

**CHILD AGENCY AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
HOW DOES FAMILY ECONOMIC STATUS AFFECT
CHILD AGENCY IN KYRGYZSTAN'S POST-SOVIET
CULTURE OF TRANSITION?**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of DPhil in Social Policy in the Social Sciences Division
at the University of Oxford*

By

Saltanat Rasulova
St Cross College
Word Count: 93,670

July 2013

Table of Contents

CHILD AGENCY AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES: HOW DOES FAMILY ECONOMIC STATUS AFFECT CHILD AGENCY IN KYRGYZSTAN'S POST-SOVIET CULTURE OF TRANSITION?.....	i
List of Tables	v
List of Charts	v
Abbreviations.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Theoretical framework and research puzzle	3
1.3. Theories and approaches utilised.....	7
1.4. Outline of the chapters	11
CHAPTER II CHILDHOOD AND CHILD AGENCY: LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	13
2.1. Introduction	13
2.2. Childhood as a local construct, and children as agents.....	15
2.3. Human agency: history and scope of the concept	17
2.4. Child agency: the evolution of a concept.....	22
2.4.1. Child agency action.....	25
2.4.2. Child agency freedom	29
2.4.3. Child agency purposiveness	32
2.4.4. Child agency outcome.....	35
2.5. Core component tensions within the concept of child agency	37
2.6. Child agency and structures in the context of material disadvantages, culture and settings	38
2.7. Research questions	41
2.8. Conclusion.....	43
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....	45
3.1. Introduction	45
3.2. Kyrgyzstan as an exemplary case.....	46
3.3. Children as research informants of qualitative research	50
3.4. Children and neighbourhoods: the process of selection	53
3.4.1. The state school and the neighbourhood background.....	57
3.4.2. The private school and the neighbourhood background	61
3.5. First phase of the fieldwork (December 2010).....	64
3.5.1. Group discussions to select age groups, to formulate child agency and to test research instruments	64
3.6. Second phase of the fieldwork: determination of sample size, selection of children, additional activities with children and meetings with parents (January – February 2011)	70
3.6.1. Sample size and its consequences.....	70
3.6.2. Additional group discussions and interviews with children.....	73
3.6.3. Ethical issues arising during the course of the research.....	77
Dissemination of information about the study	77
Informed consent	79
Confidentiality and prevention of harm to participants	80
Power relations	81

3.6.4. Meetings with parents, teachers and local authorities	83
3.7. Working with data and analysis	85
3.8. Conclusion.....	86
CHAPTER IV KYRGYZSTAN - POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: TWO MODELS OF CHILDHOOD	89
4.1. Introduction	89
4.2. ‘Childhood’ contested.....	90
4.3. Soviet childhood: a historical overview.....	91
4.3.1. Character formation as child agency.....	91
4.3.2. The early years of independence: economic fluctuation and further political changes.....	95
4.3.3. Families and poverty at the time of transition	98
4.3.4. Families, culture and globalization after the collapse of the Soviet Union	101
4.4. Kyrgyz childhood – a social and cultural view	103
4.5. Modern childhood - (subjective) views of children	108
4.5.1. Childhood and adulthood	109
4.5.2. The happy childhood versus the unhappy childhood.....	110
4.6. Modern childhood – (subjective) views of parents	115
4.6.1. Parents’ childhoods and their influence on current parenting styles	118
The private school parents	118
The state school parents	119
4.7. Conclusion.....	121
CHAPTER V CHILD AGENCY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT: RELATIONSHIPS	124
5.1. Introduction	124
5.2. Agency and age-related relationships.....	125
5.2.1. To be the youngest or the eldest	126
5.2.2. How culture, material wealth and poverty interact to create differing maturity	130
5.3. Sibling relationships	137
5.4. Child agency and gender-based relationships	142
5.4.1. Boys’ relationships with parents.....	143
5.4.2. Girls’ relationship with parents	149
5.5. Low income and relationships.....	156
5.6. Conclusion.....	158
CHAPTER VI CHILD AGENCY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT: SETTINGS AND ACTIVITIES	162
6.1. Introduction	162
6.2. Family characteristics as conditions for the construction of child agency	163
6.2.1. Numbers of children and child agency	164
6.2.2. A family or a household: implications for child agency	164
6.2.3. Differences in parental employment: implications for child agency	166
6.2.4. Subjectively agentic and objectively poor	169
6.3. Housing characteristics as conditions for the construction of child agency	172
6.3.1. A home and a house as a setting to construct and exert child agency	175
6.4. The main home activities and child agency	178
6.4.1. Household chores, expanding skills and child agency.....	178
6.4.2. Paid work and child agency.....	184
6.4.3. Parental divorce and child agency	189
6.5. Conclusion.....	192

CHAPTER VII CHILD AGENCY AND NON-HOME ENVIRONMENT (NEIGHBOURHOOD): SETTINGS AND ACTIVITIES.....	195
7.1. Introduction	195
7.2. Child agency and non - home neighbourhood	196
7.2.1. Neighbourhood as a non-home setting.....	196
7.2.2. Neighbourhood scopes and their impact on child agency.....	198
7.2.3. Neighbourhood and its effects on younger children's agency	200
7.2.4. Neighbourhood and its effect on older children's agency	203
Girls	203
Boys	207
7.2.5. Kyrgyzstan as a setting.....	209
7.3. Neighbourhood activities and child agency	211
7.3.1. Leisure time	211
7.4. School as a setting and child agency	218
7.4.1. School activities and child agency.....	222
Extra clubs.....	222
What is agency in schooling?	224
Schooling as future oriented agency.....	228
7.5. Conclusion.....	231
CHAPTER VIII CHILD AGENCY AND NON-HOME ENVIRONMENT (NEIGHBOURHOOD): RELATIONSHIPS.....	234
8.1. Introduction	234
8.2. Child agency and non-home environment	235
8.3. Child agency and relationships in non-home neighbourhood.....	237
8.3.1. Friends and peers in the neighbourhood	237
8.3.2. Religion and neighbourhood relationships.....	241
8.4. Child agency and relationships in school.....	243
8.4.1. Relationships with classmates	244
Age- and gender-related effects on child agency at school	244
Relationships through learning achievement	247
Relationship through competition at school.....	249
Relationships through bullying	252
8.4.2. School relationships with teachers.....	253
Teachers as knowledge- and power-holders	253
Relationships between children and 'paid' teachers.....	255
8.5. Conclusion.....	259
Chapter IX CONCLUSION.....	263
9.1. Introduction	263
9.2. Aim, proposition and scope of research.....	264
9.3. Ability to act: agency components and settings	266
9.3.1. Home environment.....	268
9.3.2. Non-home environment	274
9.4. Culture, economic background and child agency.....	280
9.5. Kyrgyz society and child agency.....	285
9.6. Conclusion.....	287
References.....	291
Appendix 1 Group discussion with children: Topic guide	314
Appendix 2 Semi-structured interview with children: Topic guide	317
Appendix 3 A list of core methods and activities	319
Appendix 4 Group discussions with parents: Topic guide	321

