Introduction

The Playground Incident, the Field and a Conceptual Framework

The Playground Incident

On a weekday evening in May 2008, as the sun begins to fade on the school playground, some neighbourhood youth gather for their daily games of pickup basketball. This day's group of 'locals' is rather small. It includes two Kyrgyz males, Batyr and Bolot (aged twenty-three and twenty-five respectively); a Russian male, Maks (aged twenty-three); and a Kyrgyz female, Eliza (aged seventeen). The three males present have lived in the neighbourhood throughout their lives, while Eliza moved here from another Bishkek neighbourhood about ten years ago.

After some time, another group of young males arrives at the playground. There are about eight of them, between sixteen and twenty-one years old. From an encounter three days earlier, the locals already know that the members of this group – whom I will call the 'visitors' – originate from the Ysyk Köl region of Kyrgyzstan.[1] Those of the visitors who still attend school have come to Bishkek for a few days to compete in a basketball tournament against other school teams from all over the republic. The rest of the visitors hail from the same village, close to the town of Karakol, but moved to Bishkek some years ago in order to study or work. None of the visitors lives in this neighbourhood or has any friends among the locals. The visitors picked this basketball court to prepare for their tournament simply because it is the closest to the dormitory where most of them stay. After each group has played on one of the court's two baskets among themselves for about twenty minutes, the visitors take the first step. They kindly ask whether it would be possible to play a game against the 'local team'.

It is a minor detail that triggers the ensuing conflict. 'Let's play four guys against four guys', suggests one of the visitors. 'There aren't only guys on the

Figure 0.1 The neighbourhood playground (photo: P. Schröder)

court!' is the harsh reply by Eliza, the only girl present. 'All right, then let's play four guys against three guys and one girl', the visitor counters with a smile. But Eliza does not leave it at that. She does not hesitate to speak up against anyone on this court or dare to expose any weakness in front of her daily male competitors, who otherwise would not pass up the chance to pick on her. Furthermore, Eliza is a top-notch basketball player, a member of the school team that won the Kyrgyz National Championship and a future prospect for the national women's squad. Without blinking an eye, she replies to the visitor: 'We don't play against a weaker team!' After a moment of stunned silence throughout the playground, the locals burst out laughing at this unexpected audacity.

Eliza's statement then provokes one of the visitors to mumble a vulgar Kyrgyz obscenity in her direction. Upon hearing it, Batyr gets up from where he has been sitting, walks up to the visitor and barks at him: 'What did you say? Come here! Who are you anyway, and what do you want here?' The two stand face to face in the middle of the playground. In a corner a few metres away, Eliza asks Maks why he does not go over to where Batyr confronts the visitor. But before Maks can answer, Batyr and the visitor are already exchanging punches and kicks. Batyr takes a hard blow beneath his eye, then drops the visitor with several kicks. After less than a minute, the fight suddenly stops. In that moment, Bolot and the oldest of the visitors step between the combatants to calm them down. No one else gets involved in the violence, including Bolot, Maks or Eliza.

For Batyr, the issue is not settled after this initial clash. Pressing a hand against his injured eye, he sits down on the asphalt and makes about half-a-dozen

calls, seeking out the whereabouts of some of his friends who could 'help him out' in this situation. When a younger neighbour passes by the playground, Batyr orders him to run into the neighbourhood 'to gather our people'. Towards the visitors, who are standing on the other side of the playground, he shouts: 'You wanted it like this, so now we will finish you off!' At this point the young males from Ysyk Köl seem to realize they may soon encounter some serious trouble. All of a sudden, they start running towards the school gate to make their escape. It is Batyr alone who chases after them, trying to get a hold of at least one of the visitors until his help arrives.

The escape route of the visitors is along the western end of the neighbourhood, where Batyr's apartment block and some small shops are located. When I reach there together with Bolot, Maks and Eliza, Batyr and the group of visitors are being escorted off a side street by two police officers. There is already quite a crowd of spectators on the street, most of them Batyr's long-time neighbours and age-mates (*rovesniki*). Kanat has come over from his apartment in another yard of the neighbourhood right after the news of Batyr's fight reached him. Now he stands in the middle of the street, casually chatting with the police officers. Metis has just come home from work. He has been living in the same building as Batyr for twenty-three years, and the two of them hang out in 'their yard' almost daily. Calmly Metis walks up to Maks and some other bystanders, sits down on a bench and asks about what happened at the playground.

Other neighbours act less reserved. Bakyt, a seventeen-year-old Kyrgyz, is upset and screams at Maks: 'Why didn't you help Batyr?!' Tilek is agitated as well. In contrast to Kanat or Metis, Tilek is a newcomer in the neighbourhood and at the time of this incident has been living in the same apartment block as Batyr for only two years. Now Tilek is hustling around to gather information and then exhorts the younger neighbours, those of Bakyt's age, to 'by all means' stay put and alert: 'You gather over there in the second yard and wait for my call, understood?'

After about fifteen minutes, the visitors from Ysyk Köl are released, and the officers tell them to head home to their dormitory. At this point, Batyr's chances for revenge seem slim. The officers start questioning him about the incident and keep him in check. Ten more minutes have elapsed when a car races onto the scene and stops right next to Batyr. Inside are the friends who Batyr called for help. Tilek approaches them and tries to convince Batyr that it would be a good idea if he (Tilek) joins them in their quest for revenge against the visitors. But Batyr rejects this proposal quite firmly and leaves Tilek standing on the street. No longer held back by the officers, Batyr enters the car and takes off together with his friends to continue the chase of the visitors from Ysyk Köl.

What happened from that point on, I attempted to reconstruct through interviews during the days following this incident. Later that evening, Batyr and the other pursuers figured out the exact location of the visitors' dormitory. Utilizing

the connections that one of his friends had to Bishkek's police authorities, eventually Batyr managed to take his revenge.

With the help of some accommodating police officers, Batyr and the other neighbourhood locals were able to force the visitors out of the secure shelter of their dormitory. Once they were in the street, Batyr and his friends gave them a severe beating. To make matters worse for them, the visitors were later taken into police custody based on the allegation that they had caused the earlier incident at the playground. Still, for Batyr, it was a bittersweet episode. The morning after he had successfully taken revenge, he saw a doctor and learned that the blow he received at the playground had caused a serious eye injury, which required surgery and a two-week stay in a Bishkek hospital.

What happened on that day in May 2008 turned out to be the crucial incident of my fieldwork. Regardless of the degree to which physical violence was a topic of discussion and bravado among my young male interlocutors, this was in fact the only time that I witnessed them involved in it. As such, the playground incident was neither representative nor typical of what I experienced during my time in this neighbourhood between 2007 and 2008.[2] Nonetheless, and in particular because it was reminiscent of both the neighbourhood's recent past and that of its young inhabitants, the playground incident proved most significant in shaping my understanding of the social dynamics of urban youth in Bishkek.

For the moment, this incident at the playground serves as an opening scene. It is an ethnographic vignette touching upon all elements that will be essential to this study: its main actors, themes and their relations. This will gradually evolve as I move through the chapters. In Chapter 1, with the help of Batyr's story, I discuss the role of the neighbourhood as a social and symbolic resource for its young inhabitants. In Chapter 2, I use Kanat, who came from another yard to support Bakyt, in order to add a territorial angle and reflect on the importance of the neighbourhood's yards in local youth socialization. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal with different 'generations' of young neighbourhood males: regarding both the dynamics of their particular age hierarchy, which separates the young ones such as Bakyt from the 'elders' such as Bolot, and friendship relations, as between Batyr and Metis. In Chapter 6, I examine the interethnic relations between the neighbourhood's two most dominant groups, the Kyrgyz and the Russians (here represented by Maks). Following up on their mutual understanding as 'Bishkek's urbans',[3] Chapter 7 examines Tilek's role in the neighbourhood and discusses the perception of recent migrants who have come to the city from Kyrgyzstan's rural areas. In this way, the individual chapters assemble a social panorama of integration and identification as practised and expressed by the young males of a Bishkek neighbourhood. In the concluding chapter, I reassess the evolution of these various relationships among and beyond the 'Bishkek Boys' in light of the city's postsocialist trajectory, i.e. how recent urban change is associated

with youth cultures, in-migration to the city and the political 'ethnicization' of societal relations.

