need, quite another to successfully impose a technical fix at the local level where accessing the service may be: a) culturally inappropriate, (i.e., a public admission of failure on the part of a woman as unable to properly care for her family92), or b) culturally incomprehensible, (i.e., it upsets deeply held values and beliefs about family relationships and function). In any case, rather than differentiating between men and women, the community centre houses a sewing room, photography shop, small appliance repair facility, hairdressing salon, and village bath which operate in the service of the community, which includes women and men together.

A number of people spoke of village needs in ways that do not differentiate women from men. For instance, in response to a question about her work with village women the social worker said:

SW: We deal not just with benefit distribution assigned to women, but usually in general to village people/families. Thus I can’t say much particularly concerning to the women. I can say in general the usual challenges that villagers come with is unemployment.

92 A Canadian friend of mine married a Kyrgyz woman. They kept their house in the suburbs of Bishkek when he was transferred to Beijing. Even in this case, it was not appropriate to hire someone to do his wife’s cleaning work; rather, a family member ‘helped out’ while they were away.
Of course one could deduce from this excerpt that the village social worker needs gender training in order to better understand the way women are particularly disadvantaged in the village. However, to differentiate men from women fails to account for the way 'unemployment' came to be imposed on the village in the first place, the impact unemployment is having on the community as a whole, and the broader contexts in which the community and its various members come to understand unemployment and support their 'unemployed.'

7.1.4. 'Modern’ thinking and opportunities

It has been argued that the Western aid agenda is disempowering for many because rather than providing people with the autonomy to do things for themselves, it has the same ‘things done to them’ feel as the Soviet ‘modernization’ scheme of an earlier generation (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). This despite an enduring and persistent agenda to convince people they need to rely less on government support and more on themselves and their own efforts. The notion of relying on oneself goes hand in hand with a focus on individual achievement and competition, both of which are pillars of neoliberal development. To encourage people or villages to be self-reliant is to draw them into a complex web of relations that are accountable to these tenets of neoliberalism. So-called self-reliance in the Western world is bolstered by a number of supports and subsidies (social welfare, taxation systems, agriculture subsidies, bank bailouts) that enable citizens to embody and support consuming behaviours, and thus the complex itself. What has not been accounted for in the Kyrgyz context is the practical implications when people were made to adjust to the overnight removal of government social support on a mass scale.

Political and institutional reforms have not kept up with economic reform in Kyrgyzstan so there are few stable and reliable systems in place to support social welfare or sustain its emerging economy (Cummings, 2012; Gleason, 1997; Pomfret, 2004). Thus, while people recognize they can no longer rely on government, most do not have the capacity to rely on themselves either:

J: But I am at the same time far from thinking that one needs to rely totally on government, especially the one like ours we have today. I think people should make their own efforts as
well to make their lives better. Although taking into consideration the situation in the country now, it is so difficult. If you look now there is nothing in the village for youth. They are flowing to the cities.

The focus on self-reliance has meant competition for power, and corruption:

R2: Not mentioning people, government can’t feed and look after itself properly. They are not thinking in which direction we should develop and how, they are not thinking how to properly govern the country and help them, instead they are fighting for power.

It has also introduced an attitude of greater selfishness, pointing to the way self-reliance requires individuals to see themselves and their needs as separate from those of others, both in terms of family and community:

YW: Unfortunately there aren’t any opportunities to work, there is mainly here the sheep, cows. Everybody thinks only himself or herself. Everybody tries to make his own food.

Self-reliance can also point to personal failings as an explanation for social problems:

HM1: We know each other, and among us there are such people who are lazy, drink alcohol, or other problems. We are all “ishterman” (hard worker men)...my people should be “ishtemchil” (hard, good worker) and become wealthy, and I always try to bring new and elite sorts of potatoes, and in cattle breeding also and advertise them and sell them, and wish our people became more and more wealthy.

HW1 (inserting into the conversation): Nowadays the people work only who have money, and others who are not working are lazy people. So people who are “ishterman” (“hard worker man”), work.

HM1: You should be “ishterman”!!! Otherwise you can’t achieve. And these works, I mean here we need more men than women, because I have one son, so we can’t do everything. We need to work harder.

‘Modern thinking’ calls for new technologies, the knowledge and ownership of which are then associated with status. These may not, however, be the kinds of technologies that are actually needed to improve village life:
After the Soviet Union, mmm, the number technologies are increases mostly the automobiles. During the Soviet Union there weren’t foreigner cars, we had only Soviet cars, jihuli, moskvich, and Volga (models of Soviet cars), but now almost all families that have a car, not Soviet but foreigner’s. But we don’t have enough, almost we don’t have technologies like tractors, combines, reapers and other agricultural technologies.

Nonetheless, one of the projects being introduced the following summer was to teach young people how to drive. What better way to encourage the need for automobiles in the village than to teach young people how to drive? On the one hand, there is the question of how many will be able to afford to buy a car, much less operate and maintain one; while on the other, transportation is becoming increasingly important for moving people and goods to markets in Naryn, Bishkek and elsewhere. Indeed, transportation may be one of the few new sources of income available in an era where the idea of a self-contained village is becoming less and less viable. It is interesting how 'self-contained' and 'self-reliant' appear so distant in the capitalist conception of either of these nostrums. In the chapter that follows I explain how formal processes of governance at the village level are organized to coordinate with the reporting requirements of international development agencies operating beyond village control.
8. Formal Processes of Governance in Jerge-Tal Village

In Chapter One I suggested that training programs for women entrepreneurs are part of a strategy developed by Western gender specialists concerned with how to address the problem of women's social and economic marginalization. As such, they are tied into an international development programming complex wherein concerns with women's well-being are articulated through institutional processes such as accounting systems, accountability systems, and computerized technologies which both produce definitions of 'gender' and establish 'gender mainstreaming' programs and policies, while at the same time assessing effective implementation and compliance with these. Within this integrated complex, people engage in local face-to-face relations, but are accountable to textualized organizational processes that lie elsewhere. The practical effect is that local discretion in key decision-making processes is displaced as the centre of power and authority, and disembodied managerial technologies operating at some distance from local settings come to be taken for granted as not only reasonable, but 'natural'. In this chapter I show how village decision-making processes and the work of village administration are made to coordinate with accountabilities given by standardized concepts and categories developed elsewhere. This is important because it is at the village level that women entrepreneurs are drawn into a set of extra-local relations that targets them as: 1) in need of being rescued from poverty, and (2) the instrument through which poverty alleviation is to be accomplished. Their point of entry into the relations can be located in village decision-making processes and the way these coordinate with the work of village administration. The coordination of local work practices is further tied into the organizing function of relations that extend well beyond the village. The organizing function of extra-local relations works to preclude dialogic exchange along a chain of activity that links the work of international development agencies to the training of women entrepreneurs.
The term 'administration' can be conceived of in three ways: the actual acts, practices and processes of management; the people who perform the work of administration; and the more generalized "activity of a government or state in the exercise of its powers and duties," including the laws that govern or guide their work. In other words, the concept of administration can be understood as both a functioning body of laws and practices, and a set of embodied individuals whose work practices enact and engage them. When I consider 'village administration' in Jerge-Tal, I am thus referring to the more generalized body whose function is to govern particular kinds of village activity through the exercise of power and performance of duties; but also to the embodied individuals who enact 'administration' by engaging in actual processes and practices of 'management'. Management also refers to a form of generalized activity wherein those in charge oversee other bodies (that are usually lower down the hierarchy). But it also refers to the actual work performed in particular sites, by particular people whose knowledge of how to do their work is organized and accountable to other management 'bodies' located elsewhere. The term 'bodies' can also be conceived in two ways: as abstract conceptual shells like NGOs, INGOs, the national government, a village administration, and so forth.; or as embodied people who do management work in local sites, and whose work is likewise coordinated with and by the work done by management 'bodies' located elsewhere.

In analyses of formal processes of governance, the concepts 'administration' and 'management' can thus be applied to refer conceptually to a set of governing rules and practices (and the individuals who perform them), but also to actual embodied practices that give substance to conceptual frames of understanding. The concept of 'institution' is more analytically complex. I found the following definition useful as a starting point for understanding the administrative and managerial function of the extra-local relations that organize village administration and decision-making processes in Jerge-Tal village. According to this reading, an institution is:

any structure or mechanism of social order and cooperation governing the behaviour of a set of individuals within a given community…Institutions are identified with a social purpose transcending individuals and

http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/administration
intentions by mediating the rules that govern cooperative living behaviour. The term...is commonly applied to customs and behaviour patterns important to a society, as well as to particular formal organizations of government and public services. Institutions are a central concern for the law, the formal mechanism for political rule-making and enforcement.  

This definition is congruent with institutional ethnography (IE), wherein ‘institution’ refers not to a particular type of organization, but rather, to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place across multiple sites. IE is concerned with the way documentary forms of knowledge (training manuals, reporting requirements, and standards, for example) mediate the linking and coordinating of activities and work processes within and across diverse sites, such that they obscure the actualities of everyday life. With the foregoing in mind, I have written an account of governance processes that begins by identifying, in general, some of the bodies involved in processes of governance and public administration in Kyrgyzstan. I then move into an ethnography of formal processes of village governance that describes: (1) links to traditional decision-making processes in Jerge-Tal village; (2) the work processes involved in administrative decision-making in Jerge-Tal village; (3) how documentary forms of authority organize work practices at the village level; and (4) how local work practices are coordinated to meet the external reporting requirements of INGOs and government authorities.

8.1. Political events since Kyrgyzstan’s independence

Askar Akiev was elected first president of the newly formed Kyrgyz Republic in October 1991, and was re-elected (amid allegations of vote-rigging) in the elections of 1995 and 2000. Akiev pursued an agenda of privatization of land and economic assets and was considered to be liberal-minded compared to other Central Asian presidents. Opposition parties were allowed to run in elections during Akiev’s rule, though they found themselves subject to judicial proceedings against them or their representatives if their popularity was seen to pose a threat to Akiev’s rule. Protest demonstrations began to erupt in 2002 after the imprisonment of a leading opposition figure. Discontent was further stirred by the failure of Akiev’s administration to resolve the country’s ongoing

94 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institution
economic difficulties and ethnic tensions in the South. When two of Akiev’s children won seats in the 2005 elections, allegations of presidential vote-rigging led to calls for Akiev’s resignation. Mass demonstrations broke out in Osh and Jalal-Abad where protesters took control of key cities and towns. As dissent shook the country protesters stormed the presidential compound in Bishkek and seized control of the office. Akiev escaped to Kazakhstan and then to Russia where he finally agreed to tender his resignation after meeting with Kyrgyz delegates (Juraev, 2008; Levitin, 2004; Tursunkulova, 2008).

Later that year Kurmanbek Bakiev won a landslide election (albeit amidst allegations of election fraud). Despite promises of constitutional reform that would limit the power of the president and give more authority to parliament, Bakiev continued, like Akiev before him, to embrace a program of patrimonial rule, elite control of resources, oppressive tactics and nepotism. Growing discontent with blatant nepotism and Bakiev’s failure to address issues of corruption, poverty, and the high cost of utilities led to another revolution following the arrest of a key opposition figure in Talas region in April 2010. Once more protesters stormed the presidential compound in Bishkek, only this time security personnel fired on them, killing 88 people. The next two days drew thousands of people, enraged by the killings, to the scene (Temirkulov, 2010). Bakiev fled to his home in Osh region and then to Belarus where he has remained since his presidency was deposed. Following the events of April 2010, unresolved ethnic tensions fuelled by poverty and unemployment in the Osh region (where the population of the Uzbek minority is close to 40%), exploded into violence, destruction of property, and looting95. Hundreds of people were killed, thousands more lost their homes and businesses, and many fled the country in the days that followed. The devastation was significant, and deepened the tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the region (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2010). Rosa Otunbaeva was installed as interim president and served until Almazbek Atambaev was elected president in October, 201096. The Atambaev Administration operates as a multi-party coalition wherein power

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95 Although media attention focused primarily on the Osh region, looting and destruction of property in Bishkek forced the closure of many businesses. A monument remembering those killed during the storming of parliament has since been erected in the public square.

96 Presidents are elected to serve five-year terms, while prime ministers are chosen and appointed by parliament.
is shared amongst the leading five political parties. Atambaev is noted for his pro-Russian stance and support for Kyrgyzstan's potential entry into the Central Asian Customs Union.

8.2. Processes of governance and public administration

One of President Akiev's first decrees after assuming office as president was the *Law on Local Self-Government and Local Public Administration*. The law was enacted in an effort to transfer local government powers to local councils. It was amended in March 1992 to introduce a system "in which forms of self-government include the local council and bodies of territorial self-government, as well as local referenda, citizen assemblies and other forms of direct democracy" (Alymkulov & Kulatov, 2001:526). Akiev issued a further decree in August 1994 to begin the process of restructuring authorities in local settlements along municipal lines. Further decrees were issued from 1999 onward to strengthen local council authority and to introduce the principle of self-sufficiency to municipal entities. Today the functional structure of local government is divided into three territorial tiers of representative, executive and regulatory bodies: *ayil* (village and rural level); *raion* (municipal level); and *oblast* (provincial level administration).

*Tier One - local council (ayil kenesh)*. This level of government is tasked with electing the council chairman and his or her deputies; approving rules governing local council procedures and establishing commissions; approving social and economic development plans and social protection programs; and approving the budget and budget execution reports. The local council also employs specialists on a contractual basis to assist with logistical support and develop required materials, but these employees are not considered civil servants. Local council commissions are made up of council members and invited specialists who meet to discuss issues related to the economic, social and cultural development of the territory. The local council chairman, the head of local self-government, has organizational powers and represents the council in relations with public bodies, associations and individuals. There is also a village or rural council chairman who is head of self-government at the first tier level of government. This chair has an executive and regulatory function at both the local village and the local state administration level. The chair’s responsibilities include passport
registration and civil registration of documents (i.e., marriage certificates, property identification, and so forth). The chair is accountable to the local council and the head of the raion or municipal level administration (Alymkulov & Kulatov, 2001).

**Tier Two - raion level.** This level is tasked with approving programs for social and economic development and social protection, and exercising control over their implementation. Councils approve the local budget and budget reports, and review information on the use of extra-budgetary funds. This level oversees public education, health care and social security, and maintains local roads and communication. Raion level administration provides funds to balance budgets at the village level and ensures minimum needs are met (Alymkulov & Kulatov, 2001).

**Tier Three - oblast level.** The head of the local state administration implements policies of the president and national government (i.e., manages resources of local state administration, allocates land plots, manages municipally owned enterprises, and so forth). This administration is tasked with formulating the draft local budget and draft programs for local social and economic development, submitting them to the corresponding council for approval, and organizing their implementation. Oblast administration is also in charge of sanctions on business entities; exercising compliance with environmental protection acts; developing and implementing measures to ensure employment and social protection of low-income populations; maintaining law and order; and representing the territory in relations with higher government bodies. This body provides most of the budget funds of raion level government. Its governor is the highest state official in the oblast (Alymkulov & Kulatov, 2001).