List of Tables

Table 1. The elements and components of agency	21
Table 2. Research questions, relevant chapters and methods.....	76
Table 3. Core activities, their details and objectives.....	84
Table 4. Central Asian GDP Growth (Annual %) by country	96
Table 5. Number of children per family at the state and private school	164

List of Charts

Chart 1. Kyrgyzstan's GDP Growth (Annual %) 2001-2010.....	97
--	----

Abbreviations

CEE/CIS	Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education Institutions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MLA	Monitoring of Learning Achievement
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	World Bank

Abstract

CHILD AGENCY AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES: HOW DOES FAMILY ECONOMIC STATUS AFFECT CHILD AGENCY IN KYRGYZSTAN'S POST-SOVIET CULTURE OF TRANSITION?

This thesis explores how children's experiences of childhood in Kyrgyzstan transformed after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and the consequent transition to market economy. In particular it studies the interrelations of culture and economic circumstances and their effects on child agency in times of economic, social, cultural and political change which were not given enough attention in the relevant literature. I sampled 40 children (aged 12 and 16) from a state school in an underprivileged area and a prestigious private school (used as economic dividers) to study the complexity of child agency and structure in their daily lives. An 'agency' concept was applied as a theoretical framework conceptualised through the four components as action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome and was formulated as the setting-based ability of children to act in response to cultural and economic structures and relationships at home, school and the neighbourhood. The effects of low and high income on child agency are not straightforward due to the changing traditional culture in the Kyrgyz society, which makes agency not only a social and cultural construct, but one affected by economic conditions. The study demonstrated the nuances of child agency as freedom in high income, its conflicting purposes in low income and differentiated outcomes of short and long term wellbeing between the two groups. Economic circumstances do not only influence the dynamics of agency across settings, age and gender but challenge the very notion of the classic Western concept of agency as an independent ability to act. The findings elaborate on the concepts of the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997) and the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004), as these theoretical frameworks do not account sufficiently for economic dis/advantages as a structural factor of agency, which emerges as a socially shared process of acting whose nature depends on material circumstances.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This thesis is about child agency in contemporary Kyrgyzstan - a country that has been experiencing dramatic changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The modern Kyrgyz population is affected by numerous factors, starting with the profound and sudden economic stratification, the dramatic and sometimes violent political episodes of unrest in the last 20 years, westernization, and last but not least the enduring religious and cultural norms. All these combine to shape the experience of Kyrgyz children and to highlight it as of a special research interest. This complicated local history presents an opportunity to explore equally visible, yet contrasting dimensions of childhood and child agency.

In a country that has experienced huge economic changes of a kind never seen before, traditional culture may have less influence on children's ability to act agentically given challenging economic circumstances. My initial hypothesis was that poverty and low income encourage cultural changes and promote child agency as children start contributing financially to the economy of their household and their roles within the family become more important. While this hypothesis can be partly supported by evidence from different countries with regard to the role low family income plays in the decision to have a child work (Edmonds, 2003), the various assumptions underlying my hypothesis have not previously been examined empirically in transition societies. From the literature the material side of child agency as a local construct also emerged as not having been given enough attention within the framework of the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997), unlike culture which has emerged as a prominent topic. This thesis will demonstrate how economic challenges interact with cultural

norms in a society such as Kyrgyzstan, and produce a specific type of child agency which challenges a classic Western view of agency. Western theorising defines human nature 'as essentially individualist and competitive whose agency is often separated from its membership in a society and is supreme (Amin, 2001; Watson, 2000; Heron, 2008). As Jeffrey (2011) suggests the classic writing on agency emerging from the Marxists tradition and even the literature on the anthropological and sociological youth of the 1980s and 1990s tended to present youth as individual and independent of adult worlds.

The investigation of children's changing roles and their agency in modern Kyrgyz society will not be limited to age and gender (though they are able to considerably affect children's abilities to act), as this would undermine the significance of historical and contemporary economic, political, social and cultural structural forces, as they also create new socio-structural differentiations and economic inequalities. The central aim of this thesis is therefore to explore how interconnected political, social, cultural, economic factors and westernization are creating changes in the experiences of child agency in Kyrgyzstan. It specifically investigates how they are altering children's relationships with their parents, their roles within the home, their activities in different settings, the nature and type of work they do and their social relationships within the school and neighbourhood. This introductory chapter intends to give an overview of this study, to set out the context, research questions and main purposes of the thesis and to describe the contribution it will be making to knowledge in this area. This chapter will also reflect on some theoretical principles and challenges faced when exploring child agency.

1.2. Theoretical framework and research puzzle

Children's experience of childhood in rapidly changing environments will be investigated through child agency as the theoretical lens, which has received growing recognition and attention in academic circles (Panelli et al., 2007; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2010; Katz, 2004). Children are currently seen increasingly as actors and agents of their lives. Overall, the concept of 'human agency' is seen as being influenced by Western conceptions of the actor (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Meyer and Jepperson, 2000) and to be linked with individualism. Theories of/about agency began to take shape in Europe and in the USA by the 1970s (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1994) as a result of the increasing emphasis on the view of the individual as an autonomous, self-interested actor (Johnson, 1999).