To offer additional context on the 'playground incident' that occurred in this Bishkek neighbourhood, I now outline how I 'found' my field, both as a topic and a place, and how I practised fieldwork among my interlocutors. Before we move into the thick of theory and ethnography in the chapters, this will help to illuminate the research idea behind this book, the stage upon which I approached my topic, and the parameters (of ethnicity, age and lifeworld) that I shared and negotiated while spending time in this neighbourhood.

Finding a Field

Youth and Urban Anthropology in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia

During my first stay in Bishkek in the summer of 2002, I was an undergraduate student of anthropology, having come to Kyrgyzstan as part of a university programme to improve my Russian language skills and to gain fieldwork experiences. For three months I stayed with a wonderful Kyrgyz guest-family: a widowed father who shared an apartment with his two unmarried daughters, aged nineteen and twenty-one, as well as his fifteen-year-old son. From the abundance of experiences during this intense period, what I found most fascinating was how these young Kyrgyz women managed their daily lives. With ease they seemed to switch between fulfilling kinship obligations, taking care of the household, being good students and enjoying Bishkek's nightlife. Back then, everything about their lives was complex and essentially impossible for me to grasp as a naïve newcomer to Kyrgyz society. Yet ever since that first encounter, the desire to gain further insight into the young urbanites of Bishkek remained with me.

When in late 2006 I finally had the opportunity to begin research on this project, I found that both of my interests – youth and the urban context – were still subordinate issues on Central Asia's social science agenda. While the first fifteen years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union had made the region more readily accessible to Western scholars, the anthropological focus had been on other topics. In Kyrgyzstan, one of the established research themes at that time was Islam and spirituality (e.g. McBrien 2006, 2008; Pelkmans 2006, 2007; Heyat 2008). Other major areas of research were concerned with the political and economic effects of post-Soviet transformation; the democratization and development of civil society (e.g. Anderson 2000; McMann 2003; Pétric 2005); and privatization and economic livelihoods, the latter focused primarily on rural areas (e.g. Yoshida 1999; Hilgers and Helwig 2001; Pétric et al. 2004).

Exceptions to these early dominant topics were rare, as in general were studies that offered detailed ethnographic accounts and thorough analysis. As of 2006, among these exceptions were studies by Kuehnast (1997) on the 'Soviet-Kyrgyz' identity of young women during the transformation period, by Megoran (2002)

on political nationalism in the Kyrgyz–Uzbek borderland, and by Liu (2002) on political imaginations among Uzbek men in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh.

By the time I was ready to begin my fieldwork, many of those interested in Kyrgyzstan were occupied with the so-called 'Tulip Revolution' of 2005: fascinated by its peaceful progression, yet still puzzled by where it had come from, who had orchestrated it and what changes it might bring (e.g. Pelkmans 2005; Fuhrmann 2006; Cummings 2008). Apart from such assessments on the reasons for, and implications of, the political switch from independent Kyrgyzstan's first President, Askar Akaev, to its second, Kurmanbek Bakiev, this event created a favourable momentum for my endeavour.

Kyrgyzstan's first revolution made youth a topic of broader concern. Khamidov (2006) wrote about 'Kyrgyzstan's Revolutionary Youth' and described how young men and women had been mobilized through informal groups to play an 'instrumental' role in the protests in downtown Bishkek. The fact that Kyrgyzstan's youth had vividly impacted this moment of their nation's history was undeniable. Beyond that moment, attention began to be paid to the 'nonrevolutionary' segments of Kyrgyz youth, meaning the ways in which young people in Kyrgyzstan experience and practise their everyday lives outside of demonstrations and political mobilization (see Kirmse 2010b, 2013).

As I prepared for my fieldwork in early 2007, research of urban contexts in Central Asia was no more developed than research on the region's young people. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, ethnographic research in this region either had not been conducted in urban locations or the urban context had not been an explicit topic.

At that time, Nazpary's (2002) study on Almaty, which discussed the early post-Soviet era as a time of 'chaos' (*bardak*), violence and dispossession for the city's long-time inhabitants, basically provided the sole point of orientation. Later, an edited volume entitled *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia* by Alexander, Buchli and Humphrey (2007) marked the first collective effort to draw attention to the region's urban settings. This work discussed essential dynamics of postsocialist change, such as migration to cities and the related perception concerning a 'ruralization' of urban environments. However, the volume did not feature a Kyrgyz case study, instead focusing exclusively on four urban contexts in the wider region: Astana and Almaty (Kazakhstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and Ulan-Ude (Russia; see also Pelkmans 2008). Back then, this selection reflected the state of urban anthropology in Kyrgyzstan: while a certain social category, Kyrgyzstan's youth, had captured some of the scientific spotlight in the aftermath of the 2005 'revolution', Bishkek – as the very location of protest, unrest and change – had not yet been considered a worthwhile topic.

These were the major influences that had shaped my interest when I arrived to Bishkek in the spring of 2007. Taking into account the then-recent events in Kyrgyz society, as well as the topics that had dominated research on Kyrgyzstan

since 1991, my intention was to examine the nonrevolutionary, 'common' realities of the underresearched group, youth, who inhabited an equally underresearched arena, the urban setting of Bishkek.

Bishkek: Urban History, Migration and Changing Demographics

Bishkek is a city with a short history. Initially the site was the fortress known as 'Pishpek', founded in 1825 and belonging to the Khanate of Kokand (Geiss 2003: 149). During their expansion into Central Asia, Tsarist Russian troops conquered the fortress in 1862. Pishpek began to attract new inhabitants, became an established marketplace, and in 1878 attained the status of a 'district town' in the Russian empire's *Semirech'e* oblast (Malabaev 2001: 17; Petrov 2008b: 21). By the late nineteenth century, the additional development of the town was carried out according to a grid (street) plan, which still can be seen in Bishkek's current cityscape (Usubaliev 1971: 21; Map 2). Following the establishment of the Soviet regime in Central Asia, Pishpek was renamed Frunze in 1926, in honour of Mikhail Vasilevich Frunze, a Bolshevik leader and former commander-in-chief of the Red Army, who had been born in Pishpek in 1885 (see Marshall 2003).

The city of Frunze was the capital of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) until 1936, and continued as the capital of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) until 1991. Local historian Petrov (2008a) depicts in detail the 'achievements' of socialist modernization during that era. These included the establishment of European-style urban infrastructure and industries, for example, the construction of Frunze's first hospitals, food-processing factories and the main train station, as well as the spread of education and culture through schools, an institution such as the pedagogical institute for women, or cinemas and theatres (see Stronski 2010). After the 1950s, the provision of adequate housing and the formation of larger-scale neighbourhoods became critical for the development of the Kyrgyz SSR's growing capital.

From the end of the nineteenth century and through the Soviet period, the ethnic Kyrgyz were a minority in Pishpek and Frunze. According to Petrov (2008b: 21), in 1876 Pisphek was inhabited by a total of '58 families (182 people)': forty-eight families were ethnic Uzbeks, nine were ethnic Russians and one was ethnic Tatar. In the following years, it was mostly Russians who settled in Pishpek and thus became the city's major ethnic group (see Katsunori 2000). In contrast, the number of ethnic Kyrgyz in the city started to rise only after the Soviets had begun to enforce the sedentarization of the traditionally nomadic and semi-nomadic Kyrgyz households. In line with the general political conditions of Kyrgyzstan's socialist era, this made Frunze a predominantly 'Russian-Soviet' city.[4]

In early 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR declared that Frunze would thereafter be known as Bishkek, a variation of the original settlement's name (Petrov 2008a: 92). Some months later, in December of that year, the

Republic of Kyrgyzstan gained its full independence from the Soviet Union. Since then, Bishkek has undergone significant changes, much of it related to migration and changing urban demographics (Kostyukova 1994; Abazov 2000; Alymbaeva 2013).