**National Government - Zhorgorku Kenesh** is the supreme legislative body in the Kyrgyz Republic. It consists of a Legislative Assembly (60 members) and an Assembly of National Representatives (45 members).

### 8.3. Local self-government and community government

Political parties are a hallmark of democracy in Western politics. However, in Kyrgyzstan, there is little "citizen interest in this form of representation, since it provides no practical advantages in the political struggle compared to informal citizen
A number of associations have been established since Akiev's decree on local self-government, including public councils, residential area committees, house committees, councils of veterans, women and youth organizations, and many others. The main forms of direct democracy and community at the level of self-government include (Alymkulov & Kulatov, 2001; Giovarelli & Akmatova, 2002):

**Local referenda** - a method of citizen decision-making through a general vote on major issues of community importance. There is a legal framework in place for national referenda but not local ones (it is unclear to me at what level local referenda are able to influence change).

**Kurultais** - a form of village assembly held at least once every two years. This older institution of local self-government was revived by the decree *Increasing the Role of Kurultais in the Management of Local Affairs* in May 2001. Its purpose was to bring the system of government closer to the people and to place programs and decisions under public control. Kurultai members are elected by the community.

**Citizen assemblies** - a meeting of all citizens who live in a given neighbourhood, district or village for the purpose of managing local issues. Citizen assemblies make recommendations to local authorities. Whereas the *Law on Local Self-Government and Local Public Administration* was enacted to organize forms of direct democracy and community self-government, according to Alymkulov and Kulatov (2001:535), "Kyrgyz legislation does not provide a strong framework for the activities of community self-government or public organizations.... In practice, community self-government entities often become another type of institution subordinated to local raion administrations."

**Ayil okmotu (community government)** - are elected rural executive committees that form rural government administration at the level above the village head. They are the primary administrative-territorial unit of the Kyrgyz Republic. Comprised of groups of one to 12 villages or settlements, *Ayil okmotus* are responsible for the following: land and water management, the maintenance of physical infrastructure, supplying agricultural inputs, collecting taxes and fines, organizing elections, among other duties. The *ayil okmotu* head is appointed by the *raion*
administration, and has authority over the village head. Village heads tend to be reluctant to contradict the authority of the ayil okmotu. However, since village heads are democratically elected, they tend to enjoy more trust and respect that the ayil okmotu head (though some village heads have been impeached by their councils and removed from office). Citizens go to the ayil okmotu when they have issues that cannot be resolved by the village head. Village heads and the staff of the ayil okmotu are paid positions. Although there appears to be an extensive sphere of rural committee activity, it is not supported by sufficient staff. Thus the capacity of committees to exercise their delegated functions is limited.

_Aksakal courts_ - are the ‘peoples’ judicial body responsible for enforcement of customary law. _Aksakal_ means ‘white beard’ and the courts link back to a form of governance practiced in the country's nomadic past. Akiev issued a decree that gave aksakal courts jurisdiction over property, torts and family law. Although women are allowed to serve on aksakal courts, it is more common for them to attend in the role of women's councils.

_Women's councils_ - are a continuation of an institution from the Soviet era, now operating as nongovernmental organizations that are no longer entitled to receive funding from the state. There is a women's council under each ayil okmotu and raion administration. The councils are funded by membership fees and small grants and all positions are unpaid. When councils are active they are a source of support for women in abusive relationships and those going through divorce. They also deal with the inappropriate behaviour of women97 and are often involved in decisions made by aksakal courts (Giovarelli & Akmatova, 2002).

_Religious leaders_ - although there has been something of a revival of Islamic practices since independence, the significance of Islam is experienced differently depending on region, community and family. Religious leaders do not typically get

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97 Giovarelli and Akmatova (2002) explain that customs and traditions are taught in the family, and that shame, respect and dignity are powerful tools of social control in village life. While there is no specific public shunning or punishment, violating customs and traditions means a loss of respect not only for individual women, but for their family as a whole. Thus, daughters are taught by their mothers how to properly behave as a woman so as not to bring shame to the family.
involved in affairs outside the concerns of religion. Their function is primarily that of leading prayers and providing counsel for family problems. They seldom interfere, even when they do not approve of customs (i.e., bride kidnapping is contrary to Islamic teaching, but mullahs perform marriages even when they know the bride has been kidnapped). Since women are not permitted entry into the mosque, they do not generally seek help from male religious leaders. Kyrgyz women tend to receive much less education about Islam than their Uzbek counterparts, and are thus generally less interested in religious concerns. Nonetheless, Giovarelli and Akmatova (2002:15) conclude, all women live to a degree "within a three-dimensional set of laws: traditional-national, religious, and new European laws."

Clan leaders - are part of the extended family network in rural villages. They are primarily male, and are sometimes elected. Their role is to maintain peace and unity in the community and to preserve and restore Kyrgyz customs and traditions. Clan leaders also regulate the "festivities of clan families (how many animals to slaughter at funerals, how much money to spend on food, who should be invited, [etc.])" (Giovarelli & Akmatova, 2002:10).

8.4. Naryn oblast and Jerge-Tal village

Kyrgyzstan has long been characterized as being resource poor relative to neighbouring countries in the Central Asian region\(^8\), and even during the Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan was considered to be one of the poorest of Soviet republics. This may in part account for the state's eagerness, relative to other Central Asian states, to pursue liberal reforms, as these were needed to bolster its attractiveness to foreign investors in the wake of independence. During the Soviet era, the Central Asian region generally served as a source of raw materials for Soviet heavy industry (though heavy industry itself was never set up in the region). Kyrgyzstan's exports included gold, mercury and

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\(^8\) The significance of resources has been the subject of much scholarly debate. The key arguments center around the extent to which the availability of resources matters and to what political effect (see, for example, Luong and Weinthal (2010) for a comparative account of oil reserves in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; Spoor (2009) on the agricultural sector in rural 'transition' and the consequences of land reforms; and Kandiyoti (2007) for accounts on cotton in particular, as an agro-industry crop, to name a few).
uranium in the industrial sector, and wool, meat, and crops in the agricultural sector. Some light industry (metallurgy and textile production, for instance) was established in Kyrgyzstan, but more so as a strategy for securing the Soviet Union’s remote border regions, than out of an interest in building viable local economies. Transportation infrastructure was likewise developed in the interests of producing and exporting raw materials (Cummings, 2012; Spoor, 1999).

The context in which the current economic circumstances of Naryn oblast and Jerge-Tal village are situated is thus, a Kyrgyz economy that has long been: primarily agrarian, characterized by poverty and marginalization, and subject to the priorities of outside interests. Rural people in Kyrgyzstan are increasingly dependent on land and livestock for their livelihood. At the same time, new forms of social stratification are leading to loss of longstanding forms of mutual trust and aid among rural households. While rural producers draw on a wide range of coping responses, these are unlikely to involve cooperating with people outside their household and immediate kin networks. In effect, Steimann (2011:7) asserts, many “fail to enter rural commodity markets and to develop their livelihoods beyond mere subsistence production”99. The informal economy, developed in response to the shortcomings of the centrally planned economy, and typically more pronounced in the agricultural sector, is ever more vital as a coping strategy given today’s uncertainties (Nasiritdinov, Rayapova, Kholmatova, Damirbek kyzy, & Igoshina, 2010; Ronsijn, 2006). These are some of the broader factors that condition how formal and informal processes of governance have come to operate at the village level.

Naryn oblast is the largest province in Kyrgyzstan. It is divided into five raions with Naryn raion being the second largest. The influx of ethnic migrants (most significant were Russian, German and Tatar) during the Soviet era was generally lower in rural areas, and especially in Naryn oblast ethnic migrants were few. Out-migration from the Naryn area to Russian-dominated urban centers had also been low due to ethnic and cultural constraints. Thus, contrary to other regions of the country, the population of

99 I believe the question as to whether they ‘fail to’ or ‘prefer not to’ is open to debate, but that will have to be the subject of another paper.
Naryn has remained primarily ethnic Kyrgyz\(^{100}\) (Patnaik, 1995; Schmidt & Sagynbekova, 2008).

Jerge-Tal village (ayıl) is the main village of the Jerge-Tal ayıl okmotu, which includes the villages of Jalgyk Terek and Kyzyl Jyldyz. Municipal administration is comprised of the head of the rural executive committee (ayıl okmotu) and his staff, which includes: a chief accountant, a land-planning specialist responsible for leasing communal arable land and managing the pastures adjacent to the village, a statistician, and a social development specialist responsible for calculating and allocating pensions and child allowances (Steimann, 2011:79). The meeting hall of the municipal building located in Jerge-Tal is also used by the local council (ayıl kenesh) and by the aksakal council. Jerge-Tal established its own Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance in July 2003. This body "engages in social and economic communal development and interacts with external NGOs and aid agencies to implement local development projects and allocate micro-credit to local entrepreneurs" (Steimann, 2011:79). The main sources of employment are village administration, the community centre, teaching, small retail shops, taxi service, privately operated flour mills, and veterinary services.

8.5. An ethnography of processes of formal governance in Jerge-Tal village

We were grateful that Jyrgalbek, the local UNDP representative, was able to arrange an interview with the village head during our second visit to Jerge-Tal village. Jyrgalbek accompanied us to the municipal building, where we were led down a dimly lit corridor to the village head's office. He left after introducing us. The office room was small, painted Soviet blue, and heated with an electric radiator. A single bulb hung from what appeared to have at one time been a fluorescent light fixture on the ceiling. On one wall stood a bookcase containing old books and records, on the other, a filing

\(^{100}\) This is in contradistinction to Osh and Batken oblasts that measure significant Uzbek and Tajik populations, or Chui oblast where southern rural migrants are beginning to settle in the Kara Balta area, and where people from all regions come to Bishkek. Issyk-Kul region is also somewhat more ethnically diverse. One of our hosts in Karakol village spoke well of the considerable impact Russian migrants had on life in this region.
cabinet piled high with manuals and files; there was no computer. The village head invited us to sit around a small table in front of his desk. His demeanour, professional yet friendly, he was apologetic about frequent cell phone interruptions. At one point two women came in with documents for him to sign. Despite the interruptions, we were able to form a general idea of the way the village administration functions, and the way it intersects with village decision-making processes, laws and regulations generated by the government of Kyrgyzstan, and access to international aid programs. Below I have written an account of formal processes of governance in Jerge-Tal village by combining data gathered from these sources: the village head’s explanations; comments made by other village participants; and publications that explain the workings of jamaat (community organizations) and other forms of governance in Kyrgyzstan.

Figure 8.1. Municipal building in Jerge-Tal village

8.5.1. Administrative decision-making processes in Jerge-Tal village

According to village residents their local leadership is elected in "a democratic way." The village head is chosen, usually from among six or seven candidates, by elections in which both women and men take part.

R2: We choose the one who would work for people, who would feel for people, who understands current economic, social and political issues.
Village deputies are likewise elected to serve five year terms. According to the village head, everyone, young or old, man or woman, is entitled to put themselves forward as candidates to serve as village deputies, and people freely vote for those who they consider to be the best candidates. He added that there were more elders serving as deputies these days. This may be related to the decree put forward by former president Akiev to revitalize aksakal courts as a means of rekindling Kyrgyz national identity. He also mentioned that young teenagers and a youth group were nowadays becoming more active and contributing to village decisions. Village administration is tasked with managing village services and distributing government funds. For instance, the municipality pays 12,000 soms per month (~$260) to the kindergarten for operating costs. Village administration is also in charge of the distribution of seeds, coal and oil provided at discounted rates by the government, and administering funds given to the village social worker, whose office is housed in the village administration building.

Although considerable village input is technically required for the formal regulation of village administrative activity, aside from understanding some of the basic duties a deputy has been elected to perform, the way the village administration operates appears to be either unknown or perhaps not of concern to some people in the village, at least with respect to wages. From what we could tell, village deputies are not paid positions:

A: They work without taking any salary?
DIR: No they don’t take any money I think, for example; when we talked they said that they don’t get any salary for their position. But I don’t know exactly, you should ask others also.

Of course it could also be that since people are more invested in the institutional processes that guide the operations of village administration (to be explained below), whether or not positions are paid is of minimal consequence to the proper execution of

\[101\] It is known, for instance, that they vote on decisions regarding community infrastructure and are involved in the appointment of people to positions like director of the community centre.
duties, especially since even at the highest levels of government administration, wages are pitifully low\textsuperscript{102}.

Organized participation in processes of village administration appears to originate from a longstanding traditional and customary form of social organization, the *jamaat*, which is one of the primary sites of participation in processes of formal governance in Jerge-Tal village. *Jamaats* are a form of social organization used by ‘communities’ of farmers, society in general, and nomads in particular that dates back centuries to feudal times. Historically, the ‘Kyrgyz community’ was composed of a number of groups related to each other through tribe, common economic interests, and ideological unity that had broad authority over the economic, familial and ideological interrelationships of particular territorial units. Reference to *jamaat* is found in Kyrgyz oral tradition and is also contained in documents of the Kokand khanate (an 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century feudal state of the Ferghana Valley), which supported these strong internally linked forms of tribal community.

Today, the rights of ‘communities’ are codified in Kyrgyz law. The law *On Jamaats and their Associations* drafted February 21, 2005\textsuperscript{103}, defines *jamaat* as "a form of local self-administration organization that is a voluntary association of members of local communities who reside in the same street, block or other territorial formation of village or town, created for joint decision-making in local affairs" (Idrisov & Pak, 2006:unpaged). The form *jamaats* take appears to be village specific. In Jerge-Tal *jamaats* were composed of various unions and representative bodies; in the Osh region, the village we visited seemed to be organized according to village blocks; in Kara-Balta (a larger centre near Bishkek) the notion of *jamaat* did not come up at all. In the latter village, participants were highly critical of a village administration whose only concern

\textsuperscript{102} This is one of the explanations given for high levels of government corruption in the country. Bribes are required to augment poor wages, indeed they are almost built into the way the economy works. Although the bribe economy did not come up in our interviews (aside from a passing reference by one of the students), perhaps this respondent was trying to discern between salary and bribe.

\textsuperscript{103} It is interesting to note that *jamaats* were not mentioned by either Alymkulov and Kulatov (2001) or Giovarelli and Akmatova (2002) in their reports on local governance, possibly because these did not evolve into a form of official self-government until 2005.
seemed to be collection of taxes. There appeared to be little interest or support for village development there\textsuperscript{104}.