An expression of agency among children and young people can be manifested in different aspects of life, such as political mobilization (e.g. Honwana and de Boeck, 2005; Bundy, 1987; Such et al., 2005), poverty reduction (e.g. Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2011), social exclusion (e.g. Ridge, 2002) etc. These studies address the gap in recognising children as agents when faced with adversity, as they were previously seen as helpless and passive victims (Save the Children, 1995; Punch, 1998). Agency is also multiple in its forms of expression, as resilience (Masten, 2001), autonomy, resourcefulness (Werner and Smith, 1982), and/or strategies for long-term planning and survival (Jeffrey, 2011). It can even be negative (Redmond, 2009) or as harming the wellbeing of the agent himself/herself. Such diverse forms of agency expression demonstrate a complexity of its nature and definitions and its receptiveness to different factors.

All societies are believed to share some common features of structural factors (Giddens, 1984). However, this thesis argues that agency is locally constructed and that

structures are circumscribed by local conditions, historical background and cultural norms in such a way that child agency can have a variety of specific forms of expression. This means that different societies can have various constraining and/or encouraging effects on children being agents in their own lives, as well as different perceptions of children as actors. In the studies conducted since the introduction of the 'new sociology of childhood' (1997), material disadvantage stands as the most influential (e.g. Ridge, 2002; Redmond 2009). In fact the ways in which economic conditions play out with culture in the expression of child agency have not been sufficiently explored. This leads to an argument that the prevailing theory that views childhood as a local construct needs a stronger focus on its material dimension. In particular, childhood understood in the framework of the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004) - i.e. understanding childhood in terms of national, cultural, social and political processes - needs to be complemented and further researched from a point of view of economic circumstances.

However, my argument (based on the literature review) about the significance of economic conditions (economic disadvantages/advantages) in exploring child agency together with local cultural nuances requires empirical evidence to prove its added value to the notion of the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004). From this point of view, the question raised is whether and how children as a generational unit change within the national, cultural, social and political processes. The special interest in this thesis is about the interplay of culture and material conditions for the exercise of child agency within that process of change. This is also an inquiry into the ways in which children use their agency to mediate the effects of gender and age across settings (home, school, neighbourhood), and in their relationships (with parents, teachers, friends and families), their activities (studies, paid/unpaid work, friendships, competition etc)

and how these practices vary across economic groups. Agency as a theoretical tool will be argued to encompass the actual variations in children's lives/actions individually as well as structurally in the cultural context of age and gender. To better understand the concept and its relevance to children, this study suggests its theoretical distillation as a concept consisting of four components (which will be fully explained in the literature review). It has been suggested that all four of these - action, freedom, purposiveness, and outcome - are practically circumscribed in different ways. Exploring child agency through the lens of action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome will demonstrate the distinctive variations in the expression of agency between the two economic groups. Furthermore, this thesis will demonstrate that gender and age play out differently in terms of children's abilities to be agentic specifically because of material differences between them.

Kyrgyzstan is proposed as a location for this empirical enquiry, given its specific cultural and economic transition, in addition to the current political and social changes. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic transition to a market economy have produced unprecedented consequences for the traditional cultural and ideological framework. Kyrgyzstan now represents a rich context in which to capture a particular moment in the history and development of a society in transition where the place and role of children are subject to profound and long-term changes. Kyrgyzstan's triple heritage, comprising of its indigenous nomadic culture, Islamic customs and the powerful legacy of its membership in the Soviet Union, can contribute to explain the modern positioning of children in Kyrgyz society. It is a country in which the older person always has more power and authority than the younger. Such a system of authority was also popular during the Soviet regime, when children's subordination in society was grounded in a patriarchal system of relationships, with older people as

power-holders entitled to exercise authority and control over them (for similar studies see Nieuwenhuys, 1994; Hollos, 2002). Given the Soviet legacy of obedience and collectivism reinforced by Kyrgyz culture in terms of age structure, child agency, often argued to be an individually based phenomenon, becomes an even more challenging and contested subject of research, especially now that both these cultures are being challenged.

This is not to argue that some children are culturally programmed and others are free from traditional expectations, but to suggest that some aspects of culture are more likely to survive any economic change, such as the authoritarian relationships between fathers and sons and the particular attitudes of families towards daughters. The very fabric of the authoritarian arrangements is based on the notion of age as not so much biological and developmental but rather a structural factor in Kyrgyz society. An age-related hierarchy presupposes that people who are older are more agentic than younger ones and, in the case of children at least, agency is more than just an ability to act, but is also about navigating between the control of parents and other adults in order to be able to act. However, this is not to paint children as an entirely exploited and inferior social group with regard to a superior adult class (Oldman, 1994). Age hierarchy has a direct effect on child agency, though its implications are not as straightforward as they may seem to be. This is because, although age culturally has a limiting impact on agency by accumulating power, authority and control in older people, it also presupposes more responsibilities being delegated to children as they grow older. However, this picture is different between the two economic groups of rich and poor and age becomes not only a social but also a material factor. In this context, children are a worthy subject of study as a social/generational category, bearing in mind the general consensus in relevant literature that childhood is locally constructed.

In order to understand the effects of material dis/advantage on child agency, the two schools in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, where recent economic stratification is most clearly observable, were selected to allow comparisons between the two economic groups. One state-run and one private school were chosen to demarcate economic divisions. Girls and boys aged 12 and 16 were selected in equal numbers at both schools to study the age- and gender-based variations in child agency. The state school children represent the average poor, as I do not claim to study the poorest children, but rather to explore the differences between material statuses; the range of children in the sample will be shown to be sufficient for the sake of comparison. These two groups still have contrasting backgrounds and will give an insight into how the life experiences of children in Kyrgyzstan reflect their material circumstances. Therefore, although the schools have been chosen as a divider, I propose that this selection is about comparing not two different schools, but two different strata of society.