During the first wave of out-migration, it was primarily ethnic Russians who left post-independent Kyrgyzstan (Abazov 1999a: 247; Kosmarskaya 2006: 60; Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008: 115).[5] In 1989 Bishkek's total population was approximately 620,000, with 345,000 ethnic Russians (56 per cent) and 142,000 ethnic Kyrgyz (23 per cent).[6] During the eighteen years up to 2007, these numbers changed dramatically: with almost 140,000 Russians leaving Bishkek, their numbers declined to about 25 per cent (205,000 people) of Bishkek's 814,000 official inhabitants, while the ethnic Kyrgyz in the city increased from 142,000 to 509,000 to represent a 62 per cent majority in the city.

However, taking into account the fact that many migrants resided in Bishkek without a legal 'residency permit' (*propiska*) for the city, the above numbers need to be adjusted to provide a more realistic assessment of the demographic situation. In 2009, estimates by the Bishkek mayoral office put the total count of nonregistered Kyrgyz in the city at approximately 220,000. Adding that number to the overall total, the Kyrgyz rose to about 71 per cent of the city's population, while the Russians in turn fell to 20 per cent (Table 0.1).[7]

What is striking about these statistics is the growth rate of ethnic Kyrgyz in Bishkek: from 7 per cent in 1939, to 23 per cent in 1989, to 52 per cent in 1999 and then to an unofficial 71 per cent in 2009. This development of group size therefore describes no less than an ethnic turnaround of the city: while the Russians had been in the majority during the later Tsarist period and in Soviet times, the Kyrgyz began to assume the dominant role following their country's independence in 1991. The impact that this ethnic turnaround had on the city and its social fabric will remain a core theme throughout this book. Analytically, the 'economics of group size' (Schlee 2008: 26) will then serve as an important instrument to explore how social and ideological practices of inclusion and exclusion, which seek to shape narrower or wider identity categories, relate to perceived benefits and the distribution of resources (see Chapters 2 and 5).

Table 0.1   Group sizes in Bishkek I: ethnic Russians and Kyrgyz (1939–2009)

	1939	1959	1979	1989	1999	2007	2009 (unofficial)
Population (approximately)	93,000	262,000	536,000	620,000	761,000	814,000	1,000,000
Russians	66%	67%	62%	56%	33%	25%	20%
Kyrgyz	7%	10%	17%	23%	52%	62%	71%
Other	27%	23%	21%	21%	15%	13%	9%

In particular, Bishkek's recent demographic shifts reveal an intra-ethnic tension and identity boundary separating those Kyrgyz who were long-time inhabitants of Bishkek, and who thus called themselves 'urbans' (*gorodskie*), and those Kyrgyz who had not been born in the capital, but relocated there at a later point in their lives from a peripheral area. The latter were referred to as either 'rurals' (*selskie*), *myrki* or 'newcomers' (*priezzhie*), depending on their acknowledged 'achievements' in a post-rural, urban socialization. As later chapters will describe in detail, these changes set opposing forces in motion: a reverberating socialist ambition for cosmopolitanism (captured famously in the slogan 'friendship of peoples') and the reality of an advancing Kyrgyz ethnonationalism.

To better understand the sizes of these relevant social groups of 'urbans' and 'rurals'/'newcomers' in Bishkek, the following simplified scheme can be employed. In 1989, ethnic Kyrgyz in Bishkek numbered approximately 150,000. It was commonly understood that those Kyrgyz, since they had already lived in the capital during the Soviet era, belonged to the group of urbans. Lacking reliable statistics to track the actual changes to this specific group of urban Kyrgyz within the last two decades, both in terms of their decrease by emigration or potential growth by reproduction, I will, for the sake of argument, take the number of 150,000 as a constant until 2009.

In contrast to the delineation within the group of ethnic Kyrgyz, among the ethnic Russians, there was no similar intra-ethnic differentiation between rural and urban. The Russians were instead considered urban by default (Kandiyoti 2007: 607). This categorization relied on the previous ethnic hierarchy of the socialist era, which generically associated the Russians with modern progress and the urban domain. Also, in comparison to the quantity of Kyrgyz migrants from other areas of Kyrgyzstan, the number of Russians who had relocated to Bishkek since the 1990s was negligible.

Based on the above, if one considers the 150,000 Kyrgyz who had already resided in Bishkek in 1989 as urban Kyrgyz and adds the 200,000 Russians who were officially registered in Bishkek in 2007, the overall group size of Bishkek's urbans would amount to about 350,000. Against this stand about 350,000 registered and 200,000 unregistered Kyrgyz rural migrants who resided in the city as of 2009. With these estimates, the unofficial total population of Bishkek in 2009 would have been about one million people, with rural/newcomers accounting for 55 per cent of the inhabitants and urbans for 35 per cent (and 10 per cent representing other ethnic groups; see Abazov 2004: 91). Within the group of urbans, ethnic Kyrgyz represented about 15 per cent and ethnic Russians about 20 per cent. To begin with, this examination of group sizes identifies the mutual inclusion of long-time Kyrgyz and Russian residents within the multiethnic category of Bishkek's urbans as an alignment between two minority groups in this city (Table 0.2).

*Table 0.2   Group sizes in Bishkek II: 'urbans' and 'newcomers/rurals' (2009)*

Bishkek: ~ 1,000,000 inhabitants			
'Urbans' 35%		'Newcomers/rurals' 55%	Other 10%
Russians 20%	Kyrgyz 15%	Kyrgyz 55%	

As for Kyrgyzstan's rural-to-urban migrants, they have made their way to Bishkek in 'waves' that came from different regions at different times. In fact, the first people who resettled in the capital during the 1990s mostly originated from the northern regions of Naryn, Ysyk Köl and Talas, which are geographically closest to Bishkek (Map 0.1). Only later, and in particular around the time of Kyrgyzstan's 'second revolution' in 2005, did migrants from the southern regions of Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken begin relocating to the capital (Nasritdinov 2008: 7; Alymbaeva 2008, 2013).

In Bishkek, these demographic shifts and the distinction between 'Northerners' and 'Southerners' – i.e. ethnic Kyrgyz representing different regions – were significant aspects of a struggle for 'real Kyrgyzness'. In the final chapters of this book, this will be further discussed as an indicator of the ongoing ethnicization of societal relations in Kyrgyzstan, which in the country's capital has created new realities of exclusion, affiliation and the distribution of opportunities.