The basic underlying function of the \textit{jamaat} seems to have persisted over time. Of interest to me, however, is how the function of the \textit{jamaat} is being adapted to suit increasingly institutionalized forms of village governance. I found the distinction Nokatbek Idrisov and Uliana Pak (2006) make between 'community' and 'community organization' helpful for understanding the implications of increasingly institutionalized decision-making processes, and the way they intervene to organize people's perceptions and understandings of village life. In their account:

\begin{quote}
'community' [is] defined as an autonomous social substructure of society residing in one geographical territory who have common needs and resources, and carry out joint activities for the benefit of the community itself, and 'community organization' [is] defined as an association of people, jointly implementing interests, programs or goals based on a set of particular norms and rules, either formally registered with the state or with informal status (Idrisov & Pak, 2006: unpaged).
\end{quote}

Traditional 'Kyrgyz community' operated according to strong internal links that required minimal forms of institutional administration. The 'community organization' of today, however, draws the 'community' into a system of local self-administrative bodies that interact with each other, with public authorities internal and external to the village, and with international aid organizations that operate both through, and separately from, village administration and local NGOs.

The following excerpt from Idrisov and Pak's (2006) \textit{Jamaat (Community Organization)} explains the intended function of \textit{jamaat}, and helps to clarify some of the institutional processes of village governance I observed in Jerge-Tal:

\textsuperscript{104} In Bishkek, I occasionally observed courtyard meetings going on, from the window of my fifth floor apartment. People would gather and speak, often quite heatedly, over the course of an hour or two, after which they approached the chair to sign a paper. The paperwork is evidence of some connection to institutional processes organized by documentary forms of accountability.
...in order to ensure efficient resolution of local affairs, it is necessary for the population to actively participate in any given activity in addition to creating compulsory local self-administration bodies.

In Jerge-Tal these bodies would be: (a) executive-administrative, that is, village administration; and (b) representative, that is, village unions.

This mobilization of the population into particular formations is one type of local self-administration. It also constitutes one form of direct participation by citizens in local affairs. By uniting into community organizations, the population of a particular territory is able to become more organized, consolidate to solve specific issues, prioritize the directions of an activity, fairly distribute resources, etc. Today, the activities of communities facilitate the process of determining the interests, needs, and sets of values of local communities, thereby providing local state administration and local self-administration bodies the ability to judge the level of pretensions of residents. This in turn means that the local state administration and local self-administration bodies are able to more objectively assess the existing social-economic situation during managerial decision-making. For self-administration bodies, community organizations act as additional mechanisms to not only identify problems, but also to help provide solutions to the problems while also meeting the demands of the people. At the same time, community organizations may be used by local self-administration bodies as a means to disseminate information to the population. Communities are one of the population's means of control over the activity of local public authorities and local self-administration bodies. Finally, it is necessary to make note of the representative function of community organizations. The community represents the interests of its members, and groups within the population whose views have been formulated and expressed in front of local authorities.

In Jerge-Tal, jamaats interact with the village commission in decision-making processes that are organized and make sense at the local level. All decisions for the village, including what projects to support and who to hire to implement them, involve the complex workings of the village commission. While the excerpt above implies that the village commission is a local decision-making authority that acts in the interests of its members, and serves as a form of control over local public authorities, there are a number of institutional processes external to the commission that intervene to influence, and in some ways, usurp that authority. The Jerge-Tal Village Commission is a formally organized group comprised of the village head, local deputies, local representatives of international organizations, and unions representing youth, women and the elders
(aksakals) that gathers to discuss village business. It is tasked with collecting and compiling information required to access national and international aid. While the commission is the main body for decision-making processes locally, it must coordinate with decision-making processes both internal and external to the village at regional, national and international levels.

One of the main functions of the commission is to organize a sort of a townhall meeting, where various representatives and interested parties gather to discuss and vote on village business and priorities. According to the village head, approximately 300 people attend the public gathering where village needs and wishes are named and prioritized. Various village representatives and jamaats are invited to attend the annual meeting where they get to voice their concerns and ideas, and make requests for funding and support. One of the aims of this meeting is to satisfy the reporting requirements that regulate self-administration of municipalities according to government law. There is also a legal requirement for the commission to establish goals and fulfill responsibilities as specified in its own charter. Thus when representative bodies vote on priorities for village development, determine how particular grant funds will be allocated, and determine what new grants need to be applied for, they are fulfilling the legal and administrative obligations of both the jamaats and the village commission.

Decision-making at the jamaat level is an important starting point for naming, legitimizing and prioritizing the concerns of various community groups (i.e., youth, women, or the elderly) at the annual meetings of the commission. I could not discern from my interview data how exactly consensus is reached, but it appears to be the business of jamaats to present their needs before the commission at the annual meeting. After hearing all presentations, village priorities are identified and agreed upon.
Once their requests are approved, *jamaats* may be tasked with writing grants to obtain funds for projects. Grant funds are not dispersed directly to the *jamaats*, but rather administered by the municipality to project leaders. It is the responsibility of each project leader to ensure that projects that have been approved and funded get implemented, and to submit a report to the municipality accounting for monies spent, the names of people working on the project, and the progress made. It is the responsibility of the municipality to complete the final reporting required to justify the funds released and spent. The annual meeting of the commission thus sets in motion a process of naming, prioritizing and approving project proposals for the village. The requirement for democratic input draws all parties into institutional processes of governance that organize access to funding.

Some of the decisions made by the commission coordinate with the Ministry of Justice through the self-administration body of the municipality. My initial sense was that the Ministry of Justice receives reports from all municipalities, and that international aid organizations need to go through the ministry to access information about villages and to gain approval for larger projects. However, it appears that international aid organizations operate more independently than that. To become established in Kyrgyzstan they need to register their mission statement, key personnel and objectives with the Ministry. This entitles them to open local bank accounts as non-commercial organizations. They are then subject to Kyrgyz law as it applies to non-profit organizations. Once registered, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are able to work independently with local NGOs or village *jamaats* as long as they operate according to the charter they have registered with the government. In this sense INGOs appear to be bound by some of the same rules as the *jamaats*.

Where it gets interesting is that the agenda of most INGOs goes beyond the arbitrary provision of aid. People and villages must meet certain conditions to qualify for aid -- and they must be able to understand and operate within the processes required to access it. Moreover, INGOs do not work directly with villages, but rather through local NGOs who compete for project funding, and who then work with the project leader from the village. Both local NGOs and village project leaders take part in training programs to help them understand how to work within the requirements of INGOs. The original decision-making capacities of the *jamaat* gave it broad authority over the economic,
familial and ideological interrelationships of a 'community'. It was an internally legitimate form of authority supported by the feudal state. Some of that authority would have been eroded by the imposition of communist principles, which influenced decision-making capacities during the Soviet era. In the current post-Soviet era, however, the authority of the *jamaat* is undermined by a particular form of externally-based authority, one that increasingly compels the local commission to perceive and make decisions regarding village well-being according to criteria determined by the documentary processes of INGO reporting. This has far-reaching implications for the power to influence the economic, familial and ideological interrelationships of a given community.

For one thing, INGOs have influenced changes to law, social policy, and government priorities by placing conditions on international aid. In the case of reparations following the ethnic conflict in Osh region, a major coordinated effort was required among donors in order to sensitively and effectively respond to the crisis. The government had to carefully manage its interpretation and handling of the affair not only to ease tensions between conflicted parties in Osh region, but also to maintain good donor relations. In the meantime, Jerge-Tal village, far removed from the ethnic conflict in the south of the country, had difficulty accessing seeds and oil (for which they rely on government aid) at planting time. Funding for much needed improvements to their kindergarten was also delayed (possibly even pulled) when the Aga Khan Foundation shifted its priorities to the Osh region and the village lost contact with their connection, in this case likely an NGO who turned its attention to more lucrative projects in the South of the country. The annual meeting of the commission is thus a required step in accessing aid from both the municipality (which administers social benefits paid by a national government that itself relies on external funding), and international organizations (which require applicants to meet certain criteria in order to qualify for aid). However, the decision-making capacities of the commission, and the outcomes of its processes, are very much subject to a complex network of institutional processes that operate external to the village, if not Kyrgyzstan itself (in the case of INGO influence). As the Osh event shows, legal and administrative requirements are only surface manifestations of the way relations external to village life enter into and intervene in the local decision-making capacity of village commissions.
8.5.2. **Documentary forms of village administration**

Decisions made by the village commission are taken up by village administration personnel (who are also part of the village commission). Four key sets of documentation guide the business of village administration. Document One is the village passport, a set of records for tracking statistics about what goes on in village territory, (i.e., the number of houses, shops, buildings, farmland, and so forth). Everyone who comes to the village (through marriage, perhaps) or moves away from the village is registered in these documents. Registration is required to access citizen benefits (healthcare, education, pension, property rights, etcetera). Municipal administration is tasked with administering funds allotted by the government for residents in particular locales; when people move they are not entitled to receive benefits in the new location unless they are registered there. This is especially problematic for internal migrants who leave the village with their families to relocate in Bishkek where it is difficult to obtain access to such services as healthcare or education without proper registration. In any case, Document One is used to track all kinds of village activity. Its records are updated annually. Although the information is primarily collected for taxation purposes and benefits allocation, the information is also used when applying for government and international aid.

*Figure 8.2. Village administration documents*
Document Two is a register of all grants and investments that come to the village, and there have been many that have come to Jerge-Tal. The village head named United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), Red Cross, Ala Too CAMP (Central Asian Mountain Partnership), Eurasian Development Foundation, and Grant Stimuli (government-funded program) among those registered in the book. Project leaders chosen by the Jerge-Tal Village Commission are tasked with compiling detailed information about the aims of a project, the funding spent, details about the spending, the work that has been done, and who is working on implementing the project. This information is given to village economists who are responsible for producing a statistical report from the information and details provided by the project leader. These reports are then used to justify the funds issued by the government and the INGOs for humanitarian aid and development work in the village.

Documents Three and Four are produced annually by the national government, and outline the general duties and responsibilities of village administration as an institution. Document Three describes the function and operations of a village municipality according to a national law that regulates the self-administration of municipalities. Document Four lays out the duties and responsibilities of each individual position within the administration. Document Three is “a framework for duties and responsibilities confirmed by government decree” (VA interview). The village municipality is expected to operate in accordance with that framework. Document Four supplements the framework by outlining best practices for the competence and authority of village administration – it is the legal framework that guides the administration of each locality or village. It contains 23 units of government directives outlining details about each individual’s responsibility within the village administration, and describing in detail each worker’s position and responsibilities. Although the directives come down from the national government, the ‘fit’ is decided locally by the village commission, and ratified annually by a gathering of village deputies (i.e., the people who serve as village administrators). In Jerge-Tal village, the rules and regulations are put forth before a convening of the village commission that meet annually to determine if the directives are working for the village and make changes when necessary. Once settled at the village
level, the documents are given to regional deputies who discuss them with national
deputies in Bishkek. When a final draft of duties and regulations is approved it is signed
by the Ministry of Justice and becomes the law by which the village administration must
abide.

As explained above, Document Two registers all grants and investments that
come to the village. I initially thought this meant all projects were authorized and
administered by the village administration. However, it appears that the commission has
more authority in this regard, and that the role of village administration is to receive and
distribute funds, and to complete reports for funding the village receives. Although the
point of entry for NGOs may be the village administration body (INGOs work through
their local representatives in the village), village administration does not have the
authority to approve projects on its own. Rather, approval is sought through commission
members who then appoint a project leader. It is the responsibility of project leaders
chosen by the commission to provide all the details about spending and implementation
of projects to village economists (elected village deputies) whose job is to produce
statistical reports for the municipality. The commission is able to monitor progress and
make decisions based on information from the reports. The municipality forwards the
reports to the donor agencies and government bodies to whom projects are accountable.
Information from the reports may also be used by the municipality to assist particular
groups. For instance, 50% of the proceeds from the village bath and rents paid by
businesses operating out of the community centre (300 soms ~$6/month) are paid to the
village municipality. The funds are held in part to pay for equipment and repairs to the
centre. The community centre may also refer to information from the reports to
negotiate with the municipality to forgive rents; for example, those due in January and
February when most of the businesses are closed due to cold weather.

These documents suggest that village decision-making processes operate
democratically in the village, and, at least in Jerge-Tal, people seem to be satisfied that
the processes are working for them. People seemed to have faith in their local
government, or at least understand the limitations it works within:

R2: Villagers have problems that are similar to the problems of a
big family. Village governor and his/her staff (often men)
solve issues/problems of that big family. But village people
have problems that need to be solved on government level (school, kindergarten, employment) for which local governor does not have the capacity to solve.

This leads to frustration and disillusionment with the national government at various levels. Issues of transparency and legitimacy seemed to be especially troubling. Many people agree with the respondent below:

R2: Today government is a big game where everyone fights for his/her share…. Today government can’t solve its own problems between each other, how they can solve our problems of the nation.

Their faith in shifting forms of governance has been limited by the overall instability of government in Kyrgyzstan:

J: Government people are changing constantly, changing reforms, so it is unstable to do successful work now. The village municipality workers also change. They work according to certain laws that also not questioned and checked.

Nor do all villages have faith in the people who work in village administration. For instance, this account from a respondent in Osh region tells a different story about how things work at the level of village administration:

SD: ...if I write a project and win the money/grant, it comes not to my personal address/account, but...under particular village governance. So then local governments take certain amount of the money. When it comes to report they just request you to write more money on transportation or something else.... They use for own purpose a lot of money that come as a grant to the village people. More than that when you write a project they claim to be the authors of those projects. I do not mind them being authors, but then money part is making things complicated... Thus, today people do not believe in governments.

It was noteworthy that whereas village people were concerned about the transparency of some of the processes of local governance, the village head had complete faith in the legality of Documents Three and Four to organize the work of village administration. This may be because village administrators received training at the regional level on how to manage the business of village administration. Thus they
know how to use the rules and regulations provided by the Kyrgyz government and can amend them to fit their village needs. In the eyes of the village head, the Documents constitute law and do not require monitoring because administration complies with the law of the Kyrgyz Republic. The problem is that laws extend beyond the walls of village administration, and meeting the requirements of law on paper does not necessarily mesh with the interests of all who interpret or are subject to it.

8.5.3. Coordinating local level processes with external reporting requirements: The textual mediation of village need

A complex set of relationships is involved first in naming and prioritizing village needs at the local level, and then in accessing and distributing forms of aid to meet them. Local processes are rooted in collective forms of decision-making whose objectives are to seek democratic input into decisions about the needs and priorities of the overall community. Once decisions are made at the local level, the work required to activate them draws village people into complex institutional processes that are coordinated, for the most part, extra-locally. Although on the surface decision-making processes appear to be emphatically locally-driven, over the past two decades development institutions have been training people to identify village needs so that they meet the reporting requirements of international aid organizations. This has influenced the way people have come to 'see' and understand poverty and need in their village.