1.3. Theories and approaches utilised

Childhood is locally constructed; hence child agency is also affected by local culture and society. Culture, understood as values and beliefs shared in a particular society to legitimate particular social practices and personal behaviour (Baldock, 1999), does not mean to be closed, stable and static (Clark, 2004). Instead it is a practice ‘constructed by social agents’ which produces meanings that ‘have to be made and remade’ (Clark, 2004, p. 39). But local not only means local society, but also locally at home, locally at school, and locally in the neighbourhood. However, I argue that children’s agency should be placed within the framework of the (interconnected) process of transition and globalization, which reinforce each other and generate new forms of inequalities. This is because children manage to mingle and personalise the wider impersonal macro factors in their everyday life at the micro level, and they are an

integral part of the wider changes taking place in both family and country. If during the Soviet Union children belonged to the Communist Party through being young members of various children's collectives including school, after the collapse of the regime children were relocated back to their homes and families. Although the word 'collectivism' is not popular in social discourses in contemporary society in comparison with the Soviet era, the practice of collectivism is preserved observably within the family union as a collective entity.

Nevertheless, the use of the theory of agency reveals that the experience of child agency in a specific material and family context cannot be limited to children's behaviour within the home only. This is because children tend to have various abilities to act depending on which setting they are in. Therefore I will also look at children in relation to school and their neighbourhoods. If agency conceptually supports the argument of children as agents, then a setting-based claim empirically acknowledges a more structure-oriented reality for them. As will be demonstrated, this presumes that child agency in Kyrgyzstan means a setting-based ability to exercise agency that depends on the child's age, gender and economic dis/advantages. In fact agency and children's activities are not under the sole discretion of the agent, but are greatly affected by their relationships with others. The latter are profoundly circumscribed by cultural norms, but vary between rich and poor families. Given the important role of locality in the children's lives, settings will be the main ways of organising the thesis, whereas the component-based approach will act as a uniting factor for all the children as agents. The component-based analysis of agency across these variables will demonstrate how children's agency can vary in terms of their abilities to act in the first place, and to do so voluntarily for their own personal reasons and outcomes.

In general, with the Kyrgyz practice of social relationships being focused on age-based authority, the argument of the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997) claiming that children are social actors worth being studied on their own is challenged in some ways, as children in the Kyrgyz culture are not independent from their parents and cannot be considered outside their relationships with them. This relates to both understanding the concept and selecting the methodology. Without generalising this claim, this study underlines that studies with regard to child agency in cultures similar to Kyrgyzstan's are better carried out with a special focus on parent/children relationships whilst taking into account material circumstances. In other words, Kyrgyz children cannot be seen as separate and autonomous beings as they tend to be in the new sociology of childhood. No matter how agentic children are, their agency is still subject to adults' power in the first instance and to other external factors in the second. This questions the universal relevance of the concept of agency, or at least the way in which it is often conceptualised in much of the classic Western writing on agency. This reflection will be pursued throughout the thesis and possible answers will be sought across the chapters.

The thesis will contribute to furthering the knowledge about the cultural, material and ideological distinctions of different conceptualisations and practices of childhood by showing the different dynamics of child agency experienced in the two schools. Although the thesis suggests comprehensive differences between rich and poor, the challenge is to avoid a juxtaposition of the two schools as two opposite worlds of childhood. As shown later in the thesis, some stark dichotomies could be seen with regard to different aspects of child agency between the two schools, such as voice versus action, freedom versus needs, tradition versus modernity etc. Furthermore, settings will also be proved to play different roles in children's lives, in so far as they are more

organic among the poor and rather fractured among the rich. These dichotomised differences tend to make poor children appear more traditional and rich children more consumerist.

Moreover, discussions will bring up even more dichotomies in the lives of children at the two schools as differentiating a family from a household, a home from a house, collective from individual, rational from moral etc. The evidence that children living in the same historic and social conditions and sharing the same culture can have different childhood practices is obvious. This is seen through the ways in which children perceive and use space, exert individuality and collectivism in their lives, maintain cultural norms such as age, honour and shame, their spatial thinking and awareness, their sense of identity and belonging to settings, understanding of their responsibilities etc. However, drawing the contrasts between children in the state and private school without implying that there are no nuances and factors in common between them is one of the main challenges. The thesis will demonstrate that both groups of children and their families are experiencing some degrees of change and continuity in their cultural practices.

The ability to act that agents have depends upon their structural location. In cases of low family income, child agency is about being children in the here and now, expressed in economic and moral rationalities and bounded by cultural expectations. In case of high income, children tend to be less agentic in the here and now, but are more likely to enjoy their agency outcomes in the future. While a possible assumption could be that low income is detrimental for child agency and high income is more likely to have a positive effect, this study shows that economic conditions have a rather temporal aspect for agency action and outcome. This thesis will propose the idea of child agency evolving from mainly a social and cultural category to one that depends on economic

circumstances. A particular distinction of this study will be to do so by looking at contrasting economic conditions and demonstrating particular nuances of agency and culture through agency components. Moreover, the findings will advance the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997) and the cultural politics of childhood (2004), as these do not sufficiently stress the economic dimension of childhood and economic conditions (advantages and disadvantages) as a structural factor of agency.

1.4. Outline of the chapters

The thesis is organised in nine chapters. Starting with this introductory chapter, the thesis will unpack the subject and expand from the literature review with the theoretical framework (chapter II) and methodology in chapter III. The methodological chapter will not only justify the research tools and sampling of children, but also explain the selection of the neighbourhoods and schools. The empirical discussions will start with chapter IV, which is divided in two parts. The first part will be focused on describing the current economic and social situation in the country as a background for analysis and will move on to conceptualising children and childhood from a historical, social and cultural perspective. Although it has been argued that children should be researched in wider national and international contexts, such an approach can be critiqued for overlooking child-level structural conditions. Therefore the second part of the chapter will focus on parental views on childhood and parenting and discuss the ways in which these may affect children's lives.

The four empirical chapters (V, VI, VII and VIII) will be focused on the home and non-home environments, as a setting-based approach to children's different expressions of agency. The home environment represents children's home, their relations to home, the activities they undertake and their relationships with their parents, siblings and other adults. The non-home environment will focus on the same aspects of

children's lives but within their schools and neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are defined as the immediate neighbourhood close to the physical location of home, neighbourhood in a close locality including school, city centre and other important places for children, and finally the country. This thesis will demonstrate the multifaceted complexity of exploring child agency under various economic circumstances through interpreting children's daily life patterns.