A Neighbourhood in Bishkek: Iug-2/Shanghai

In Bishkek, there basically existed two types of settlement. The term 'private sector' (*chastnyi sektor*) generally designated an area that was composed of single detached houses, whose interior yards were usually surrounded by walls or fences.[8] In terms of economic status, the designation 'private sector' stood for very different living arrangements. It included old and unrenovated houses, some of which dated back to the early twentieth century, as well as the so-called 'new builds' (*novostroiki*), most of which were simple mud-brick constructions concentrated in the outskirts of Bishkek and often lacking basic infrastructure. The opposite of these were the luxury homes of Bishkek's new rich: made from high-quality import materials, multi-storey and protected by thick walls, high gates, surveillance cameras and sometimes private security guards (Alexander and Buchli 2007: 25–27). Such 'castles of the rich' (*zamki bogatykh*) could be found in the central areas of Bishkek, but also towards the outskirts, where clusters of them had such fitting names as 'VIP town' (*VIP gorodok*) or 'Tsarist village' (*Tsarskoe selo*).
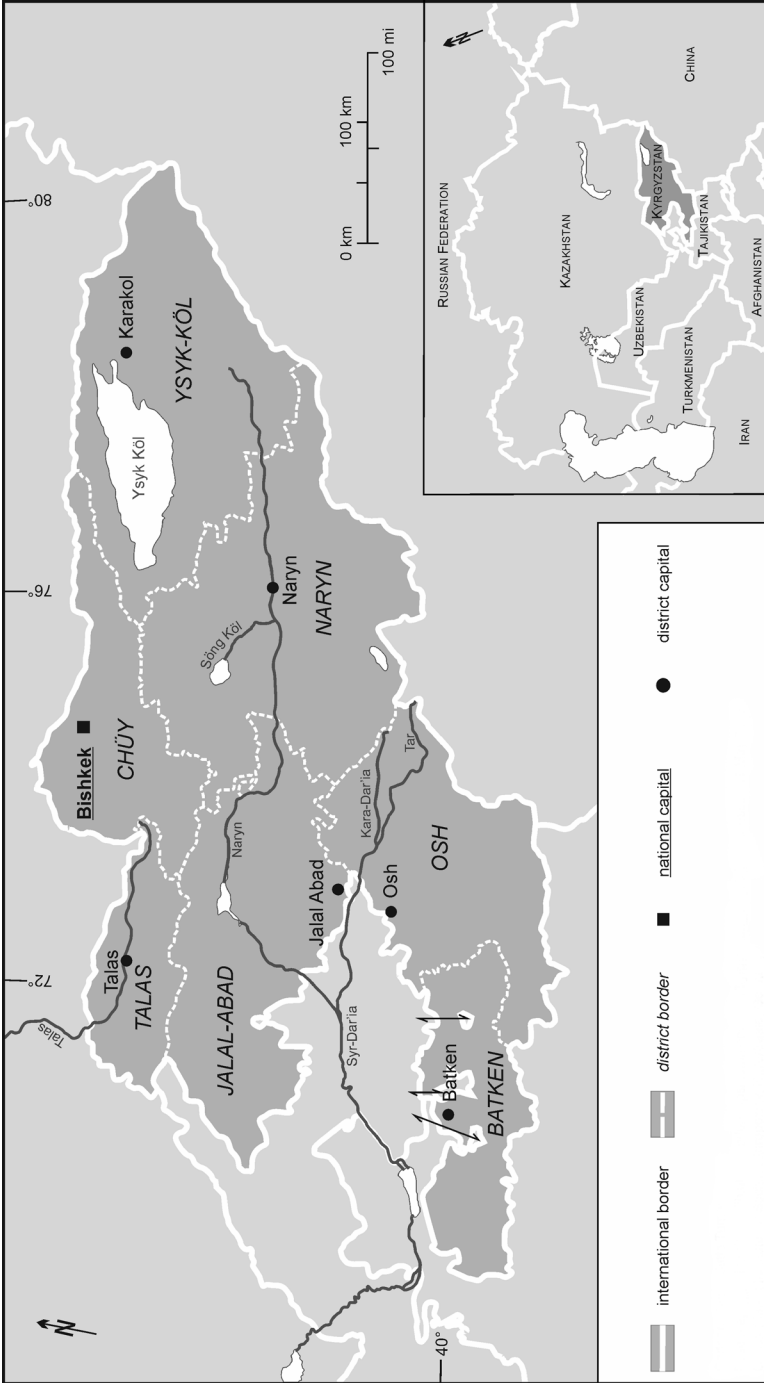
Map 0.1 Kyrgyzstan. Cartography: Jutta Turner; base map: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/kyrgyzstan_pol_05.jpg. Map © Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany

Bishkek Boys
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Philipp Schröder
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/SchroederBishkek

The other type of settlement was the so-called 'microregion' (*mikroraion*), composed of multi-storey apartment blocks, the building of which had begun in the late 1950s during the Khrushchev era. The term 'microregion' suggests that besides being places to sleep, the overall planning goal was to provide the inhabitants with additional facilities that eased their daily lives by concentrating services closer to them. Therefore, shops, schools, kindergartens and leisure facilities (e.g. cinemas and libraries) were set up either within or in close proximity to these microregions (French 1995).

It was because of these architectural parameters that I became interested in doing fieldwork in such a microregion of Bishkek. In contrast to the conditions in most of Bishkek's private sectors – where there were exclusively privatized spaces, such as the interior courtyard of a single house that was walled off from neighbouring houses, and exclusively public spaces, for instance, a public park with no residential area 'attached' to it – the microregions promised to offer spaces that were neither exclusively private nor exclusively public. On the one hand, in the microregions, the vast areas between the single apartment blocks where the sports fields and other recreational facilities were located could be considered to 'belong' to that neighbourhood and, as such, were meaningful, parochial spaces. On the other hand, formally these spaces were not the exclusive property of a single group of inhabitants, but were shared by neighbourhood residents. I was confident that the existence of such various spaces within a microregion, arranged within 'hierarchies of intimacy' (Liu 2007: 77), would guarantee at least some level of interaction among neighbours, which would provide me with an additional opportunity for observation.

The microregion where I conducted my fieldwork from April 2007 to October 2008 was located in central Bishkek. The administrative name given to this neighbourhood during Soviet times was *Iug-2* (which translates as 'South-2'). Apart from the official name, the microregion was known as *Shanghai* among its long-time inhabitants and other urban youth. I will explore the crucial aspects of the local history of *Shanghai* and its young inhabitants in the next chapter. For

Figure 0.2 The 'upper end' and 'lower end' of Bishkek's private sector (photos: P. Schröder)

now it can suffice to reveal that the name *Shanghai* goes back to a time before the first of the high-rise apartment blocks was built in the late 1970s.

The original houses that had crowded the area before the arrival of the high rises were made of mud bricks and were known to have had especially low ceilings, most of which appeared not even high enough to allow an average man to stand. These small houses stood close to one another, and making one's way through the narrow alleys was not recommended, not only because aggressive dogs regularly escaped their yards and chased after passers-by, but also because the neighbourhood was reputed to house mostly criminals. For those who nevertheless had to pass through the neighbourhood, the most convenient solution, according to the urban legend, was to climb atop the roofs and jump from one building to the next.

This constellation of houses, low and narrowly built, was perceived by some of the city's inhabitants to be 'typically Chinese', and so they claimed that this neighbourhood's architecture was 'like in China, like in Shanghai'. Since those days, the area became known as *Shanghai* and its long-time inhabitants referred to themselves as *Shanghaians*. These designations remained in place, even after the original houses had been torn down and the new apartment blocks constructed.

Within Bishkek *Iug-2* was located south of the railway tracks that cut through the city in an east–west direction (Map 0.2). In total, the neighbourhood consisted of nineteen apartment blocks, each nine storeys high. All of these buildings had been erected in a period between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s. Architecturally, the single apartment blocks were arranged so that three or four of them created an interior yard. These yards hosted swings, climbing frames, small football fields, basketball courts and benches. Besides that, there was a small bazaar in the middle of the neighbourhood as well as the 69th (Kyrgyz) Middle School.[9] The 29th (Russian) Middle School and a kindergarten were located in close proximity.

During the time of my fieldwork, *Iug-2* had about 3,000 inhabitants. In contrast to the development of group sizes of urbans and rurals citywide (Table 0.2), the demographics within *Shanghai* still favoured the urban element. With each of the Russian *Shanghaians* and the Kyrgyz *Shanghaians* representing about 25–30 per cent of the neighbourhood's population, the group of urbans in total held a 50–60 per cent majority position. This left approximately 40 per cent for the Kyrgyz rurals/newcomers, given that a small percentage of residents were also of Uzbek, Turkish, Dungan, Indian or Tatar origin.