Returning to my assertion that legal and administrative requirements are only surface manifestations of how relations external to village life intervene in local decision-making processes, I turn to the work of the village social worker, whose duties are to administer and distribute humanitarian aid. In the first place, her credentials appear more concerned with being a good administrator than with the skills normally associated with social work itself. 105

SW: I studied computer engineering at Naryn State University... No I did not study social work. I studied for being a teacher of computer class. But I took sociology class as a student.

105 These days this is not so different from the Canadian case where social workers take several years of schooling to acquire a degree that seems inappropriate to the primarily administrative tasks the job actually entails.
The credential itself is not problematic given that she does not make decisions regarding the provision of humanitarian aid on her own. It is the village Commission that decides who gets what, and, from the point of view of local familiarity and customs, it may actually be better qualified than a credentialed social worker to make determinations of need. This is not the assumption, however, that INGOs make when they train people to make qualified decisions regarding the welfare of village residents. The process for accessing aid begins with a visit to or by the social worker, or those working on her behalf. They gather information and compile it for presentation to the commission who then decide how available funds will be distributed, according to priorities set by the commission. Whereas on the surface this appears to be a locally driven process, a closer look reveals that the commission is not making decisions of its own volition based on locally grounded knowledge about village life. Rather, members have been trained to organize what can be understood as village priorities in the language and specifications of INGOs who train decision-makers to understand and report on local experience according to those terms. The excerpt below illustrates the way local people have been drawn into institutional processes by agencies who have trained them to identify people in need according to ‘indicators of poverty’:

VA: For example we receive help from international organizations such as MerciCorp, ACTED [a French NGO, she said] and others. They come usually with Poverty Reduction Programs. They ask to prove what are the indicators of poverty and the list of people suffering from it. To gather information for NGOs, we organize a commission consisting of people (union reps) from the village, not just from the municipal administration. The commission members visit people in need to see how they live and what help they need, there are people who are disabled, who live alone, too old to come and address their needs. So visiting families helps a lot and we also hear from villages who needs what...
The social worker told us that three years ago (perhaps in the course of qualifying for Poverty Reduction Strategy programs106) a commission was established to visit every family in the village to determine who needed what. As a result, the commission has a pretty good idea of people’s situations, whether they need 'humanitarian aid', or practical help such as wood for cooking or heat in the winter, or in the case of elderly people whose children have left the village to find work, someone to do their laundry. It is noteworthy how the social worker talks about 'humanitarian aid' as a taken-for-granted concept, whereas when she is talking about practical aid she suggests actual instances. At one time, the commission's sense of who needed what would have been determined by local relationships and knowledge. Today the commission's authority to establish who requires aid and how much they will receive is organized according to the taken-for-granted concepts of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers whose conditions of access to 'humanitarian aid' are determined elsewhere, yet coordinate what the commission comes to see and understand as 'poverty' and need for 'humanitarian aid'.

While I did not actually get to attend a commission gathering to see how it works, I was able to determine how it is drawn into institutional processes that operate both locally and extra-locally by piecing together components of the work people do through and for the commission. For instance, according to the social worker

SW: We are not only in charge of distributing humanitarian aid or aid that is available from the village municipality. We actually get quite a lot of aid from different kinds of local NGOs and these usually have their own conditions to meet... in order to distribute humanitarian aid.

106 The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) were initiated in 1999 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to set conditions for debt relief and monetary aid. The PRSPs are intended to encourage governments to take ownership of poverty reduction strategies by closely consulting with the population to develop the plan. In the words of the IMF (2013), "a PRSP contains an assessment of poverty and describes the macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs that a country will pursue over several years to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as external financing needs and the associated sources of financing. [PRSPs] are prepared by governments in low-income countries through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders and external development partners, including the IMF and the World Bank."
Here the social worker not only speaks about her work in terms of the concept ‘humanitarian aid’, but points to the way her knowledge needs to change to meet the conditions set by various NGOs. When it comes to working with humanitarian aid, she is not to ‘know’ according to her own locally informed observations, but rather according to textually-based requirements that direct her to interpret and record what she knows to fit a frame of understanding and action that has been developed elsewhere. As such, perhaps much as in the Western world, the job of the social worker amounts to coordinating people’s lived experiences of need with institutional requirements for the distribution of humanitarian aid.

Part of that coordination involves assisting those who require aid but find institutional processes of access difficult to maneuver. She further explains:

SW: Many people are in need of some form of help. They come to the municipality with complaints if they don’t get their benefits on time. In order to get certain types of social benefits villagers often do not know which documents they are expected to fill. Thus sometimes they come just to receive information on that.

Directing people to the proper document also involves instructing them how to fill out the form so that they ‘qualify’ for aid. In the process of translating their actual lived experience to meet the requirements of a form, the actual circumstances of a person or family in need disappear and both the social worker and aid recipient, regardless of what they know and understand about the local situation, come to talk about and understand village poverty and need according to terms given by discourses of ‘humanitarian aid.’ This is not the only way extra-locally coordinated knowledge circulates in and through the work of the commission.

The textual mediation of village need also enters into the work of the UNDP rep, Jyrgalbek, who explained improvements to the condition of poverty in the village in terms of poverty rates, "5 years ago the poverty rate in the village was 87-90%, now it decreased to 75-80%.” Jyrgalbek was knowledgeable about village statistics. He knew the population of the village, and how to separate internal migrants from that figure, and also what forms of humanitarian aid were available to village residents:
J: These days we get from government gasoline with some discount (4-5 som from 1 litre), pension, and salary for people working in formal sector, sometimes in cold winters we are provided coal with some discount. This season we were provided (3 villages) with 200 ton of coal, the ton of coal was 3000 som. Government also sends some NGOs with stimuli grant. Last year we had, usually stimuli grant is initiated by government. The construction of our club was initiated by stimuli grant.

With respect to the flow of information into the village, it is insightful that while Jyrgalbek had knowledge of the above resources, also knew that 600,000 soms were contributed by the village municipality to assist with reconstruction of the community centre (a UNDP project), and that some of this amount came from "taxes taken from salaries of working people," he was not sure if the government itself had contributed any sum to that amount. Much like the respondent who was unsure whether village deputies receive a salary for their work, it did not appear to be the business of the UNDP rep to know the amount of, or even if, government assistance goes into village projects.

Jyrgalbek has held his position since 2002. He acquired the position through a competition in which five applicants were asked about 50 questions each. A commission was then organized in Naryn city, and attended by a representative of the UNDP, village municipalities, unions and some NGOs. It was through this commission that he was selected to be the local UNDP rep. Part of his training included a program on social mobility, which was brought to the village at some point by the UNDP, and is likely related to his interest in poverty rates. He also indicated an increasing need for the development of skills required to perform a particular kind of reporting and form of accountability:

J: Accounting is such an important skill to learn, not necessarily by studying 5 years at University but through training programs as well. It is useful not just for counting money at bank or somewhere else, but in village as well, in everyday life for farmers and shepherds as well.

This statement indicates how money has entered the village and is reorganizing the way people need to think about and manage their day-to-day lives.

A local representative of an INGO we interviewed in Osh region likewise told us:
applications are filled horribly... sometime people even who run their business, they cannot count... I have one project... he is a blacksmith, he has some problems with math, I mean he knows math but from the list of iron he makes oven, and he cannot tell how many oven he can produce from what amount of iron. He draws a picture and shows me, but he can’t count it, he makes this business for 30 years... Sometimes we ask them... about their profit - for example we talk about financial expense, we ask them to show the total sum extract some other expenses, but they can’t do it how we ask, they do their businesses for a long time. And I have to explain how they should count in a proper way. Some people can’t multiply."

The blacksmith clearly understands his work in terms of a very different relation of production. It is not that he has no knowledge of how many ovens he produces. Rather, his labour has not yet been commodified so he has no need to understand what he produces in terms of abstract numbers. He still understands his work in terms of the use value of concrete products. Here we get a glimpse into the very moment the commodification of labour is accomplished. In order to qualify for assistance, the blacksmith needs to organize his work according to the abstractions of a profit logic that becomes the guiding principle by which he and the funder evaluate both the value of his work and his needs. He will not qualify for funding to produce 'use value', only 'exchange value'. This is what the building of market economy looks like.

Though we did not ask him directly, Jyrgalbek appears to have received training in 'monitoring and evaluation'. This is in all probability one of his responsibilities as local UNDP rep. His position is slightly different than that of a project leader. Some of his work is coordinated by the regional UNDP rep located in Naryn city, who has dealings with, and is accountable to, UNDP headquarters in Bishkek. Jyrgalbek is the point of contact for UNDP projects that come to the village. In the case of the WESA courses we had been invited to observe, the Naryn UNDP rep provided Jyrgalbek with a list of people to notify about the courses. Below are a few instances where traces of monitoring and evaluation appear in Jyrgalbek's work. In the first excerpt, unsolicited, he

107 One thing I remain puzzled about is how people are selected for the courses. In this case it appears the list of potential participants came from outside the village. I am not sure if this is the case with other NGOs, or how the Naryn rep acquired the list to give to Jyrgalbek.
is talking about outcomes of the leatherworks training we had observed two months earlier:

J: But it also created another three job places. Three men started to work with already processed leather and doing small souvenir stuff for school children like bracelets, cell phone bags and the like. Some of them are using leather from their old belts and bags instead of sitting with no job. Although their products are not marketed much, I think it is an opportunity to try something new, make designs on leather and creativity. Projects are usually useful as soon as they take into consideration local context and possibilities in terms of application of those skills in village place, with what is available to us.

This next excerpt speaks to the frustration of projects brought to the village by 'experts' who are more concerned about their own agenda, than what might actually be required at the local level:

J: Programs brought by NGOs are generally strong and real. But there are also examples when NGOs come not to improve something but to implement their projects for the sake of implementing. Once, project implementers came to promote better treatment of environment and clean development. What they did was clean up the garbage from the village (once), and they spent a lot of money for that, but then they left. There were no garbage bins provided, no training on how to recycle even organic garbage. I didn’t understand how what they did matched the purpose of training.

Also evident in this example is the depth of knowledge Jyrgalbek has relative to outside expertise, about sustainable development and the kinds of technologies that would be useful for his village.

Monitoring and evaluation knowledge was most evident in the way Jyrgalbek assessed training programs overall:

J: Some training is implemented once and then they even don’t ask whether we are doing something, they have gone and never came back. This way we can’t work. I think there can be productive work if the same training repeats itself with some variations. Productive work can be reached when after the training, training implementers come and see what is being done and not, why and what can be done to make it
work. Cooperation is needed, we can’t do things alone. At least it would be good to follow once in six months, year, three year and five year, how work is going on and respond to difficulties.

It is ironic here that the UNDP has provided Jyrgalbek with skills to properly monitor and evaluate its own projects, which themselves do not meet the ideals they teach him; i.e., that is, the WESA courses, as one example, are funded for one-time delivery - but ongoing monitoring and evaluation is not built into their funding. Therefore, while monitoring and evaluation discourse appears in the way Jyrgalbek comes to talk about his work, it also helps him to identify shortcomings in the way projects are brought to the village.

I do not, however, want to overstate the influence of ‘monitoring and evaluation’ discourse on what Jyrgalbek sees and understands, especially beyond his reporting work. There is a lot of experiential understanding that comes from living with the consequences of the projects that come to the village where he does his work. Given his success in the competition that awarded him the opportunity to be local UNDP rep, Jyrgalbek was likely university educated during the Soviet era. Thus like many others in the village, he is not understanding the village condition from the point of view of an illiterate or uninformed peasant. Nor does it take a university education to understand how a top-down approach, such as the 'environmental' project, could be construed as a waste of money by village people who are in dire need of practical support for their village. Village people do not need specialized training to understand how their needs fail to be met by ineffective efforts to identify and address them. In fact, they know a lot more than the forms they are required to fill out ask for. Moreover, a respondent from a village in Osh region remarked that identifying needs through democratic governance processes does not guarantee their implementation. True the village head takes decisions made by the commission to the regional governor, who then takes them to the national government. But in the end, it is the amount of budget available at the highest levels of administration that determines what gets funded and in what amounts. The same no doubt applies to the aid provided by international organizations. As a result, for all the democratic input jamaats have to decision-making processes at the local level, final decisions are ultimately made elsewhere, so that in the end jamaats often turn to
their own members to solve problems, or write grants for their community projects with NGOs.

While people may have little faith in the development process overall, they seem to have more faith in NGOs than in government institutional processes as a whole. For the most part, locally operated NGOs at least make an effort to go about their work in ways that are locally comprehensible and seek input from local sources through processes that seem more transparent and less corrupt than those that involve government:

J: As for NGO projects, again not all but many, while implementing the project they do not work only with one person they try to do more transparent work: including people, deciding budget. Who is benefiting from it, and in that sense we benefit from NGOs more than from the government.

Nonetheless, even youth are cynical about participating in projects that are organized in the form of documentary techno-fixes:

Res (b): We can say but solutions will be on papers rather than in reality.

It appears that people at the village level know what works and what does not work, and why, but their input is neither meaningfully sought on its own terms, nor is the long term impact of projects considered vital in the final evaluation of them. This has meant, according to the social worker that:

SW: There is a dependency on NGOs, on local level little is changing.

Little is changing because dependency is not a dialogic relation, at least not when terms of 'need' are mediated textually.

Textual formats do not explicitly constitute prescribed action, rather they establish "the concepts and categories in terms of which what is done can be recognized as an instance or expression of [a] textually authorized procedure" (D. E. Smith, 2006:83). In so doing, they obscure the actualities of everyday life. Relations of dependence are established through a complex of textually-mediated managerial
practices that organize the work practices of people in local sites so that they can be recognized as an instance of that text at different times across multiple sites. In this chapter I have traced back to the workings of textually authorized procedures in people's use of concepts like 'a gender perspective', poverty rates, and humanitarian aid. Once people learn how to talk about and understand what they know and what they do in terms of these concepts, their work practices (i.e., writing grant applications, accounting for funds spent, and so forth) are drawn into a complex of interrelated activities organized by a common set of institutional relations. The institutional relations I am referring to are textually organized. Such relations do not operate dialogically. In a textually organized relation, no matter how many times a text is read, or by how many different people, the text always appears the same. This is because texts function to produce standardized accounts of diverse activities so that they can be professionally managed at a distance, at different times, and across multiple sites. They are designed to mask or hide from view the complexity of dialogic interchanges, not to accommodate them.