CHAPTER II CHILDHOOD AND CHILD AGENCY: LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1. Introduction

There is a proliferation of studies suggesting that children are active social agents in the construction of their own childhoods and that childhood is socially and locally constructed. Thus the concept of agency has attracted increasing attention in academic literature and research. It has recently been acknowledged that children are social agents, able to make sense of their own experiences as well as those of other people and of the society in which they live (O’Kane, 2000). Children exercise agency in ways that depend on their knowledge, their social position and the resources available to them. Literature suggests that while recognising individual agency it is necessary also to acknowledge the constraints under which it is exercised. For instance, the way a child is able to realise his/her own agency is affected by a wide range of factors such as ‘social class, gender, ethnicity and age, alongside the prevailing political, economic and cultural ethos of the society in which he/she is located’ (Pole et al., 1999, p.44). The objective of the following literature review is to summarise the development of the concept of child agency and to highlight the context of the research questions this thesis is aiming to answer.

Although new approaches in the study of childhood and children’s everyday lives have opened up a theoretical and conceptual space where children can be seen as social agents, there is still a theoretical gap between structure and agency (James, 2010). James (2010) suggests that the structural commonalities of childhood are

‘...fundamental to any analysis of childhood since any and every childhood is built around the structures and institutions of the society and culture in which it exists as a social space’ (p. 243).

A construction of childhood cannot be imagined without its relation to child agency and also to structure and therefore it is impossible to fully understand the experiences of childhood without first positioning child agency within that construction.

This literature review aims to discuss the extant theoretical knowledge of what child agency is, the role ascribed to child agency by children themselves in the construction of their own childhood and the factors involved in exercising child agency. Breaking down the idea of agency into different components will enable the distillation of the theoretical concept of agency from practical evidence. This breakdown will inform my analysis later on and will be incorporated into the discussions throughout the empirical chapters and in my research conclusions. I will start by situating child agency within the broader concept of childhood and show the interrelations between the two. The discussion will then move on to the issue of deriving child agency from the broader notion of human agency. The overview of relevant literature will demonstrate the importance of material dis/advantages and culture in exercising child agency and will show that the scope of said agency also varies across different settings and activities children undertake. The literature review will contribute to the advance of theoretical knowledge about the multiplicity of childhood experiences and perceptions in the world but it will also illuminate the structural commonalities of childhood and set the theoretical background for the current research. Therefore, the aim of this literature review is to make a case for the significance of studying child agency in a specific cultural and economic context in order to understand the concept of childhood as a local construct.

To explore the importance of economic dis/advantages in locally constructed child agency, this study will be focused on Kyrgyzstan – a country currently experiencing profound change after the end of the Soviet era in the cultural conceptions

of children and childhood – among the newly emerged economic groups. Kyrgyzstan is as an exemplary case for a child agency and childhood study and the reasons for the selection of this locality are partly addressed in this chapter, but will be thoroughly discussed in the subsequent ones.

2.2. Childhood as a local construct, and children as agents

The argument that childhood is a social construct has received growing attention by scholars of childhood (e.g. Aries, 1962; James and Prout, 1990/1997; White, 1997; Qvortrup, 2005 etc.). The notion of social construction, first introduced by Berger and Luckman (1967) with regard to the reality theory, has been greatly influential in subsequent scholarly efforts towards understanding childhood. Within the social construction approach, one can think of childhood being negotiated through children's interactions with others, allowing for the fact that these interactions differ in various societies.

Moreover, childhood is also argued to be a cultural construct. Although all children across cultures go through the same stages (i.e. they are born, they grow through their childhood and then become adults), this universal experience is regarded through the lens of cultural relativism, as cultural practices of childhood can vary widely and therefore are best understood in a particular cultural context (Woodhead, 1996). Combining the concepts of social and cultural construction widens the understanding of childhood from the perspective of the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004). According to the authors of childhood studies, cultural politics are helpful in understanding childhood from those national, cultural, social and political processes that uniquely affect the construction of childhood across societies and time. This broader framework stresses the cultural understandings and variations of childhood practices existing in any society, yet it does not consider economic circumstances as

being part of the structure-agency dichotomy. The importance of including this missing factor in the scope of child agency research will be demonstrated in further discussions.

Beyond being a social and cultural construct, childhood is also argued to be constructed by children themselves as active agents. However, as seen agency is closely relevant to structure and should not be seen separately (Giddens, 1979). Agency in children may be gaining more attention in the literature than it should, as they are more constrained in their lives than they are often thought to be. Qvortrup (1994) claim that childhood as a construction contributes to the singularity of childhoods through its structural features. In particular, every culture and society has structures that affect childhood and children themselves are part of the construction as agents. Childhood as a space is considered to be affected by institutional structures such as economic and social institutions which exist in every society but the nature of which can vary among them (James and James, 2004).

Apart from institutional structure, it can also be relational in terms of how children are grouped in certain cultures by age, ethnicity, gender etc (James and James, 2004). Following the construction theory, it can be argued that agency and the factors affecting it are also expected to be locally constructed in a specific culture and society and in a specific time. This literature review will highlight the importance of exploring child agency as a construct of economic circumstances and suggest that the economic conditions of children's lives are important yet understudied structures in their own right within the notion of cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004).

James (2010) argues that such concepts or rather dichotomies as structure and agency should be considered as 'valuable heuristic devices' which assist scholars in their research into important structural and theoretical concepts, but also as devices helpful in understanding '...the complexity of the experiences of individuals, who bring

together and contain, in many different ways, the tensions between these dualities in their daily lives' (2010, p. 490). Through investigating the interplay of the wider processes, one will be able to understand the relationships of micro (agency) and macro (structure) factors. James and James (2008) rightly propose that 'the relationship between these twin pillars of social and cultural reproduction is not fixed, however – rather we need to understand it as dynamic' (p. 38). The flexibility and dynamism of the relationship between structure and agency make the construction of childhood a unique subject worth studying.

Child agency is key in demonstrating the universalism of childhood as individually constructed by all children as well as being bounded to structure in general, but also in understanding the plurality of childhood due to locally specific mediatory factors. In this regards, James and James' (2004) notion of the cultural politics of childhood is 'helpful to bridge the theoretical gap between structure and agency' and '...to understand and analyse the social construction of the multiplicity of childhoods that exist in the world...' (James, 2010, p. 487). However, this paradigm does not ascribe enough significance to the material factors influencing childhood, which will be a special focus of this research study.