Despite the fact that *Shanghai* was less affected by Bishkek's recent social reconfigurations than other neighbourhoods, the *Shanghaians* still were aware (and alert) that their group was diminishing in size. Since the 1990s, they had seen more and more of their old neighbours, Russian and Kyrgyz *Shanghaians*, move away to other parts of Bishkek or out of the country. These were replaced by new and non-urban Kyrgyz neighbours, which was a trend that in the
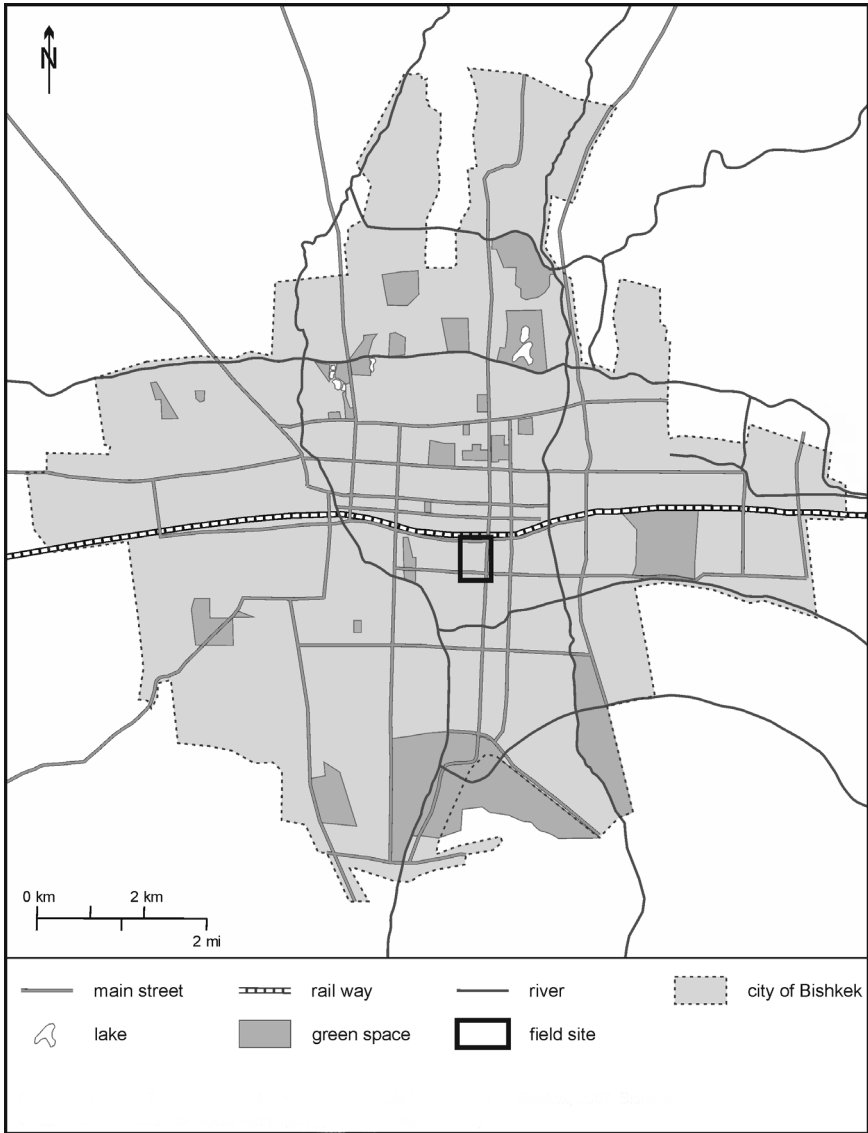
Map 0.2 *Iug-2/Shanghai* within Bishkek. Cartography: Jutta Turner; base map: Turistskaia Karta G. Bishkek, 2007, Bishkek. Map © Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany

view of *Shanghaians* had an alienating and heterogenizing effect on their neighbourhood.

These particular demographic constellations aside, there was no dominant group in the neighbourhood with regard to age, household sizes or economic status. *Iug-2* was inhabited by elderly pensioner couples who had moved into

Figure 0.3 A yard in *Iug-2/Shanghai* (photo: P. Schröder)

Table 0.3   Group sizes in Iug-2/Shanghai: *'urbans' and 'newcomers/rurals' (2008)*

Iug-2/Shanghai ~ 3,000 inhabitants			
'Urbans' 50–60%		'Newcomers/rurals' 35–45%	Other 5%
Russians 25–30%	Kyrgyz 25–30%	Kyrgyz 35–45%	

their apartments more than twenty-five years ago, as well as by young families who shared their living space with the husband's parents. There were smaller families of three people inhabiting a three-room apartment as well as families in which the parents shared a one-room apartment with their three adult yet unmarried sons. And then there were university students who lived in the neighbourhood for no more than a few months before moving on to the next cheap rental accommodation.

Practising Fieldwork

Sports as a Key

From the onset of my fieldwork, I was quite aware that 'living next door' and 'being around' most probably would not be sufficient to initiate (research)

relations in a neighbourhood of Kyrgyzstan's capital. From my previous stays in Bishkek, Central Asia's hotbed of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), I had learned that the presence of a 'Western' foreigner is no longer of particular interest to urban youth. This situation made it necessary that I find a more unique way to integrate with my potential interlocutors. Playing basketball thus became the key to my study.

Iug-2 offered several places where the neighbourhood's youth could engage in sports during their free time. There were basketball courts and football fields on the grounds of the 69th School as well as in the yards between the apartment blocks. With this infrastructure in place, sports offered an opportunity for people of different age groups and varying backgrounds to gather quite easily. Internationally acknowledged rules define how a certain game is to be played and so allow for quite uncomplicated interaction right from the start. Furthermore, playing sports together creates an informal and fluid situation from which it is easier to follow up into other areas of life. That was how I started out in *Iug-2*. I was the new foreigner in the neighbourhood, but one who all of a sudden showed up on the basketball court of the local school, running and jumping and shooting hoops with a brand-new basketball. With this I sent an obvious message: let's play.

In that way, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I made contact with some of my key interlocutors simply by playing basketball with them. However, in the months that would follow, the group of people that regularly gathered on the school's basketball court grew steadily, from about four or five neighbours in spring 2007 to sometimes more than forty people in 2008. Among this larger crowd, there were many young residents of *Iug-2* who did not share a strong interest in basketball, but rather joined the social event into which 'going to the court' (*khodit' na ploshchadku*) had gradually developed.

By that time in 2008, the group that came out to the school's basketball court around 4 or 5 pm was quite diverse. It were mostly young Russian and Kyrgyz males from about ages of twelve to twenty-five, but also some Kyrgyz and Russian schoolgirls or female university students, and a few older Kyrgyz men in their forties and fifties. Some of the neighbourhood youth stayed for hours of intense play and competition, while others only passed by and watched from the sidelines. The breaks between the games were a welcome chance to chat and exchange news; they were an opportunity for guys to flirt with girls, and they gave the older males a chance to try and teach the younger generations some of what they knew.

Most of the time the basketball games were merely a prelude, and a typical evening in *Iug-2* continued after sunset made further play impossible. As the sun went down, we usually walked back from the school grounds towards the apartment blocks. The rest of the evening, and often parts of the night, was spent sitting and chatting in one of the yards or strolling through the neighbourhood.

In contrast to my young male Kyrgyz interlocutors, who were out in the yards of *Iug-2* pretty much all the time, the Russian males and the Kyrgyz females tended to head home quite soon after dark. Since mutual visits at home basically did not occur among *Iug-2*'s male youth, the hours spent on the school's basketball court and in the yards of the neighbourhood were my main opportunities to collect ethnographic data.