To sum up, this chapter is an account of the work processes involved in decision-making in Jerge-Tal village, how this work connects with documentary forms of authority at the village level, and how the work is coordinated with and by the discourses of INGOs. I have described how village decision-making processes, long based on the internal legitimacy of jamaat relations, are being compromised by the training and reporting requirements of external aid providers. Finally, I have shown how a set of relations that extends well beyond the village functions to preclude dialogic exchanges along a chain of activity that links the work of international development agencies, local and national governance processes, and the training of women entrepreneurs.
9. Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The overarching problematic of this study was to understand how initiatives developed by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) come to organize processes of 'development' in a rural region of Kyrgyzstan. I began with two premises: the first was that 'development' could be apprehended both as a concrete institutional process and a set of policies used to hook national economies into the transnational economic organization of capitalism; and second, that concepts such as 'rational planning', 'participatory development', and 'humanitarian aid' are social processes that can be grasped in, and as, people's day-to-day work and the way they come to understand it.

The focus of my investigation was the way development institutions insert managerial practices into processes of rural development such that conceptually produced phenomena like 'gender equality', 'poverty reduction', 'market economy skills training', and 'humanitarian aid' are organized and made measurable along a chain of work activities at the local village level, but are accountable elsewhere. The kind of managerial practices I'm talking about involve fitting local actualities into the officially classifiable terms of international development agencies. When local work practices are organized to accomplish this, the actualities of social life, as lived and understood locally, fail to be adequately represented. What results are disjunctures between the reporting requirements and representations of international aid agencies and the actualities they stand in for at the level of local experience and project accountability. My aim was to show how work processes are drawn into and coordinated by a common set of relations that, whether intentional or not, preclude dialogic interchanges across a sequence of interrelated activities that link my own academic work, the institutions and work practices of development workers (local and international), the work of local and national governments, and the work of women entrepreneurs in local sites where 'development' happens.
I identified a number of disjunctures between the promise of opportunity and the realization of that promise for women entrepreneurs in Jerge-Tal village. Some of these can be explained by incomplete or inadequate training programs; for instance, teaching new sewing techniques using modern sewing machines, but having to use old patterns to teach and learn the new skills; or providing hands-on training for leather handicraft work, rather than beginning with instruction and equipment for curing hides that are locally abundant and that could be used for making the handicrafts; or delivering three-day courses to teach skills, but without follow-up built in to determine if this was enough time to learn the new skills, or to assess whether or not, or how, the training led to market economy development.

In addition to limitations of the training programs themselves, problematic factors included: ineffective coordination of training programs with key stakeholders needed to promote the effort (for instance, the mayor of Naryn, and the Ayl bank); the reluctance or distrust of local consumers to support local market economy initiatives (i.e., calling into question the producer’s ability to ensure the safety of dairy processing and salads produced for market); and limitations posed by harsh winter weather conditions, poor roads for transporting goods, inadequate technology and equipment, and the cost and inefficiency of electricity. It is little wonder that R2 eje, HD, and Jyrgalbek were unsure whether the courses had any impact.

The women we interviewed were able to incorporate diverse skills and applications to both entrepreneurial work and local village needs. They had good fashion sense and knowledge of the potential marketability of the products they were learning to make, including the marketability of traditional designs. They were conscious of local people’s capacity to pay and the value of high standards of service. Even highschool girls knew what was required to be competitive (i.e., education, skills, a market for handicrafts). Husbands and families seemed generally supportive of women’s participation in training courses and entrepreneurial activities. Support did not, however, involve a reordering of household duties in the home. Women continue to prioritize their responsibilities at home after they learn entrepreneurial skills. This may, in part, explain family and community support, but is inconsistent with market economy principles that prioritize competition and growth. This disjuncture sets up a tension that could potentially disrupt community and family relations. However, people seem to have
long ago realized that the emphasis on individual effort and self-reliance takes attention away from problems that are much larger than any individual or community can address by themselves.

Some of the women have been participating in training programs for the past 10 years. At first glance I questioned why others were not being chosen to participate instead. A closer look revealed that some women were chosen because they were skilled teachers. One of Aikokul’s early observations may be more telling. She remarked that some of the women seemed to be taking the courses more as something interesting to do for a few days, some relief from the daily routine of village life, than to develop market economy skills (Aikokul’s field notes, November, 2010). I could understand why this might be so. Ten years ago women may have enthusiastically engaged in entrepreneurial skills training. Initially there may have been much hope about the potential of a newly independent state, and how women’s participation in an emerging market economy would bring prosperity to the village. Over the past decade the women have seen the promise of opportunity and the realization of it frustrated by: the location of women entrepreneurs in a highly competitive global economy; the coordination of local efforts to the agenda of international development institutions instead of one of their own design; and a corrupt and incoherently organized state, subject, in many ways, to the same processes of development that women entrepreneurs are caught up in. I imagine the promise looks pretty empty 10 years later, and not because they lack effort, imagination, skill or knowledge. Thus they make the best of the programs that come to them. In many cases training programs merely give the appearance that something is being done – and local people know it. Self-reliance has come to mean making the best of whatever comes to them and developing skills that can be used to enhance their homes or keep them busy - something interesting to do for a few days? Why not?

I want to reiterate that the inadequacy of training programs is neither a reflection on WESA’s efforts, nor on the sincerity of their purpose. Over the course of the year I spent in Kyrgyzstan I had several opportunities to attend WESA functions and met many of their highly qualified staff. I have no doubt that Gulnara Baimambetova, Erke and their colleagues at WESA are committed to improving the condition of women's lives in rural villages. They have good reason to take pride in the courses they have developed
and the comprehensive approach they take to ensure that people receive adequate training to establish entrepreneurial enterprises. In accordance with the requirements of participatory development processes, WESA staff conduct consultations at the village level in advance of delivering training programs to determine the needs, interests and aspirations of potential women entrepreneurs. They then prepare a training program for the courses desired. This involves employing instructors with skilled expertise, and researching the kinds of regulations (health, taxation, and the like) participants will need to know and comply with in order to set up a business. Technically, WESA, like the women entrepreneurs they train, follow all the required protocols of participatory processes. Their training staff are also more than qualified to teach the skills required.

The problem is that the work of local NGOs like WESA is embedded in a broader project of developing market economies that draws Kyrgyzstan and its peoples into transnational political and economic relations. Within those relations, text-based credentials are becoming increasingly important for establishing legitimacy. In addition, the scope, imagination, and follow-up of training programs for women entrepreneurs are largely decided and constrained by the agendas and reporting requirements of international development funders whose work is likewise constrained by agendas and reporting requirements not of their own making. WESA staff, like the villages and entrepreneurs they seek to help, rely on funding that is never quite adequate to deliver the kind of programming they would like to deliver, yet know is required. It is frustrating for them that their training programs are not made available to all women who want to learn new skills and who would benefit in some way from them (WESA meeting notes, November 16, 2010).

NGOs, women entrepreneurs, and the agencies that fund them are hooked into institutional complexes that can be understood in terms of what Michael Hathaway (2010) refers to as transnational work. He applies the concept to account for how the local work processes of a multiplicity of agents are connected to relationships, regulations and supply chains that change over time. The concept of transnational work is useful for bringing into view the complex relations that local work processes are

\[108\] Gulnara told me she has heard from women who received WESA's training certificates, that these have been invaluable when they go to seek work in Russia and Kazakhstan.
embedded in and connected to, but, as Hathaway explains, it does not account for how links are formed, maintained and transformed. Institutional ethnography begins with the premise of transnational work, but rather than seeking to explain how links are formed, maintained and transformed, it seeks to explain how the components of transnational work come to be organized by a common set of relations.

Returning to Griffith and Smith's study (2004) wherein they found that conceptions built into their interview strategies presupposed a mothering discourse that shaped the kinds of stories that were told, they discovered how a particular orientation of priorities came to mediate a single version of what could be known. The problem became visible when they analyzed an interview dialogue in which the respondent had simply not responded to what they, as interviewers, were taking for granted. They identified the problem as a disjuncture between what they were able to ask and what was actually known. Griffith and Smith learned that by presupposing a mothering discourse at the outset, they had precluded a process through which dialogic learning could occur. This same dynamic was at work in the relations that organized Ainoura Sagynbaeva's efforts to establish and promote a 'new kind' of sociology department in Kyrgyzstan. What she had initially conceptualized as a 'new Soviet-American sociology' was precluded by the pragmatic demands of having to coordinate with the standardized, degree-granting academic discipline of American and British models of sociology education. This dynamic also organized the way I came to write this dissertation, most perceptibly in the template I was required to use for its presentation, and the standardized styles within the template. The dynamic not only organized the format, but also the kind of language I used. There is a particular way that feminists and institutional ethnographers express themselves in academic writing. I used this language so that my work would appeal to this audience. However, in doing so I may have irritated other audiences who are accustomed to reading things expressed differently. My text editor initially suggested corrections whenever he came across this kind of language. Later, when he realized that I was speaking a particular kind of 'jargon' his notations were written differently. Processes of consultation and participation are clearly at work in all three of these examples. Griffith and Smith consulted with mothers to learn about their relationship to their children's schooling; Sagynbaeva consulted with others in the university as she prepared her promotional brochures; and I consulted with the template
assistant about how to properly fit my work into the template, and with my editor about how to phrase things so that they were grammatically correct.

Returning to training programs for women entrepreneurs, the dynamic I have been talking about also organizes the consultation and participation processes of international development work. Consultation and participation takes place at various points along the chain of activities that connects the local work practices of NGOs, government bodies, and women entrepreneurs to work practices at the headquarters of development institutions. The problem is that no matter where we look in the chain, the work practices that organize consultation and participation are always grounded in somebody else's interests (Griffith & Smith, Forthcoming 2014); that is, the interviewer, the university, the library that will publish my work, an institutional budget line or report, and so on. However, 'somebody else' can never quite be identified. We can find traces of 'somebody else' and their interests in local work practices and the managerial technologies used to organize them, but in the end, the 'who' of accountability appears as a taken-for-granted process. The process is the product of a form of intellectual colonization that operates to discipline work practices along a chain of activity organized to preclude dialogic interchanges. What we need to ask is: What is the purpose of processes of consultation and participation? How do work practices become disciplined as a result of them? What forms of consensus building are they complicit in? What interests do they actually serve?

Transformation occurs regardless of intentions -- and it occurs not as a concept but as a social relation that I have shown can be apprehended in the way that local work practices are coordinated to meet the requirements and specifications of institutional practices and professional discourses developed elsewhere. This has implications for both local and extra-local actors. My account of the more implicit relations that organize training for women entrepreneurs contributes to better understanding how processes of 'development' operate. More research of this kind is needed to understand how processes of development can be organized to effectively empower all actors involved. By effectively empower, I mean beginning with an understanding that accounts for the underlying bases of empowerment, the nature of what is actually being empowered, and the political outcomes made possible, dismissed, or precluded at the nexus of development, social transformation and the training of women entrepreneurs in rural
Kyrgyzstan, as elsewhere. The insights I have provided offer a starting point for developing a body of knowledge about local development processes that is empirically informed, politically useful, and at least to some extent, locally produced. This kind of knowledge is politically useful to the local peoples who have contributed to it, but also to the institutions that study and serve them (or fail to serve them), and those seeking to better specify what concepts like colonization, capitalism, and transformation mean in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz context.
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Appendix A.

Early glimpses of disjuncture in work with women entrepreneurs in rural Kyrgyzstan, December, 2008

Below is a summary of fieldnotes taken from my initial visit to Kyrgyzstan (Fieldnotes, December, 2008) which elucidates, in part, what I encountered in the field and suggests why women entrepreneurs are a particularly salient focus for examining the nexus of crisis, transformation and 'development' in rural Kyrgyzstan.

In December 2008, Annie McKitrick and I arrived in Bishkek in time to attend the third day of a Business Course for Women Entrepreneurs sponsored by WESA. Among participants of the course were: two microcredit providers, a trainer from the Rural Advisory of Kyrgyzstan, a farmer/bridegown maker, a woman assisting the Legal Agency of Rural Citizens, a hairdresser and her daughter, Zinaida Aliyeva from the Rural Development Fund (also a former Partnership II grant recipient), Gulnara Kudabaeva – an economist from the Ministry of Education and Science, a pharmacy owner from the Issyk-Kul region, and a curtain maker. The focus of the morning sessions was on developing a business plan. A good business plan, participants were told, statistically leads to less chance of bankruptcy and greater chance of success, access to business loans, marketing research in advance of starting the business, consideration of the particular strength of a business proposal, the writing of an effective resume, and negotiation of contracts to ensure a business idea will be viable once it gets going.

Presentations that morning also provided information about new legislation regarding taxation, social funds, and pensions in Kyrgyzstan. It seemed that taxation in Bishkek differs from that in other regions – new land and property taxes have created problems for small business owners – some seem to be paying considerably less than others without any policy documents in place to explain why. We also learned of problems with importing in a country heavily dependent on imports. Given Kyrgyzstan’s location, imports must cross many borders. Transportation costs are high and corruption is rampant in this sector. Other issues raised were microcredit and problems urban settlers have with accessing loans and services once they arrive in the city. The root of the problem appears to lie in registration – since rural people are unable to register as residents or businesses in Bishkek they do not have access to even the minimal social services available to residents – this problem was a recurring theme at other events we attended. At the close of the morning sessions each participant gave a presentation about their work and the successes and problems they were having. We were surprised to find that social enterprise and Social Economy (though not identified that way in Kyrgyzstan) were already alive and vibrant concepts here. Annie and I made our presentations in the afternoon. We emphasized the value of the social economy work already being done and the importance of such work for Kyrgyzstan’s economy. Participants already understood how the work they do can have an impact (positive and negative) on their local communities and economies. My introduction of ‘fair trade’ stirred some very excited discussion about the value of ‘branding’ the social justice work that goes into producing village crafts. We had brought samples of coffee and T-shirts that identified the village and cooperative where these products had been produced, and...
explained the value-added component that recognizing efforts being made to support local economies can have in Northern markets. It was suggested that some training about fair trade and certification might help producers (craft and agricultural) to overcome some of the problems with corruption they encounter when bringing their products to market. I was intrigued by the way ‘fair trade’ was translated to ‘trade with a cause’, a wording I believe opens up much more directly the agenda of trade practices and who they intend to benefit.

The next day we drove to a village in the Panfilov district with Gulnara, one of her associates, and Erka Podkuiiko, the trainer from the Rural Advisory we had met at the WESA workshop. We met with a group of women who had been working together to assist vulnerable village women by implementing numerous projects (both for profit and non-profit) over the last 12 years. The women had acquired several small grants over the years that have benefitted not only the women, but also the communities they live in. They have helped to rebuild the school, brought in irrigation for vegetable gardens, and rehabilitated the local healthcare centre. We learned that while some of their efforts had been successful (a small grant obtained for the purchase of 7 goats which now number 60), others had failed. The women had been provided with equipment (an oven to bake bread, a cream separator and a wrapped candy maker) and training, but they had not been informed that permits (license, health regulations, etc.) were required for the commercial sale of their goods. As a result many of their enterprises had been shut down. Gulnara and her team were there to explain how WESA could assist with training that would help the women acquire the necessary permits, and also to provide information about other courses the women might benefit from. I began to better understand the work WESA does, and also why grant funding provided without comprehensive training specific to local traditions and regulations might produce less than desired outcomes. For my part, I introduced the notion of ‘fair trade’ to the group and passed around the labelled coffee and t-shirt samples we had brought along. The group runs a for-profit sewing workshop, and I felt that if the other projects they had begun (bread-baking, candy making) get off the ground they could benefit from labelling that informs consumers that their community benefits from the purchases they make. The only information currently provided on craft products is a price penned on a tiny brown tag pinned on the item.