2.3. Human agency: history and scope of the concept

So what is agency? The term 'agency' is used to describe a wide variety of actions at the individual and collective levels of human life. Overall, the concept of 'agency' is seen as being influenced by Western conceptions of the actor (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Meyer and Jepperson, 2000) and to be linked with individualism. Agency theories in Europe and in the US began to take shape by the 1970s (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1994) as a result of the increasing emphasis on the view of the individual as an

autonomous, self-interested actor (Johnson, 1999). However, there are views that agency can be ascribed to a collective entity as well. Sewell (1992, p. 21) argues that

‘agency is collective as well as individual . . . The transposition of schemas and remobilizations of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others’.

There is a range of definitions of human agency and there are debates around its conceptualisation and measurement. It engages with other concepts such as empowerment, coping strategies, autonomy and resilience, and is often defined through their prism. Nevertheless, in all the richness of the material about agency, it is still possible to draw out common elements and components.

According to Kotan, the concept of human agency consists of action and power. He refers to the Oxford English Dictionary, which describes an agent as ‘a person or thing that takes an active role or produces a specified effect’. According to the Merriam-Websters Online Dictionary, an agent is ‘one that acts or exerts power’, and agency is ‘the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power’ (cited in Kotan, 2009, p. 2).

Kotan argues that such elements as action and power ‘are indispensable to the concept of agency’ (p. 2) as they are causally important in generating each other. However, this definition generates some questions. It is not absolutely clear what power, and power over what, is being discussed here, i.e. power over one’s own self or over somebody else’s; and what world is at issue, i.e. the world of others or one’s own world, or both. Here, Rowlands’ (1997) categorisation of power is useful to fill this gap. She argues that power can be categorised as power over (controlling power), power to (creating new possibilities or resisting manipulation), power with (acting in a group) and power from within (enhancing self-respect and self-acceptance). These kinds of power

can reflect different ways of exercising agency, which in turn could be useful in outlining the components of child agency.

So the main condition for agency is ‘to act to influence or affect the state of the world’ (Kotan, 2009, p. 2). The notion of an act being central to agency is also supported by sociological studies which also define agency as the capacity to act. Ahearn (2001, p. 112) stresses the element of an act but also adds the external environment in which this act takes place and says that agency is ‘the socioculturally mediated capacity to act’. So, although agency is something which is generated internally, it is still about activities of individuals that produce relationships and are in turn affected by structures (Giddens, 1984). Samman and Santos also claim that one of the characteristics of agency is that it is relational and does not occur in a vacuum (2009). This is important in terms of countering the otherwise individualistic nature of the concept.

The next element of agency is purposiveness, according to Kotan; but this is not enough on its own. A real agent should have an ‘ability to judge and reflect upon goals and situations and to determine one’s own goals and objectives as reasons for action’ (Kotan, 2009, p. 2). Giddens (1984) identifies two characteristics of agency i.e. the availability of choice and the individual being ‘reflexive’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) also define agency as an agent’s ability to make meaningful choices. Going further, Ryan et al. (1995) argue that agency is about an ability to promote goals that agents actively value. In Sen’s formulation, agency should also be exercised with respect to the goals the person values and has reason to value (1987). This view of agency helps to differentiate between two parts of agency i.e. as autonomy on the one hand and as ability on the other (Alkire, 2008).

Building on the cherished notion of autonomy, individualism and independence, the modern definition of agency embraces the notion of ‘free will’, meaning that the choices and actions that people take are voluntary and that choices come from within them, not from forces outside or out of their control (Kane, 2002). So, Alexander (1992) talks about ‘moments of freedom’, Thoits (2003) similarly discusses ‘free will’ and ‘the ability to initiate self-change’, while Bandura (1989) calls it autonomous agency. According to James and James (2008), agency is ‘the capacity of individual to act independently’ (p. 9). Agency as freedom also appears in Sen’s view (1985). ‘Agency freedom is freedom to achieve whatever the person, as a responsible agent, decides he or she should achieve’ (Sen, 1985, p. 204). In particular, agency is “process freedom” - i.e. people’s freedom or ability to affect change in their own lives. Therefore agency is important intrinsically, being an end in itself, and also instrumentally, being a key contributor to wellbeing. If people exercise their own agency in realising their wellbeing freedoms (capabilities), they are more likely to realise wellbeing achievements (functionings). Yet, with the concept of agency, Sen makes the point that one’s own wellbeing is not one’s only motivation or objective, as the agent can pursue goals that can reduce her/his wellbeing.

Kane (2002) questions the notion of voluntarism in agency by claiming that humans cannot act voluntarily because of the natural causes of events which create certain obstacles. Honderich (2002) argues that actions and choices that are meant to be generated internally according to the human agency view are in reality the consequences of natural laws and events that are not within the control of any individual. The accumulation of such contradictory positions demonstrates that agency can be viewed and experienced as either bounded or voluntary or may be both at once. This is

especially evident in the case of children who live and exert their agency in a complex web of relationships and structures.

Table 1. The elements and components of agency

General meanings	Core component
Control	Action
Capacity/ability to act	
Power to act	
Elements of act	
Free will	Freedom
Choice	
Autonomy	
Individualism	
Value, purpose	Purposiveness
Value and have reasons to value	
Determination of objectives/goals	
Influence over the state of the world	Outcome
Ability to self-change	

Source: Author's own table based on the work of scholars mentioned in the text.

Table 1 summarises the elements of agency that are prominent in the extant literature and merges them under a more generalised list according to their basic pertinence (“Core components” column). According to Table 1, agency seems to consist of a number of components referring mainly to action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. According to Kotan (2009), ‘a human agent is a person or collection of persons having the ability to exert power so as to influence the state of the world, do so in a purposeful way and in line with self-established objectives’ (p. 1). And it is not only the exercise of agency that is important, but also the outcome that it brings about, which is the final component of agency. This is because one must be able to differentiate between the existence of agency, the exercising of agency and the achievement of agency. Furthermore, the outcome of agency can be related not only to the agent him/herself, but also to other people. The quality of this outcome can also vary from being positive to being negative or even harmful for the agent him/herself. The absence of any of the components of human agency discussed above weakens the character and

nature of agency and therefore agency should be viewed as always consisting of all four components: action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. In later chapters, this basic framework of human agency will be applied to empirical examples of how children exert their agency in concrete structured situations while carrying out specific activities. The same understanding of agency will be taken forward into the substantive parts of this thesis and analyses will seek to incorporate all four components into the discussions.