Pathway: Becoming a Member of a Yard

There was a considerable difference in how my relations to Russian and Kyrgyz interlocutors in *Iug-2* developed during the course of my fieldwork. I got to know my Russian interlocutors first, mostly due to our shared interest in basketball. With the young Russian males of *Iug-2*, such as Maks, I established warm and friendly ties rather quickly. Only a few weeks after I had moved to the neighbourhood, we met frequently; our conversations touched on personal matters and we also began spending time together off the court. However, despite this early familiarity, from a certain time forwards, the relations with my young Russian male neighbours did not advance in terms of mutual commitment or the degree of sharing each other's lives.

My experience with Kyrgyz interlocutors was different. In the first stages of my fieldwork, it proved quite difficult to gain access to the group of Kyrgyz in *Iug-2*. It took several months, and the fortunate coincidence of having a trustworthy mutual acquaintance, before I got in touch with Batyr and his neighbourhood peers. However, once we were connected, the ties to these young Kyrgyz males continuously intensified, quite in contrast to my rather stagnant interactions with the Russians in *Iug-2*.

While with the Russian interlocutors I had to initiate contact myself, and we then formally arranged a meeting, the Kyrgyz interlocutors were not at all hesitant to involve me on their own. The key event here was the daily evening ritual of 'meeting in the yard'. This practice was established to a point that it simply happened without planning. Everyone knew that after a certain hour of the day, around 5 pm, you would encounter some of these young Kyrgyz in the yards of the neighbourhood. Hanging out in front of their apartment blocks was the main common activity among Batyr and his Kyrgyz age-mates in *Iug-2*. They considered it to be the best and cheapest opportunity to have a good time in a familiar environment and among welcome company.

It was common knowledge which residents of *Iug-2* 'belonged' to which yard, and there was a finely grained pattern of youth exchanging mutual visits between 'their' yard and those in other areas of the neighbourhood. But as was true for everyone else, it was not possible for me to belong to more than one yard. There were strict expectations of solidarity among the members of such a group, which were measured by the frequency and duration of one's presence in the yard.

Over time I became subject to this practice as well. If I stayed away from the evening gatherings for several days – whether I had good reason to or not – I noticed a difference in my interlocutors' approach towards me. The young males I dealt with in *Iug-2* would generally not express any hurt feelings or disapproval verbally, but they would make their disappointment felt by a change in their behaviour. In this case, they would no longer put their arms on my shoulders or grab my hand during a conversation (see Frederiksen 2013: 62). Instead, they gave short answers to my questions of what had been going on in their lives in the meantime, and they enquired thoroughly into what exactly I had been doing during my absence from the yard. After such an incident, it usually took me three to four days of steady presence to get back to our 'business as usual'.

The expectation of solidarity with the members of one's yard placed a serious constraint on my research. It forced me to attach myself almost exclusively to one of the yards of *Iug-2* and its members. This decision imposed effects of social control and of the neighbourhood's power hierarchy and structured my opportunities for further interaction. On the one hand, this constellation allowed close integration into the sole group with which I was affiliated, while on the other hand it limited my ability to interact with other residents of the neighbourhood.

In *Iug-2*, Batyr and the other long-time Kyrgyz inhabitants were considered the dominant group. In their understanding of solidarity, it was still acceptable that I kept in touch with some of the Russians in *Iug-2*. From a pragmatic standpoint, this was because the Russians did not take up a big share of my time and in any event preferred to maintain a certain distance from me. More important, however, was the fact that Batyr and the other long-time Kyrgyz inhabitants acknowledged most of the Russians in *Iug-2* as equally 'legitimate', established residents of the neighbourhood, as they were themselves.

Beyond this connection with the Russians of the neighbourhood, practising solidarity with Batyr and the other established young Kyrgyz males frustrated my plan to be in closer touch with other residents in *Iug-2* (let alone doing a comparative study in another Bishkek neighbourhood). Most profoundly, this concerned the rather large group of 'rurals' who were perceived by both Russian and Kyrgyz long-time inhabitants of the neighbourhood to be a potential threat to the social order of *Iug-2* and the 'urban environment' more generally. Combining a hostile attitude towards the rural newcomers with a strict sense of in-group solidarity, *Iug-2*'s established inhabitants sent me an obvious message: if I wanted to integrate with them, I could not avoid taking sides, and however carefully I might attempt to split my time – and, in doing so, my attention – between the established and the newcomers of *Iug-2*, it was simply not a viable option.

Position: Being a (Fictive) Brother

From the moment I attached myself to this group of established residents in *Iug-2*, age became an important factor influencing our relations. With most of

my interlocutors I occupied a different position within the age hierarchy that informed the social organization of the neighbourhood's male youth. In 2008, only a few of my interlocutors were older than twenty-four, while I was thirty. In the local understanding, this age difference of six years placed me in a different, older 'generation' of neighbourhood residents.

The age gap between my main interlocutors and me was far from a deliberate choice for a certain study sample. On the contrary, this constellation resulted from the fact that most of the males above age twenty-five were considered to be already 'off the streets', meaning that they were married, had to take care of a family and so could not spend as much time out in the yards of *Iug-2* as the younger bachelors. Although they might spend most of their free time only metres away from the yards inside their apartments, those 'off the streets' eventually were out of social reach, as much for me as for their younger male neighbours.

Considering the expectations that came with a certain position in an age hierarchy, the relationship between me and my interlocutors in *Iug-2* was rather comfortable for everyone involved. In contrast to their consanguineal kin, their 'real' big brothers, I could more easily decline a request from my close interlocutors, and I was not considered to be responsible for any of their deeds. Still, after some time, my interlocutors became aware that I could be trusted when it came to providing moral and other support. From then on, it seemed easier for some of them to reveal a problem to me instead of to someone else they knew. In line with the dominant picture of masculinity, males in Kyrgyzstan – be they Russian, Kyrgyz or any other ethnicity – tended to hide concerns about their lives instead of sharing them.

To complain about hardships and to ask for moral support was usually frowned upon among male youth. If a young male chose to disclose a private issue, he often deliberately selected someone to confide in who was not socially close to him. Consequently, someone might reveal a quite sensitive fact to someone more 'distanced', an acquaintance, rather than to a close friend or a family member. Especially among the older and younger male siblings of a family, communication tended to occur in the form of command and obedience, and rarely involved nonhierarchical conversations that were guided by a belief in the power of a convincing argument. In light of that, the fact that I shared my younger interlocutors' concerns at eye level was appreciated.

Closeness or distance among young Kyrgyz males could be observed by the way they greeted each other. The most distanced and formal way was to shake hands. Two young males were regarded to be closer when their handshake included using the left hand to embrace the back of the other person's right hand. To express an even closer emotional attachment, two males, while shaking each other's hands, would bring their heads together so that their left temples gently touched. My interlocutors and I greeted each other in this way, which I believe accurately reflected our relationship. We were close, but we did not go as

far as to kiss each other's cheeks when we met, a gesture that signalled the closest affection and appreciation between friends.

This particular standing that I had vis-à-vis the *Shanghaians* decisively shaped the kind of empirical data I could gather. Being a fictive (German) brother and member of a yard, my focus inevitably adjusted to smaller groups of young Kyrgyz and Russian males who had been long-term neighbours in *Iug-2* (Schröder 2014). The perspective that I develop in the following chapters is therefore based primarily on observations of microlevel encounters and informal conversations about these. With a such smaller sample size, my aim consequentially cannot be to draw representative conclusions beyond *Iug-2/Shanghai* or to reflect about youth as a wider 'social category' (as, for example, Roche (2014) does for Tajikistan).