Our second village visit was to Bokonbaevo in the Issyk-Kul region. We visited the Golden Thimble, a women’s felt-making cooperative operated by Janyl Baisheva whom we had met at Marie Campbell’s home a couple of weeks earlier. The Issyk-Kul region, judging by the condition of homes along the road, seemed better off than the Panfilov region, despite the closure of numerous post-Soviet factories and enterprises our driver had pointed out to us during the long drive up. We speculated that the nearby Canadian owned gold mine may have helped but were told that the gold mine was not making the hoped for contributions to the local or national Kyrgyz economy.109 We learned that power in this region is only available from 8:00 a.m. to noon, and then from 5:00 p.m. to

109 The mine reportedly generates 10 percent of Kyrgyzstan’s GDP, but it also generates significant environmental and social threats. Public protests and tense government negotiations with the Centerra owned Kumtor mine feature frequently as news stories on the local news listserv I subscribe to, especially during the past year as the new government is being pressured locally to nationalize the mine.
11:00 p.m. Nonetheless, Janyl told us, people in the region worked hard to find ways to help themselves, and sheep and gardens were part of their success. The importance of sheep to the local economy was visible everywhere – sheep were not only found in the numerous pastures we passed, but also in the backyards of village houses. Mutton was a favourite staple food (almost everywhere we went) and the wool in this region is used for making felt. Annie and I got to observe part of the chain of work involved in making felt slippers.\textsuperscript{110} Janyl’s cooperative seemed much more market savvy than the one we had visited in the Panfilov district. She showed us, for instance, the frame for a yurt they set up in the summer to attract tourists. We shared with her some advice about marketing ‘trade with a cause’ on Golden Thimble labels for the Canadian market (I had seen the familiar plain brown tag on their products at a Christmas craft fair I had visited earlier on in Victoria).

Back in Bishkek we were invited by Ms. Kudabaeva, the economist from the Ministry of Education and Science whom we met at the WESA workshop, to make a presentation at a regional conference hosted by the Academy of Management under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. In attendance were delegates from Belarus, Uzbekistan and other regions of Central Asia who were meeting to discuss issues of governance and public administration. The session we attended dealt particularly with issues of local self-governance and public administration. An interpreter was present to explain some of the proceedings to us. We learned of critical issues with the practice of governance and the provision of social services as countries in the region struggled to evolve systems of democratic local governance. There were problems with lack of education of local officials and governing bodies and thus a lack of understanding of the constitution in regards to the role and function of elected bodies. Ms. Kudabaeva, in concert with the UNDP, had developed five different courses designed specifically to train local councillors about their role and how they could use it to develop and improve social services, and also how a legal framework can be used to their advantage. Annie presented on the Social Economy in Canada explaining how government procurement policies have been influenced to support local social enterprises and ‘fair trade’ in Canada. The ensuing discussion concluded that much work would need to be done in the area of social economy promotion and education before this idea could be made popular in Kyrgyzstan – though it was agreed that it was an important consideration. We were invited to join the Director of the Academy for lunch – he was keenly interested in negotiating a University/Academy partnership. We agreed to investigate possibilities for such a partnership with the University of Victoria upon our return to Canada.

\textsuperscript{110} I made a return visit in 2011 shortly before I returned home from my fieldwork during which I was able to observe how they process raw wool to make felt.
Appendix B.

WESA: Notes from meeting, October 28, 2010

After speaking at length with Gulnara, the following was decided. I will prepare a research proposal according to what we talked about today and then we will meet with Gulnara on Friday, November 5 to talk about/finalize it [possible donors to approach are Soros, OSCE, EU, HIVOS - I am also going to ask her about SIDA, and UNESCO - has a program called 'education for all']

Research objectives are twofold:
1. To investigate a ‘before and after’ case study of two beneficiaries of WESA’s training programs - one in Naryn and one in Jalal-Abad oblast. These people have only recently received the training and much can be learned from the kinds of changes they have experienced (and also if there is a need for ongoing supports to assure long-term success). Some questions to consider:
   1. What was the effect on production - quality? increase? diversity? design improvements?
   2. What was the effect on consumption? demand for products?
   3. In what ways has their market expanded? Are they exporting beyond their region now?
   4. To what extent have incomes improved?
   5. How many new jobs have been created as a result?

Basically, we will demonstrate statistically the positive impact of WESA training programs on these kinds of variables.

2. To provide an analysis of the effectiveness of WESA’s training program as a model for adult education, practical skills training, and sustainable development (especially for women in remote rural regions) that we can present as a set of recommendations to a Round Table of relevant Government ministries, Donors and other NGOs. The objective is to convince the government of the value of integrating WESA courses into its economic development programs (assist the government with developing a system of education that promotes sustainable development in regions that have very diverse needs)

Outline for Proposal [steps 1-7 are my responsibility]

1. Description of problem prior to WESA intervention
2. Discuss the essence of WESA’s work
3. Objective of the project
4. Methodology/objectives of the research
5. Step-by-step plan of activities
6. Sampling - which oblasts?
7. Expected results

8. Budget [this is Gulnara's piece of the proposal] divided into 5 areas: Research Assistants; Translators (Kyrgyz)/Transcribers; WESA management; travel costs, operating costs - we will be asking for 70% funding from Donors, WESA will provide 30% in kind (technical assistance, office space, etc.)
Appendix C.

Project Proposal (для+продок): English and Russian Versions

English Translation

Research topic:
Non-formal adult education. Opportunities, prospects and obstacles for women and youth for retraining and business skills development in Kyrgyz Republic

Description of problem:
Despite that fact that Kyrgyzstan has introduced market economy principles and formation of sustainable groups of medium and large business enterprises, economic potential and opportunities for the rural economy is not developed appropriately. The reasons are:

• Limited access to economic resources and information;
• Lack of economic knowledge and practical business skills;
• Administrative barriers in particular field;
• Lack of assistance from local authorities and the immaturity of Civil Society Organizations;
• The lack of relationship between actors;

These and other factors strictly restrict the development of economic initiatives in rural areas and force them to become a part of informal business.

The central problem is a weak system of training and professional development of women entrepreneurs. Existing educational programs for adults are not adapted for the needs of current labor market. Previously, the main focus was on the theoretical basics of entrepreneurship, while the least attention was paid to the practical implementation of attained knowledge, which increasingly do not follow the reality.

Purposes of studying:

• Identify obstacles in non-formal adult education
• Opportunities, prospects and obstacles for women and youth for retraining and skills development
• Development of recommendations for Kyrgyz Government / ministry through situational analysis and valuation
Objectives:

Expected results:

After analysis of the specific needs and concerns of the target group, according to selected regions, WESA will develop a strategy of supporting model and the widespread introduction of non-formal adult education. The project will aim on effective tools (training and counseling, mini equipment and tools supplement, access to micro-credits, psychological and business support) in order to sustain in formation of new mini-enterprises and help them during the most vulnerable period.

Objects of studying:

- Economically active and creative rural residents (with a focus on women and youth)
- Local authorities
- Local Civil Society Organizations
- Rural communities in selected locations of the south and north parts of Kyrgyz Republic
- Final beneficiaries - rural communities in selected regions.

Key research questions:

Methodology:

Plan of Action:

Place of study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Focus groups conducted</th>
<th>Number of beneficiaries</th>
<th>Expert interviewing</th>
<th>Number of experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The importance and necessity of this study:

Team of project:
Profile of the Organization

*Previous experience:*

The "Women Entrepreneurs Support Association" (WESA) public union unites active, initiative women of Kyrgyzstan of all ages to develop the capacity of women in small and medium business, to support their private business initiatives, to provide information, to give them knowledge and skills on market economy, to protect their interests and rights. WESA proclaims equal access to economic resources such as land, property ownership, credit, information resources and supports the competitive capable women in the labor market through practical retraining courses. WESA has already experienced conduction of practical trainings awarding both men and women with the opportunities to organize and operates a business. For detailed information about courses and activities of WESA visit web site: www.wesa.kg

Significant activity of the Association is to conduct research on various aspects of social and economic life. Research conducts by independent researchers - experts in the gender studies field, sociology, economics and other fields.

Below is a list of research projects conducted by the Association:

- Business administrative barriers in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. CIPE
- Monitoring of rural women needs in Kyrgyzstan. UNIFEM
- Access of women from Chui region to economic resources
- Economic and legal issues of border residents of Batken region of Kyrgyzstan

Detailed information of WESA activity: www.wesa.kg

**Russian Version**

Описание проблемы:

Несмотря на то, что в Кыргызстане внедряются принципы рыночной экономики и образовывается группа устойчивых средних и крупных бизнес предприятий, экономический потенциал и возможности сельской экономики не достаточно развиты. Причинами является: ограниченный доступ к экономическим ресурсам и информации, нехватка экономических знаний и навыков ведения бизнеса, административные барьеры на местах, отсутствие поддержки со стороны местных органов власти и незрелость Организаций Гражданского Общества, отсутствие взаимосвязи между акторами. Эти и другие факторы серьезно ограничивают развитие экономических инициатив сельских жителей и подталкивают к уходу в неформальный бизнес.

Немаловажной проблемой является слабая система переобучения и повышения профессиональной квалификации женщин предпринимателей. Имеющиеся обучающие программы для взрослого населения не адаптированы к потребностям рынка труда. Основное внимание уделялось теоретическим основам предпринимательства, при этом, меньше всего внимания уделялось таким аспектам, как практическое закрепление полученных знаний, которые все более и более отстают от реальности.
Цель исследования: Выявление препятствий в системе неформального обучения взрослого населения. Возможности, перспективы и препятствия women's и молодежь к переобучению и повышения профессиональной квалификации.

Разработка рекомендаций для Правительства / министерства путем проведения ситуационного анализа и оценки.

Задачи:

Тема исследования « Система неформального обучения взрослого населения. Возможности, перспективы и препятствия women's и молодежь к переобучению и повышения профессиональной квалификации. 

Ожидаемые результаты:

После оценки специфических потребностей и проблем целевой группы отобранных регионов, WESA разработает стратегию и модель поддержки и широкого внедрения системы неформального обучения взрослого населения. Проект разработает эффективные инструменты (обучение и предоставление консультаций, обеспечение мини оборудованием и инструментами, обеспечение доступа к микро-кредитованию, психологической поддержке, сопровождение бизнеса ,и.тд) для оказания содействия в стартах новых мини предприятий и помогая им в период когда они наиболее уязвимые.

Объекты исследования:

Экономически активные и инициативные сельские жители, (с фокусом на женщин на молодежь)

Местные органы власти

Местные ОГО (организации гражданского общества)

Сельские сообщества в отобранных местах на Юге и севере страны.

Конечные бенефициары - все сельское сообщество в отобранных регионах.

Предмет исследования

Основные вопросы исследования

Методология исследования
Основные этапы (шаги) реализации проекта

Место проведения исследования:

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<th>№</th>
<th>Регион</th>
<th>Проведение фокус-группы</th>
<th>Кол-во бенефициариев</th>
<th>Проведение экспертных интервью</th>
<th>Количество экспертов</th>
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Значимость и необходимость данного исследования

Команда исполнителей:

Ожидаемые результаты:

ПРОФАЙЛ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ, ПРЕДЫДУЩИЙ ОПЫТ
Общественное объединение «Ассоциация в поддержку женщин-предпринимателей Кыргызстана» (далее – WESA) предоставляет экспертные и консультационные услуги для членов и клиентов Ассоциации, оказывает содействие равному доступу к экономическим ресурсам: земле, имущественной собственности, кредитам, обучающему - информационным ресурсам и оказывает поддержку конкурентоспособности женщин на рынке труда путем переобучения и повышения квалификации. Практические курсы WESA уже имеют определенную известность в нашей стране, как стартовая площадка для начинающих предпринимателей, как для женщин, так и мужчин . Подробную информацию о курсах и деятельности WESA можете посмотреть в нашем веб-сайте по адресу: www.wesa.kg

Важным направлением деятельности Ассоциации является проведение исследований по различным направлениям социально –экономической жизни страны. Исследования проводятся независимыми исследователями – специалистами в области гендера, социологии, экономики и других отраслях. Ниже представлен список исследовательских проектов, выполненных Ассоциацией:

Административные барьеры бизнеса в КР и ЦА. CIPE
Оценка потребностей и нужд сельских женщин Кыргызстана. ЮНИФЕМ
Доступ сельских женщин Чуйской области к экономическим ресурсам
Экономические и правовые проблемы жителей приграничных районов Баткенской области Кыргызстана

Подробную информацию о деятельности WESA можете посмотреть в нашем веб-сайте по адресу: www.wesa.kg
Appendix D.

WESA Grant Application I:
Draft 2, November 2010

Title of Study:
Women Entrepreneur Support Association (WESA): A Case Study of Adult Education Training for Sustainable Development in Kyrgyzstan

Project Background and Research Partners

Our research partnership began with a project entitled Women’s NGOs in Kyrgyzstan: International Funding and the Social Organization of Gender (principal investigator Dr. Marie Campbell) during which an invitation was extended to Gulnara Baimambetova, chair of the Kyrgyz NGO, Women Entrepreneur Support Association (WESA) to attend the Canadian Community Economic Development Network’s national meeting in May, 2008. A reciprocal visit to Kyrgyzstan was organized in December, 2008 for Debbie Dergousoff (second research partner) and Annie McKitrick (representing the Canadian Social Economy Hub) to observe some of the work WESA was doing to enhance community economic development. Debbie Dergousoff is a PhD student in Sociology at Simon Fraser University in Canada. In addition to the project named above Debbie spent 4 years as a Research Assistant at the British Columbia Institute for Cooperative Studies where she organized an Ethical Purchasing Forum bringing together practitioners, community groups and politicians in an effort to enhance ethical trade in the Victoria region. She has presented papers at the annual Congress for Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada, and has shared her research at conferences of the International Centre of Research and Information on Public and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC) in both Canada and Sweden. Debbie is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the American University of Central Asia. She will bring to the project support from the Sociology Department who can advise her about the local scene, and who will also provide student assistants to help with various aspects of the research. Gulnara’s NGO, WESA, works with partners from local authorities and public organizations to design training courses that provide locally-adapted instruction to assist women with starting and operating small scale social enterprises in baking, curtain design, needlework, hair-styling, fruit, vegetable and dairy processing, and others. WESA’s courses, available to beginner and experienced entrepreneurs of all ages, are especially invaluable to middle-aged and older women living in remote agricultural areas where few economic opportunities exist. The aim of our project is to assist the government with developing a system of education that promotes sustainable development in rural regions with diverse needs.