2.4. Child agency: the evolution of a concept

Research in sociology, anthropology, psychology and political science recognises childhood and children's agency and distinguishes children as units of observation and as actors in their own right who are constrained by the societies in which they live, but who are nonetheless able to mediate the impact of social boundaries within their abilities. In sociology, child agency is about children's 'meaning-making activities', while in psychology it is associated with '...children's behavioural influence on parents during social interaction' (Berardo and Shehan, 1999, p. 25). Rychlak's (1988) definition of agency emphasises that agency is present in human beings from an early age by arguing that agency is 'the inductive capacity of mind to organize or influence its experience in some way *from birth*' (p. 188). The ability to act is also seen in the competencies of babies observed in neonatal units. The staff adopt different attitudes to premature babies and treat them 'as a person-citizen with rights', 'as a needy passive dependant and future person', or 'as a work object' (Hall and Stacey, 1976 cited in Alderson et al., 2005, p. 77).

However, parents as well as professionals do recognise that babies demonstrate their preferences over the neonatal treatment that they receive. One consultant neonatologist remarks:

‘I think it is remarkable. I have enormous respect for these little babies, and sometimes the way they cling on to life is extraordinary. I don’t know ... this will to live somehow...he nearly died about three or four times. It was extraordinary how this little body, this little soul kept winning through...’ (Alderson et al., 2005, p.78).

Some parents and staff talked about the babies’ agency by calling it ‘babies’ crying out for care; wriggling into a comfortable position; pulling out tubes, sometimes prematurely and sometimes appropriately and called the ability to survive ‘force of character’ or ‘obstinacy’ (Alderson et al., 2005, p.79). In fact, developmental psychology argues that agency is given to a child from birth, whereas symbolic interactionist conceptions of agency connect the agency to the appearance of language (Mead, 1934). Equally, the idea that children have agency is increasingly accepted especially since the development of the new paradigm for the study of children that emerged in the social sciences during the 1990s (Prout and James, 1990/1997). There appears to be a growing consensus that children should not necessarily have to be like adults in order to be agents.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1983) brought about an enhancement in treating children as sociological and anthropological subjects in their own right. Articles 12 - 15 regulate the right of the child to speak on matters that affect him or herself, and their right to freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and freedom of association. However, the UNCRC is seen to be ‘equivocal on the issue of children’s agency’ (White and Choudhury, 2007) and seems to consider that not all children can be agents. For example, article 12 restricts the right of the child to speak to only those children who are ‘capable of forming his or her own views’, who are more likely to be like adults. In addition, article 14 stresses the ‘rights and duties’ of adults ‘to provide direction’ to the child in how she or he exercises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

These restrictions are put forward in the belief that children are not capable of deciding themselves what is good for them mainly due to their young age, which is also about adults guiding children because of their stage of development. I suggest that although the UNCRC recognises children as agents able to speak up on their own behalf, at the same time it narrows the boundaries of child agency and almost equates it with participation. It seems that given the fact that children are seen as vulnerable and in need of protection (according to the UNCRC), they must be able to speak up. So by understanding child agency as participation, the inclusive discourse on children as participating and autonomous actors can in turn negate the broader issues and complexity of child agency.

Thus, it appears that powerlessness, incompleteness, incapacity, weakness and inability are embedded in characteristics of children by default. Valentine (2009) writes that a liberal definition of agency excludes children because of its moral dimension, as well as through its emphasis on rationality and competence. However, children have preferences and judgments about what they want and why they want it, which may differ systematically from those of adults. Robson et al. (2007) argue that agency challenges the notion that children are essentially powerless and are weak minors, and promotes the alternative that children as agents are ‘...active empowered young people’ (p. 136). Feminist and post-structural theories claim that children are ‘...simultaneously both dependents and agents’ and that even the ‘...powerless do not entirely lack agency’ (Robson et al., 2007, p. 138). With the argument in mind that children are both agents and dependents, this section will analyse what child agency is through the core components of human agency identified in the above discussion i.e. i) action, ii) freedom iii) purposiveness and iv) outcome.

2.4.1. Child agency action

The first component of agency, which is about taking action, and the issues surrounding it are well demonstrated in the case of children. As discussed earlier, taking action is restricted by certain circumstances and although actions are generated by an agent him/herself, they are affected by others. Research into how young people aged 12-25 exercise personal agency when undergoing transitions in education and training, work, unemployment, and in their personal lives found that children do not simply act, but they have to adopt several forms of transition behaviour to be able to act. These forms are ‘strategic’, ‘step by step’, ‘taking chances’, and ‘wait and see behaviours’ which young people exercise to move from one stage of life to the next. Transition behaviours are the ‘patterns of activity people adopt in attempting to realize their personal interests and occupational goals within social requirements and structural opportunities’ (Evans and Heinz, 2007, p. 86). This suggests that young people have to adjust to the conditions that they find themselves in so as to achieve the results they want to achieve. The article calls such type of agency ‘bounded agency’, which means that it is ‘socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasising internalised frames of reference as well as external actions’ (p. 93). In terms of agency components, this means a reduced scope for young people’s individual agentic actions and circumscribed freedom to do so.

Child agency becomes somewhat problematic when one attempts to view children as holders of power. For instance, if children have to work, they may seldom do the work they would prefer, such as work which brings them respect, appreciation, skills and money (Levison, 2000). So when acting to do paid work, children usually lack the power to make their desired choices. Mizen et al. (2001) suggest that the motivation for children to work is about ‘...a relationship between choice and constraint, freedom and

necessity' (p. 53). The majority of children are involved in domestic or unpaid work, which they do not necessarily appreciate or value. For example, in Kyrgyzstan rural children are often sent to live with urban relatives or sometimes with non-relatives to help them with household chores (SIAR, 1999), which demonstrates how children lack abilities to exert their power. Such children's abilities are constrained by the fact that they do not have the freedom to make their own choice due to economic reasons. These children are separated from their own families to find better living conditions outside them. They do the work which they would not want to do otherwise. This is an important emphasis on the role of economic disadvantage not only for the child agency actions, but also for its freedom component.