The Conceptual Framework: Integration and Identity

With regard to the lifeworlds of the *Shanghaians* and their everyday routines in Bishkek, my main interest was with issues of integration and identity. The following section reflects on the connectedness of these two phenomena and is meant to serve as the basic conceptual framework for this ethnography. More nuanced discussions will evolve in the single chapters, for example, on territorial identification (Chapter 2), friendship relations (Chapter 5) or ethnicity and language (Chapter 6).

Integration

Simply put, I perceive integration to be about exchanges. The ways in which people practise their exchanges of material and nonmaterial goods create and shape the social relations that tie them to one another. That being said, the involvement in social relations by exchanging with others does not occur arbitrarily. Exchanges are guided and informed by specific rules and conventions, and they require a frame of reference that those who are exchanging share and can commonly relate to. As a result, people may exchange in varying degrees with different counterparts. The rules associated with these exchanges are subject to change over time due to external conditions or innovative practices and can (be used to) facilitate or constrain both personal intentions and collective (inter) action. In that way, social exchange or its rejection may also lead to avoidance, exclusion and (violent) conflict (Chapters 1 and 7).

This very basic perspective can be said to synthesize the different major approaches that the social sciences have developed on integration since the late nineteenth century. The observation that integration is about exchanges can already be found in Durkheim's classic notion of 'positive integration', which he understood to concern mutual cooperation and support (Durkheim 1997 [1893]). Based on that, for most of the twentieth century, integration has been

looked at either from a systemic perspective or starting from individual actors (Domingues 2000).

Until the 1970s, social exchange theory was strongly based on an individual actor model and a focus on the reciprocal transaction of rewards. In the case of Homans (1961), for example, this was inspired by insights from microeconomics and behavioural psychology. From a critical viewpoint, however, this and similar approaches reduced the examination of exchange processes to simply 'the economic analysis of noneconomic social situations' (Emerson 1976: 336). Most profoundly, critique along these lines queried the proposition of a rational actor operating in a perfect market environment, as propagated by neoclassical economic theory, and thus pointed to the insufficiency of some exchange theories to account for the influence of traditions, norms and habits on human behaviour.

To overcome these distinctions, and to link individuals and their motivations with collective arrangements and rules, it was then suggested that exchange theory should look beyond series of dyadic ties in order to investigate the actors' multiple entanglements in both direct and indirect exchange relations (Befu 1977: 276). Responding to this challenge, exchange theory began to develop an understanding of social structure 'as both product and constraint, typically in the form of networks of social relations' (Cook and Whitmeyer 1992: 110).

Beyond the necessity of keeping in mind an actor's social constraints, as he or she is constantly part of a 'structured situation',[10] this last quote from Cook and Whitmeyer indicates a general compatibility of exchange theory and network analysis. Both these concepts aim to combine the premise of an individual actor model with an understanding of structure as patterns of social ties that emerge and operate on grounds of exchanges and transactions (Kapferer 1969; Mitchell 1974; Cook 1990: 219).[11]

Finally, then, the overlap of exchange theory and social networks with the topic of integration may be illustrated by comparing two definitions. Boissevain (1979: 392) names as the first 'virtue' of network analysis that it 'focuses systematic attention on interlinkages between units of analysis. These interlinkages may be outward links between individuals and between groups; they may also be inward links, setting out the interrelations between members of a group or other unit of analysis'. Also having such 'interlinkages' in mind, Münch (2001: 7591) determines social integration as referring 'in the first instance, to the extent and intensity of the interlinkages among the constituent parts of a social unit'.

These developments in the field of exchange theory and social network analysis mark the basis for how this ethnography approaches integration. Throughout the chapters, I will examine various ways in which individual actors define and engage in their social relations through exchanges with others. At the same time, their particular embeddedness in these webs of association will be shown to influence their options, perceptions and interactions. Along the way, I will continue to explore further theoretical angles, for example, on the relatedness of authority

and 'attractiveness' (Blau 1960; see also Chapter 1 of this volume) or on mascu-line 'self-presentations' within a neighbourhood social hierarchy (Goffman 1990; see also Chapter 6).

In particular during later chapters, the work of Ervin Goffman on perfor-mative interactions and body symbolisms during everyday encounters will also be significant in reflecting on the dramaturgical aspects of integration. In a rapidly changing environment such as that of *Iug-2/Shanghai* or Bishkek more generally, the perspective of a microethnography makes it possible to capture instances of emergent social organization through a detailed analysis of interper-sonal exchanges, narrations and self-presentations. Such endeavour to synthesize, broadly speaking, exchange theory and symbolic interactionism can draw on crucial 'convergences' between these approaches, such as that 'institutional modes of behaviour' – such as the aforementioned rules guiding exchanges – are under-stood to emerge from elementary interactions during which 'men "produce" themselves through symbolic interpretations of realities and reward-directed, constructive action' (Singelmann 1972: 422).

Identity

Concerning integration, I have argued that (social) exchanges occur in relation to frames of reference to which the actors involved commonly relate. In order for actors to practise integration in varying degrees, it is essential for them to know who is who, i.e. to have a perception of the own and the other, of similarity and difference (see Schlee 2002). Basically, this is what came to be called social iden-tities, namely to have an 'understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which include us)' (Jenkins 1996: 5).

Starting from this assumption, I perceive identity to be closely intertwined with integration. Despite the fact that both integration and identification capture observable practices of everyday life, analytically it seems viable to see integration as being primarily about the actual exchanges of material and nonmaterial goods, whereas identity refers to (representations of) social categories, including their corresponding meanings and discourses (see Donahoe et al. 2009). This distinc-tion allows us to grasp the dynamic (overlap or divergence) between the actors' actual courses of action and their justifications or statements of belonging. This is what Schlee (2004: 144) points to when he argues that the markers and ele-ments of which identities are composed should 'be seen as the raw material for political rhetoric, which can be used selectively to pursue goals of inclusion or exclusion'.

The perspective from which I have chosen to approach integration is in line with a 'constructivist' take on identities. I agree with Donahoe et al. (2009: 8), who 'understand constructivism broadly to mean that, with the species of *Homo sapiens*, all identities are social, cultural, and historical products, regardless of

whether or not they seem to be natural in the eyes of various actors'. In such a reading, identities form and change according to the ways that actors equip identities with content (such as citizenship, locality, ethnicity, language, appearance and symbols), and how then they handle these vis-à-vis other such classifications in different social situations.

Perceiving identities as variable constructions with possibly changing boundaries (see Barth 1969) – as opposed to treating them as primordial – does not go as far as to claim that changes in the content of identities and their reciprocal positioning come about arbitrarily or are easily achieved. To be able to 'switch' the primary identity of a we-group – for instance, to change the frame of reference of a social movement from a national to a religious one – is a demanding task of political and social engineering that requires skill and leadership (Elwert 2002b). Yet at the same time, even the most skilful leader and manipulator of identity is constrained by the setting within which he or she operates. Thus, historical and current social figurations to some degree prescribe a leader's opportunities for redefining identities and for establishing more or less inclusive group boundaries, because if a leader's claim for change is not considered credible by others, in terms of logic and plausibility, then this leader usually encounters difficulties in mobilizing an adequate following (see Schlee 2004).

In light of the above discussion, the parallels between my take on integration and identity have become apparent. Regarding integration, I trace how early disagreements within the actor-exchange versus collectives-structure debate are dissolved by accepting that the relationship between these levels actually may be one of mutual influence. In a similar fashion, the classic distinctions between primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to identity can be overcome. In order for this to happen, identities have to be generally accepted as products of interactions. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that there are limitations to identity constructions, that identities do contain elements that vary in terms of the degree to which they are ascribed or flexible, and finally that the anthropologists' interlocutors might themselves in fact perceive identities to be 'naturally given' (primordial).

Outline of the Chapters

Based on this conceptual approach, what will emerge from the pages ahead is a panorama of social ties, practices and identity discourses among and beyond the young residents of the Bishkek neighbourhood called *Iug-2* or *Shanghai*.