Research Objectives

The work done by WESA involves manoeuvring awkwardly functioning regulating bodies, people’s lack of knowledge about legal rights and obligations, a general lack of knowledge about market economy processes and a general lack of trust among people
and of institutions due to all of the foregoing. Poverty is widespread among women in both urban and rural areas of Kyrgyzstan where jobs once dependent on Soviet provision of social infrastructure have been replaced by market economy processes. Many women are employed in the informal economy where they neither register their businesses nor pay taxes due to lack of knowledge about these processes. WESA’s training programs are aimed at assisting entrepreneurs toward self-sustainability in a market economy. Both men and women have benefitted from the programs, although most of the craft, agricultural and food products of Kyrgyzstan are produced by women. Given high levels of inequality and poverty rates in the Central Asian region, equitable institution building is of utmost importance to the future development of this region. Thus our research objectives are twofold:

1. To generate a ‘before and after’ account of two current beneficiaries of WESA’s training programs - one in the mountainous region of Naryn oblast and the other in Jalal-Abad on the north-eastern end of the Ferghana Valley. The case of Jalal-Abad is especially important given the high need for training and economic revitalization following the tragic events of last June in this region [insert some poverty/ unemployment statistics from these regions] These two very different regions have been chosen: a) to demonstrate WESA’s ability to adapt their training programs to suit people from very different regions with very diverse needs; and b) since the people at these sites have only recently received their training much can be learned from the immediate changes to their circumstances and the kinds of ongoing supports they may need to ensure their long term success. This study will provide valuable empirical information about the way adult education programs can function to promote sustainable development in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Our investigation will consider improvements to: (1) production - quality, quantity, diversity, design; (2) incomes; (3) job creation; (4) consumer demand; and (5) market expansion – local and/or export.

2. To provide an analysis of the effectiveness of WESA’s training programs as a model for adult education, practical skills training, and sustainable development, especially for women in remote rural regions, and those living in high crisis areas. WESA recently began to work in Osh oblast where there is also a high need for training and assistance following the events of last June. Our research aims to explicate the processes by which WESA is able to effectively adapt their courses to local needs in diverse locales. Our analysis will inform a recommendation we aim to bring to a Round Table of relevant government ministries, donors, and NGOs to integrate WESA’s training courses into government economic development programs.

**Methodology**

Institutional ethnography (IE) is a method of inquiry developed by Dorothy Smith, as a project of empirical inquiry wherein ‘institution’ refers not to a particular type of organization, but rather to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place in multiple sites. IE is concerned with the way documentary forms of knowledge (training manuals, reporting requirements, standards, etc.) mediate the linking and coordinating of activities and work processes within and across diverse sites. An IE analysis does not test a researcher’s hypothesis or generate a new theory but rather aims to explicate the social organization of people’s day-to-day lived experiences, in the case of our research, those processes that WESA training programs set into motion to make sustainable economic activity possible in diverse rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Focus group and indepth interviews will be conducted in Naryn and Jalal-Abad at the end of November in
order to: (1) develop an analysis and evaluation of a WESA training program in action; and (2) to map out the diverse institutional processes which organize, govern, and regulate the activity of entrepreneurial women to gain an understanding of the diversity of needs and interests in local sites and how WESA adapts its training programs to accommodate these.

Plan of Action

Interviews will be done at the end of November. Three students from the Sociology Department at the American University of Central Asia will be hired to assist with translation, interviewing, and data analysis. Interview transcription and data analysis is to be completed by the end of February, with a final report and recommendations ready for presentation to a Round Table by the beginning of April.

Expected Results

This research promises: to significantly increase understanding of the dynamics involved in developing locally-appropriate training programs for sustainable development initiatives in Kyrgyzstan; to train AUCA students in qualitative research methods and sustainable development work; and most importantly, to offer a newly formed government looking for innovative new ways to address unemployment and economic hardship in Kyrgyzstan with a plan for developing a system of adult education that promotes sustainable development in rural regions with diverse needs, but that can also be adapted to suit urban areas.
Appendix E.

WESA Grant Application II:
Draft 3, December, 2010

Rebuilding rural economies through a comprehensive program of informal adult education: Opportunities, prospects and obstacles for women and youth in the Kyrgyz Republic

Project Description

The goal of our research is to develop a model for the widespread introduction of informal adult education programs for women and youth that will help foster participation, cooperation and sustainable community economic development in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. By informal adult education we mean the provision of training and skills development by professionals outside of formal education systems. The purpose of our research is to identify obstacles to efficient delivery of informal adult education in diverse rural regions, and to identify opportunities and prospects for delivery of a more comprehensive program of training and skills development than existing programs currently offer. Our objective is to use this model to present a set of recommendations to the Kyrgyz Government and relevant ministries outlining the prospects and limitations of implementing a comprehensive system of informal adult education in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan.

This research promises to significantly increase understanding of the dynamics involved in developing locally-appropriate training programs for sustainable development initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, but more importantly to offer a newly formed government looking for innovative ways to address unemployment and economic hardship in Kyrgyzstan with a plan for developing a system of adult education that promotes sustainable development in rural regions with diverse needs, but that may also be adapted to adult education in urban areas.

Background Information/Statement of Problem

The aim of our research is to develop a system of informal adult education that will encourage sustainable development in regions of Kyrgyzstan characterized by diverse needs. By informal adult education we mean the provision of training and skills development by professionals outside of formal education systems. Poverty is widespread in the Kyrgyz Republic, particularly among women whose jobs once depended on Soviet provision of social infrastructure, and youth who lack the knowledge and skills to viably participate in market economy processes. While Kyrgyzstan’s transition to a market economy has seen the development of sustainable small, medium and large enterprises in urban centres, the economic potential and opportunities of the rural economy have scarcely seen any development at all. There are many reasons for this: limited access to economic resources and information; lack of economic knowledge and practical business skills; administrative barriers at various levels; lack of assistance from local authorities; immaturity of Civil Society Organizations; and a general lack of
relationships among key players. These and other factors have meant limited development of economic initiatives in rural areas where women are marginalized to the insecure and unpredictable realm of informal economy, and youth are leaving to look for opportunities in the cities or as migrant labor in surrounding countries.

Our preliminary research has identified four problems with the delivery of existing youth and adult education programs:

- They are not very well adapted to the needs of the current labor market or to the diversity of community needs in rural Kyrgyzstan where social economy may be a more locally appropriate starting point than ‘market skills development’ per se.
- Training and professional development programs for women entrepreneurs have tended to focus on the theoretical basics of entrepreneurship without giving adequate attention to the practical implementation of knowledge and skills.
- Where practical skills training has been provided it has not been accompanied by the timely provision of equipment and resources needed to carry those skills forward into economic activity.
- The social exclusion of would-be recipients because training and professional development programs have not been universally accessible in the regions or villages where they are offered.

In the course of putting together this proposal Gulnara Baimambetova, initiator of this project, had occasion to meet with H. K. Zholdosheva from the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Migration. He proposed cooperation with the project as the government is very much in need of the kind of information this research will provide.

**Project Details**

*Goals and Objectives*

The goal of our research is to develop a model for the widespread introduction of informal adult education programs for women and youth that will help foster participation, cooperation and sustainable community economic development in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Our research objectives are threefold:

- To identify obstacles to efficient delivery of informal adult education in diverse rural regions.
- To identify opportunities and prospects for comprehensive delivery of training and skills development for women and youth in these regions.
- To develop a set of recommendations for the Kyrgyz Government and relevant ministries by applying an institutional ethnography to understand the prospects and limitations of a comprehensive model for informal adult education in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan.

This research promises to significantly increase understanding of the dynamics involved in developing locally-appropriate training programs for sustainable development initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, but more importantly to offer a newly formed government looking for innovative new ways to address unemployment and economic hardship in Kyrgyzstan with a plan for developing a system of adult education that promotes sustainable development in rural regions with diverse needs, but that may also be adapted to adult education in urban areas.
**Research Subjects**

This project will involve input from rural communities in both southern and northern regions of the Kyrgyz Republic, namely Naryn, Osh and Chui oblasts. Our research will involve consultation with the following groups in selected villages from these regions:

- Economically active and creative rural residents (with a focus on women and youth)
- Residents who were excluded from previous training programs in their region
- Local authorities and NGOs
- Local Civil Society Organizations
- Beneficiaries of former training programs
- Providers of training programs

We found that these groups expressed a strong interest in providing data and input to our project during a preliminary research trip to Naryn region in November 2010. WESA has been working with groups in the Osh region where a comprehensive informal adult education system would be of tremendous benefit to the rebuilding efforts going on there. The Chui region is particularly subject to internal migration since it has more infrastructure than other regions of the Kyrgyz Republic. A comprehensive skills training program will be invaluable to both internal and external migrants in that recipients of the programs will acquire transportable credentials that can assure greater success and less vulnerability in their new locales. Overall the final beneficiaries of our research will be rural communities, their input to the project will be of utmost importance.

**Methods**

Institutional ethnography (IE) is a method of inquiry developed by Dorothy Smith as a method of empirical research wherein ‘institution’ refers not to a particular type of organization, but rather to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place across multiple sites. IE is concerned with the way documentary forms of knowledge (regulations, reporting requirements, standards, etc.) link and coordinate activities and work processes within and across diverse sites. An IE analysis does not test a researcher’s hypothesis or generate a new theory, but rather aims to explicate the social organization of people’s day-to-day lived experiences, in the case of our research, the processes that need to be coordinated at a local level and beyond to set into motion training programs for sustainable economic activity in diverse rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Focus group and in depth interviews will be conducted in Naryn, Osh and Chui oblasts between December and the end of January 2011. The purpose of these interviews is to gather data from which we will construct maps of the complex institutional processes which organize, govern, and regulate the activity of women, youth, and local groups and authorities to gain an understanding of the diverse needs and interests in local sites and how a system of informal adult education can be developed to accommodate these. An analysis of these findings will be used to develop a model for an informal education system for rural Kyrgyzstan, and also to formulate a list of recommendations as to how the system might be implemented. These recommendations will be presented to a Round Table of relevant government ministries, donors and NGOs for their consideration.
Staff/Administration

Research Partners

Our research partnership began with a project entitled Women’s NGOs in Kyrgyzstan: International Funding and the Social Organization of Gender (principal investigator Dr. Marie Campbell) during which an invitation was extended to Gulnara Baimambetova (research partner), chair of the Kyrgyz NGO, Women Entrepreneur Support Association (WESA) to attend the Canadian Community Economic Development Network’s national meeting in May, 2008. A reciprocal visit to Kyrgyzstan was organized in December, 2008 for Debbie Dergousoff (second research partner) and Annie McKitrick (representing the Canadian Social Economy Hub) to observe some of the work WESA was doing to enhance community economic development. This project developed in the course of ongoing communication after the completion of that project.

Gulnara Baimambetova is the initiator of this project. Gulnara and the staff at WESA have five years’ experience working with partners from local authorities and public organizations to design training courses that provide locally-adapted instruction to assist women with starting and operating small scale social enterprises. WESA’s courses, available to beginner and experienced entrepreneurs of all ages, have been especially valuable to middle-aged and older women living in remote agricultural areas where few economic opportunities exist.

Debbie Dergousoff is a PhD candidate in Sociology at Simon Fraser University in Canada. Debbie has four years’ experience as a Research Assistant at the British Columbia Institute for Cooperative Studies where she organized and participated in numerous research projects, including an Ethical Purchasing Forum bringing together practitioners, community groups and politicians in an effort to enhance ethical trade in the Victoria region. She has presented papers at the annual Congress for Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada, and has shared her research at conferences of the International Centre of Research and Information on Public and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC) in both Canada and Sweden. Debbie is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) where she is teaching courses in Gender Studies, Social Theory, Qualitative Methods and Market Society. She will bring to the project professional support and student Research Assistants from AUCA.

The project will employ the following staff:

Project Initiator - Gulnara Baimambetova, co-author of this proposal, will be responsible for establishing and maintaining links with local groups and agencies; scheduling research visits to selected villages; developing and managing the budget; providing administrative support; assisting with data analysis; translating the final report into Russian/Kyrgyz and arranging for the Round Table presentation. She will collaborate with the coordinator on developing the model for a system of informal education and producing the list of recommendations to present to the Round Table.

Project Coordinator - Debbie Dergousoff, co-author of this proposal, will be responsible for overseeing project development and operation; developing working relationships with participants, including formal and informal community leaders; hiring and supervising project staff (recruiting AUCA students); performing data analysis; collaborating on developing the informal education system model; and producing the final report in English.
Research Assistants/Translators – Three AUCA students will be hired to assist with conducting interviews and providing translation services. The students will be involved in data analysis; contributing input to developing the informal education model; and assisting with content for project publications.

Transcribers/Translators – Will be hired to transcribe interviews from Kyrgyz and/or Russian into English; and to translate the final report into Kyrgyz and/or Russian

Administrative support - Responsible for maintaining routine communication and correspondence; website development for the project.

Graphic Artist - Responsible for layout/design of project publications (posters/brochures/analyses/recommendations) to distribute to Round Table participants.

Available Resources

Office

Meeting room, office space and equipment will be provided by Women Entrepreneurs Support Association (WESA)

Expertise

Debbie Dergousoff is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). She brings to the project expertise in gender issues, Social Economy, and institutional ethnography, as well as support from the Sociology Department at AUCA for advice about local issues and provision of student assistants to help with various aspects of the research.

WESA has years of practical experience in training both men and women to organize and operate entrepreneurial businesses.

Budget: Needed Resources

Personnel

Travel Funds

Equipment

Supplies
Appendix 1: Time Line

Month 1: January
Interviews in the three regions concluded by the end of January.

Month 2: February
Translation and transcription of interviews completed by the end of February.

Month 3: March
Data analysis and production of first draft of final report

Month 4: April
Completion of final report and recommendations for presentation
Organization and coordination of Round Table
Production of resources for distribution at Round Table
Presentation of findings and recommendations to the Round Table by the end of April

Appendix 2: Resumes and CVs
Appendix F.

Interview Guides

WESA Participants Interview Guide

Interview Guide Naryn Nov 11-13/2010

Explain purpose of research: gathering information for my PhD

I am investigating the training of women entrepreneurs [especially in rural regions] for the purpose of putting together a set of recommendations to convince government authorities of the importance of integrating this kind of training into their sustainable economic development programs.

The information I gather from you today will be used in part for my PhD dissertation, thus it may be published in academic articles and shared in classrooms and at Conferences. It will also be used as evidence in a research proposal I am currently writing with Gulnara Baimambetova at WESA for a project aimed at putting together recommendations for the government to seriously consider these kinds of training programs as a strategy for sustainable development in rural areas like Naryn.

Agreeing to participate in this interview does not oblige you to answer questions I ask that you would rather not talk to me about. Do you understand the purpose of the interview? Do you agree to participate?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. I want to begin by asking you what it was like in Soviet times here?
   Employment – men? women?
   What changed after Independence?

2. What kinds of government assistance are currently available to people living in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan?
   How do you go about finding out about them?
   Are they difficult to access?

3. Who is in charge of making decision for the village?
   Are they elected?
   Are both men and women involved?
   Are decisions made democratically or by the authority of leaders? [Who are the leaders?]

4. How did you hear about WESA’s programs?
5. What kind of work was involved in getting this training program set up today?
   I’m interested in knowing about all the stages – all the work that is done step-by-step by people in the village to prepare for a course [the courses WESA provides are adapted to local settings and one of my tasks is to map out the work required to make this course workable here]
   How did things get started?
   Who talks to who? What kind of paperwork is involved? What is the work involved at the village level to bring this course here?
   Did any of this work conflict with your duties at home? How was this negotiated?

WESA Courses
1. How did you come to choose this particular course for your village?
2. How is the course funded? What was involved in accessing funding?
3. Did you need to bring in special equipment before you could take the course? What was involved in accessing funding for the equipment?
4. How was it decided who would take this course? Was your family supportive?
5. Did you have to make special arrangements at home to be able to be away at this course today?
   What duties do you have at home?
   Who will attend to these once you begin working?
   What was involved in negotiating these arrangements?
6. How many jobs will be created [directly/indirectly] as a result of this course?
   In this village?
   In the broader area?
7. Do you feel well-prepared to begin your work now that the course is done? What kinds of new skills did you learn today?
   Equipment
   Techniques
   Reporting
   Business plan
8. How has this course helped you in terms of production – quality/quantity/diversity/design?
9. How do you expect this course will help in terms of improved incomes? consumer demand?
   market expansion – local and beyond?
10. What ongoing challenges do you expect there will be?
11. What kinds of ongoing support do you think you will need to successfully grow your business?
WESA Courses – In Naryn City

1. What was your economic situation like before you took the WESA course?
2. What has changed since?

Village Administration Interview Guide


Explain purpose of research: gathering information for my PhD

I am investigating the training of women entrepreneurs [especially in rural regions] for the purpose of putting together a set of recommendations to convince government authorities of the importance of integrating this kind of training into their sustainable economic development programs.

The information I gather from you today will be used in part for my PhD dissertation, thus it may be published in academic articles and shared in classrooms and at Conferences. It will also be used as evidence in a research proposal I am currently writing with Gulnara Baimambetova at WESA for a project aimed at putting together recommendations for the government to seriously consider these kinds of training programs as a strategy for sustainable development in rural areas like Naryn.

Agreeing to participate in this interview does not oblige you to answer questions I ask that you would rather not talk to me about. Do you understand the purpose of the interview? Do you agree to participate?

Interview Questions

1. I want to begin by asking you what it was like in Soviet times here? Employment – men? women? What changed after Independence?
2. What kinds of government assistance are currently available for villages in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan? How do you go about finding out about them? Are they difficult to access?
3. Can we talk about the Community centre? Where did the people that work there get their training? Who was involved in getting it set up? Do you think the programs have been a success for the people involved? for the village?
4. What would you say are the main challenges facing this village and the people in it these days? do you think things will improve in the next 5 to 10 years? [In what ways worse? or better?]
5. What are the main challenges local administration faces in ‘getting things done’ in this village? We want to understand the work involved for local administration to ‘get things done’ in this village. What work processes would local administration need to be involved in to bring a comprehensive training program to this village - Internally? Externally?
6. Let’s suppose an adult education program was to be developed for this village. Who would be in charge of deciding what was needed for the village? What kind of work is involved in making these decisions? [We are trying to draw out the step-by-step process – what are the protocols involved? Who would initiate things? How would they go about initiating something? What authorities would they need to deal with locally or nationally? What kind of work would be involved in these dealings?] [We need a detailed description of what is involved]

Who is consulted? How are they consulted? Are both men and women involved? What about youth? Are decisions made democratically or by the authority of leaders? [Who are the leaders? Are they elected, or…?]

**Businesses Interview Guide**


Explain purpose of research: Our research team is working with WESA [Women Entrepreneur’s Support Association] to develop a model for the widespread introduction of comprehensive, locally-provided training programs for women and youth in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Our objective is to use the model to make recommendations to the Kyrgyz Government and relevant ministries about how to effectively implement such a program to address unemployment and economic hardship in rural regions of the country.

We will not require you to discuss information that is confidential in nature. Our objective is to map the way things work in the village so that we can understand how to develop a plan for appropriate delivery of a comprehensive training program for women and youth in this region. Since we are primarily gathering information about processes that local people are widely aware of there is little if any risk in your sharing this information.

The information we gather from you today will be used in the following ways:

- By WESA and our research team to develop a model from which to prepare our list of recommendations for the government
- Information may be published in academic articles or books, and shared in classrooms and at Conferences, both locally and internationally
- As data for the principal researcher’s PhD
- As data for the Research Intern’s report and Bachelor’s Degree

Agreeing to participate in this interview does not oblige you to answer questions I ask that you would rather not talk to me about. Do you understand the purpose of the interview?

Would you like to have your business and village named or kept anonymous in our research reports? [i.e. we could simply refer to ‘one of the businesses in Naryn region’]

Would you prefer to be named or should we keep you anonymous in our research? Do you agree to participate?

We would like to provide you with these contacts in case you have any concerns about the research: [will be translated into Kyrgyz and given in hard copy]

Researcher: Debbie Dergousoff, PhD student, Sociology/Anthropology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. You may contact me through Aikokul
Arzieva 0(771)847626 This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ann Travers. You may contact my supervisor by e-mail: atravers@sfu.ca or by telephone at (778-782-6630). In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above e-mails and phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Director, Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University (778-782-6593).

**Interview Questions**

1. I want to begin by asking you what it was like in Soviet times here? Employment – men? women? What changed after Independence?

2. What kinds of government assistance are currently available to business people in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan? How do you go about finding out about them? Are they difficult to access? What is involved in accessing them? [we need details – paper trail

3. What about assistance from the village for businesses? Is there any kind of assistance available? How do you go about accessing it? Who is in charge of making decisions about such assistance in the village? Are they elected? Are both men and women involved? Are decisions made democratically or by the authority of leaders?

4. Can we talk about the Community centre? Where did the people that work there get their training? Who was involved in getting it set up? Do you think the programs have been a success for the people who received training? for the village?

**Training Courses**

1. How did you come to choose this particular course you took in your village?

2. How was the course funded? What was involved in accessing funding?

3. Did you need to bring in special equipment before you could take the course? After taking the course? What was involved in accessing funding for the equipment?

4. How was it decided who would have access to this course?

5. Did you have to make special arrangements at home to be able to be away to take the training course? Was your family supportive? Why? Why not? What was involved in negotiating taking the course?

   What duties do you have at home? Who attends to these now that you are working outside your home? What was involved in negotiating these arrangements? How do you feel about this?

   What differences has this kind of work made to you personally?

6. How many jobs were created [directly/indirectly] as a result of this course? In this village? In the broader area?

7. Did you feel well-prepared to begin your work once the course is done? What kinds of new skills did you learn? Are there additional skills you would like to gain to improve your business?

   Equipment  Technique  Reporting  Business plan
8. How did your course help you in terms of production – quality/quantity/diversity/design?

9. Has the course met your expectations in terms of improved incomes for yourself and/or fellow workers?
   In terms of increased consumer demand? In terms of market expansion – local and beyond? [If not, what do you think is required to achieve these improvements?]

10. What ongoing challenges are you experiencing in your business?

11. What kinds of support do you need to successfully grow your business?

13. Do you expect things will improve in the next 5 to 10 years? [In what ways worse? or better?]

14. We want to understand different perspectives on how ‘things get done’ in this village.
   Let’s suppose an adult education program was to be developed for this village. Who would be in charge of deciding what was needed for the village? What kind of work is involved in making these decisions? [We are trying to draw out the step-by-step process – what are the protocols involved? Who would initiate things? How would they go about initiating something? What authorities would they need to deal with locally or nationally? What kind of work would be involved in these dealings?] [We are trying to put together a detailed description of what is involved]
   Who is consulted? How are they consulted?
   Are both men and women involved? What about youth?
   Are decisions made democratically or by the authority of leaders? [Who are the leaders? Are they elected, or…?]

**Youth/School Interview Guide**

**Youth Focus Group Guide, Naryn Jan 20-23/2011**

Explain purpose of research: Our research team is working with WESA *Women Entrepreneur’s Support Association* to develop a model for the widespread introduction of comprehensive, locally-provided training programs for women and youth in rural regions of Kyrgyzstan. Our objective is to use the model to make recommendations to the Kyrgyz Government and relevant ministries about how to effectively implement such a program to address unemployment and economic hardship in rural regions of the country.

We will not require you to discuss information that is confidential in nature. Our objective is to map the way things work in the village so that we can understand how to develop a plan for appropriate delivery of a comprehensive training program for women and youth in this region. Since we are primarily gathering information about processes that local people are widely aware of there is little if any risk to you in sharing this information with us or with other members of your class.
The information we gather from you today will be used in the following ways:

- By WESA and our research team to develop a model from which to prepare our list of recommendations for the government
- Information may be published in academic articles or books, and shared in classrooms and at Conferences, both locally and internationally
- As data for the principal researcher’s PhD
- As data for the Research Intern’s report and Bachelor’s Degree

Agreeing to participate in this interview does not oblige you to answer questions I ask that you would rather not talk to me about. Do you understand the purpose of the interview?

We do not require your names so you will be kept anonymous in our research. Would you like us to name your school or Jerge-Tal village or keep these anonymous in our research reports? [i.e. we could simply refer to ‘students from a school in Naryn region’+]

Do you agree to participate?

We would like to provide your class with these contacts in case you have any concerns about the research: [to be translated into Kyrgyz and given in hard copy]

Researcher: Debbie Dergousoff, PhD student, Sociology/Anthropology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. You may contact me through Aikokul Arzieva 0(771)847626 This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ann Travers. You may contact my supervisor by e-mail: atravers@sfu.ca or by telephone at (778-782-6630). In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above e-mails and phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Director, Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University (778-782-6593).

**Interview Questions**

1. What places do you have (nice, beautiful) to take us to if we come for a holiday in summer? Are there any places you think we should see now?

2. How do young people spend their free time here? [assuming of course you have free time!]

3. Are there any places available for youth to work, earn salary in this village?

4. Where do people go for work here? If you could get work in this village would you prefer to stay?


6. What are your plans for after you have graduated high school? the next one to three years? How did you come to decide this?
7. In what ways have your school experiences prepared you for getting a job when you are done? What kinds of school assistance would you like to see provided here to help young people plan what they are going to do when they are done high school? (i.e. In-school career advising centers/visiting presenters)

8. Do you think higher education is important? If you go to study in Bishkek will you come back? How do you think your education will help you? your village?

9. What two or three things would be most important to you in your job? What kind of obstacles might prevent you from pursuing your ideal job?

10. What kind of training do you think people in this village need? (it can be anything?) Let’s say you want to do something here but you do not know how to do it... or you would like to see some kind of service offered here but it is not available...

11. Have you heard about, or do you know anybody who has taken the entrepreneurial training programs that have been offered here before? Do you think these have been successful? What other kind of training or courses would you like to see brought here? If you could get work in this village would you prefer to stay here?

12. As permanent citizens of this village you guys know the life in a village very well thus your ideas and thoughts are very important for us. We are interested in understanding how youth make their needs known in this village – is it through your parents? or do youth in this village deal directly with local administration? through the school? What processes would be involved?

13. What processes do you think would be involved in setting up and accessing training programs for youth in your village? [this is a key question/concern - remember we are trying to map out ‘processes’ in institutional ethnography – we are trying to uncover what kinds of ‘ruling relations’ influence the career paths and choices of village youth - It is important to follow up on any leads that come up as students hopefully engage with this question!]

14. Let’s say you wanted to improve your village and you had all resources available to do so, where would you start? What things do you think need to be changed (improved) and what things do you think should be preserved (do not need change)?
### Appendix G.

**List of Interview Participants, Codes, and Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N1</th>
<th>Aikokul’s Reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A - Aikokul</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R1 - Woman entrepreneur (WESA training course)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R2 - Woman entrepreneur</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HD - Hairdresser from Naryn City</td>
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<tr>
<th>N2</th>
<th>Kindergarten January, 2012, M and Eje</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Res (g) girls, Res (b) boys, Grade 11 class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VA - Village Administration (governor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SW - Social worker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J - Jyrgalbek (UNDP Rep)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N3</th>
<th>DIR: Director of community centre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FH - 48 year old female host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YW - Young woman [sister-in-law]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HM1 - interview on cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HW1 - interview on cooperatives</td>
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| KU | an alternate transcript translator |

| Osh | INGO Respondent  |
|     | SD - School Director |
|     | International INGO  |
|     | CBT Workers         |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kara Balta</th>
<th>Erke</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hairdressers Focus Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hairdresser Shop Owner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ST1 and ST2 - WESA Students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NGOs - WNGO1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- DI - local NGO</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NA - leader of legal information center</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NU - Nurlan (interviewer)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher/Youth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bazaar woman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bazaar man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cattle breeder</td>
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Appendix H.

WESA’s Authorization to Conduct Research

WOMEN ENTERPRENEUR SUPPORT ASSOCIATION / WESA

Authorization to Conduct Research at WESA

Project Title: Women’s Entrepreneurship in Kyrgyzstan: Building Fair Trade Networks in Post-Soviet Transition Economies

I have agreed to collaborate with Debbie Dergousoff on this research project with the understanding that the data collected will be used in the write up of her PhD dissertation and also in WESA’s development of a locally-appropriate training resource for fair trade in Kyrgyzstan.

As chair of Women’s Entrepreneur Support Association (WESA) I hereby authorize Debbie to conduct research at WESA about the way various documents (manuals, forms, regulations) come to organize the work done at WESA, and by WESA with their clients. It is my understanding that I will be involved in overseeing access to WESA’s documents and work processes; access to WESA’s clients; and the authorization and use of translation services. I understand that access to documents of a confidential nature will not be required.

Gulnara Baimambetova
Chair, WESA

Signature

January 19, 2010

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