In Chapter 1, I trace how Batyr had turned into a 'leader' in *Shanghai*. While relating Batyr's biography to the neighbourhood's social history, I discuss the 'showing of respect and responsibility' and the participation in collective violent fights against other Bishkek neighbourhoods in order to depict *Shanghai* as a social and symbolic resource. The fact that during the time of my fieldwork, such

mass fights between different neighbourhoods in Bishkek no longer occurred had lastingly influenced the inhabitants' perception of *Shanghai* as such a resource and altered the practices of their social integration and identification.

Chapter 2 investigates the interplay of *Shanghai*'s built environment with my interlocutors' social practices and the meanings that they attributed to certain places in the neighbourhood. I trace what *Shanghaians* understood to be a 'yard' and I examine which variables influenced the 'liveliness' of the neighbourhood's different yards. I then explore the changing patterns of territorial integration among different 'generations' of young male *Shanghaians* and discuss the 'own yard' as a specific parochial place in relation to other spaces in and outside the neighbourhood.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with *Shanghai*'s age hierarchy and investigate the relations between different 'generations' of young male neighbourhood inhabitants. In Chapter 3, I depict what was understood as a generation in *Shanghai*, which stages age-mates passed through together, and how members of different generations addressed each other. I show how the interplay of seniority and individual merits defined the *Shanghaians*' mutual positionings within the neighbourhood's age hierarchy. Also, I describe the weak link between those generations that were understood to be already 'off the streets' and those that were considered to be still 'on' them.

Chapter 4 continues to present aspects of the neighbourhood's age hierarchy by investigating the relations between the generations of *Shanghaians* who were still 'on the street' of the neighbourhood. I discuss the exchanges between older and younger 'neighbourhood brothers' with regard to loyalty, respect and responsibility. I isolate instances from one intense *bratan-bratishka* relationship in order to discuss the interplay of such 'fictive kinship' with social ties to 'real' kin and friends.

In Chapter 5, I investigate how male friendship relations among *Shanghaians* revolved around an ideal of unconditional (mechanical) solidarity. Starting from the insight that 'true friendship' was possible only among members of the same generation, I investigate different notions of solidarity as they were presented in cultural 'products', such as music and drinking toasts. I analyse how *Shanghaians* practised male solidarity in reference to emotions, leisure activities and their ties to girls. Finally, I contrast these relations to friends with the ties that young *Shanghaians* maintained with (core) family members and their extended kin.

Chapter 6 looks at practices of identification and integration between the two largest ethnic groups of *Shanghai*: the Kyrgyz and the Russians. I depict the diverging social foci that these ethnic groups had developed in their neighbourhood and contrast their different approaches to violence in light of *Shanghai*'s power hierarchy. I move on to discuss the common preference for the Russian language and the shared social history in 'their' neighbourhood as the crucial commonalities that allowed *Shanghaians* of different ethnicities to point to their

'peaceful coexistence', to refer to each other as 'neighbourhood acquaintances' and to include each other in the identity category of Bishkek's 'urbans'.

In Chapter 7, I explore the relations between the 'urbans', i.e. the long-time inhabitants of *Shanghai* and Bishkek, and the post-Soviet migrants to the city, the 'newcomers'. I depict the urbans' stigmatizing rhetoric of portraying recent migrants to the city as rural, backward and violent intruders into the established order in the urban lifeworld. I discuss language, behaviour and appearance as crucial elements of an urban identity in present-day Bishkek and I depict the ways in which these 'skills' could be acquired in a process of 'urban socialization'.

Finally, the Conclusion analyses the background of this urban versus rural identification. I revisit the single chapters of this ethnography, concluding that the *Shanghaians*' integration in and identification with their neighbourhood had begun to fade. Most significantly, this was related to the steady decline of the inner-city fights among the neighbourhoods of Bishkek, a process that had started around 2000. Since then, no new leaders in *Shanghai* such as Batyr had emerged and there had been no new violent experiences that the young males in the neighbourhood could have shared and drawn upon as a social or symbolic resource. Eventually, the reasons for the end of the battles between Bishkek's neighbourhoods seem to be the same reasons behind the switch of integration and primary identification, i.e. from being a *Shanghaian* to being an urban. Here I discuss how urban change in Bishkek was related to the spread of new global entertainment opportunities for the city's youth, to changing urban demographics and the (political) ethnicization of Kyrgyzstan's postsocialist society.

Notes

1. Since 1995, the country has been officially called the Kyrgyz Republic. However, the name 'Kyrgyzstan' is the one most commonly used.
2. It is not my intention to include developments in Kyrgyzstan that have occurred after the period of my fieldwork. Accordingly, the major changes that the country experienced in 2010 – the overthrow of the Bakiev regime in April, the interethnic violence in the southern regions of the country in June and the parliamentary elections in October – will not be considered here.
3. In Russian, which was the predominant language of my fieldwork, *gorodskoi* may be used both as an adjective ('urban') and as a noun ('urbanite'). To stay truer to this local terminology, I decided to use the term 'urbans' (*gorodskie*, pl.) to depict long-term inhabitants of the Kyrgyz capital.
4. In contrast, Liu (2007) presents the cityscape of Osh, Kyrgyzstan's second-largest urban centre located in the south of the country, as 'a tale of two cities': a Soviet one with apartment blocks similar to those in Bishkek and a 'Central Asian' one with 'traditional' (Uzbek) *mahalla* neighbourhoods (see also Chapter 2 in this volume).
5. As Kosmarskaya (2006: 60) shows, the out-migration of 'Russian speakers' from Kyrgyzstan – which in terms of ethnicities, for instance, included 'Russians', 'Germans'

and 'Ukrainians' (see Sacks and Pankhurst 1988: 27) – peaked in 1993 at close to 100,000 annually, after which it continuously declined, dropping to about 10,000 in 2003.

6. Unless otherwise indicated, the official statistical material presented here was provided to me upon request by the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2008.

7. This corresponds with the general constellation of ethnic groups in the country, in particular with regard to ethnic Kyrgyz. According to official statistical information, in 2009, 71 per cent of the country's 5.4 million inhabitants were Kyrgyz, 14 per cent Uzbek, 8 per cent Russian and 1 per cent Dungan (with all other ethnic groups below 1 per cent). See National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (http://stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/5e7a8910-94da-47aa-8f9d-df80fa36134d.pdf).

8. This term might now be considered misleading – following Kyrgyzstan's wide-ranging privatization process of former state property, most of the apartments in the apartment blocks became privately owned (Jermakowicz and Pankow 1994; Shirazi 2004; see also Chapter 2).

9. The designation 'Kyrgyz Middle School' meant that lessons were predominantly taught in the Kyrgyz language. In contrast, at a 'Russian Middle School', Russian was the primary language of instruction. In both the 69th and 29th Middle Schools, grades 5–11 were taught.

10. Collins (1988: 412) provides a description matching the perspective I have outlined here: 'These models [exchange theory and network analysis] picture individual actors as both free and constrained. Human beings have the capacity to create or negotiate whatever they can at any moment in time. But they always act in a structured situation, so that the consequences and conditions of their creativity and negotiation are nevertheless patterned by larger relationships beyond their control' (quoted in Cook and Whitmeyer 1992: 123).

11. Aside from questions of theoretical compatibility, a major orientation for developing an understanding of my interlocutors' social ties and exchanges was Boissevain's study *Friends of Friends* (1974). Regardless of the fact that my approach was a qualitative one, Boissevain's criteria to evaluate social relations also proved valuable for my study of a small group environment. These criteria concern the degree of multiplexity (i.e. overlapping roles), the frequency and duration of interaction, as well as the directional flow of exchanges and the kinds of elements that are exchanged in a social tie.