According to SIAR (1999) 76% of working children work as they have no alternative because they were sent to work by their parents or relatives. This demonstrates how children act as agents but cannot necessarily exert their '*power over*' - i.e. resist manipulation of adults. Cultural norms of relationships between children and parents or/and other adults seem to be important in such situations, especially given the traditional Kyrgyz age-related hierarchical pattern of relationships, which were not studied in the SIAR's report. However, the relationships between children and parents within a family context is not solely unilateral coming from the parents down to children, as the latter are far from being helpless victims of parental interventions, but are also able to affect parents' behaviour in a variety of ways (Bell, 1974; Schaffter, 1975; Bell, 1968 etc.). According to SIAR's (1999) research conducted in Kyrgyzstan, 24% of working children work voluntarily in order to help their families and relatives. Working children could be recognised as not having a childhood, as childhood can be considered as a time free from responsibilities and work – a notion of childhood that first emerged in the 19th century in the industrialised countries of the North (Feeny and

Boyden, 2003a). However, paid work might be one way in which they express their agency when children act to address the adversities of their situations instead of being passive victims.

With the given examples, it is seen that children find it difficult to resist manipulation, and not to work or not to undertake the kind of work they do not want (*'power over'*). But children also choose to work and exercise their *'power to'* to create opportunities for themselves. The difficulties for children in acting as agents and exerting power are likely to be multidimensional. Not only are children influenced by external factors, but they are also subject to the constraints already imposed on them for being minors (though this is not to say that parent or any other adults are unconstrained). Moreover, child agency unfolds in different settings (family, work, etc.) and in various materially specific conditions. Poverty as a structure affecting child agency stands out as a distinctive context and is likely to affect all components of child agency. The effects of low income (which is also argued to be relative to local conditions) needs more attention especially in terms of its interaction with other factors such as parenting and culture, so as to determine its place within the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004).

In school, which is another setting for child agency, children again confront the authority of adults when it comes to agency actions. The schooling system in the former Soviet Union was characterised by authoritarian and teacher-centered learning/teaching (Silova, 2002), with a perfectly clear delineation between the roles and places of children and teachers at school. The same rigid teaching system still exists in post-Soviet Central Asian countries (Silova et al., 2007) including Kyrgyzstan, where the school dictates strict discipline and obedience to teachers' authority.

Nevertheless, children in general underline their desire to have more power to equalise their position with that of adults. They find ways to act as agents in school settings, occasionally not along the lines of, but against, regulation. So in March 2003, some parts of the world, particularly Germany and the UK, witnessed thousands of children aged 12 – 18 protesting against the Iraq War in the streets of their cities (Such et al., 2005). The children in the UK arranged to do this during school time, or at lunchtimes, and the protests are believed to have been organised by children themselves. Thousands of pupils expressed their attitudes towards war and demonstrated their agency in practice. *The Daily Telegraph* (14 March 2003, cited in Such et al., 2005) ‘recorded teachers trying to exert control, attempting “to stop the protest by locking the school gates, but the children ran across the playing fields to get out”’. Such child agency action was not expected, and the government and media, as well as law enforcement bodies, were not ready and did not know how to respond to this act of agency in a group (*‘power with’*).

It seems that children do accomplish the first core component of agency – action - but with a host of mediating factors affecting the routes they can take to exert power. This falls in line with the formulation of action theory (Golwitzer and Brandstadler, 1997; Chapman, 1984), which argues that not all actions are under an individual’s control, as they are subject to social and physical constraints. However this suggestion should be complemented by the argument that agentic actions seem to be subject also to economic disadvantage and cultural norms. Nevertheless, child agency is already expressed in the ways in which children navigate through different structures, though a further question will be how children’s abilities to act develop in a specific cultural context and how they interplay with economic circumstances.

2.4.2. Child agency freedom

There is a growing recognition that freedom or autonomy is important for children and this is what children themselves acknowledge as important. A study on the subjective wellbeing of children aged 10 and 15 in the United Kingdom discovered the importance of a sense of autonomy and control in young people's lives as a key cross-cutting theme (Rees et al., 2009). In particular, children value '*the amount of choice you have in life*', an indicator that is strongly associated with the overall wellbeing of children. Children also found it important for their wellbeing to have freedom. While the freedom component of child agency is intrinsically important for children, it operates differently in various contexts and is probably linked with the power that children can have over their actions. Such and Walker (2005) point out that 'the position of the child in public is often, by default, one of moral incompetence' (p. 51). This fundamental tension can be illustrative of bounded child agency. As mentioned above, being a child already involves assumptions of being less able, because children are younger than adults and therefore they have lower levels of ability, skills, wisdom and experience. In fact, age stands as a crucial variable in treating children as being less developed, and consequently less able to act in their own right, but also more accountable, which contradicts their relatively weak social position.

In some cultures similar to Kyrgyz, age can be the most important factor of organising social relationships in society. Paradoxically, children are expected to behave responsibly but are not given full recognition as responsible agents (which could vary from culture to culture). As a result of limited freedom due to their younger age and position in society, children may experience suppression of their agency actions and freedom as discussed earlier. The question to ask would be whether such societal norms and attitudes to children, which are strongly embedded in the nature of social

relationships can be subject to change as a result of economic, political, social and cultural transition. For instance, in a country such as Kyrgyzstan, which is recognised as a weak state, people's agency can have different forms and be expressed in alternative ways distinct from the patterns during times of stability. A study (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2007) argues that state weakness in Kyrgyzstan '...deters citizens' contribution to the public sphere, reinforces a culture of impunity, leads citizens to defect from their duties...' (p. 455). Given a low level of state support and limited social services, these people possibly have to rely on their own survival strategies in contrast with the previous Soviet system of egalitarian and universal social policies. Such country context can be able to reshape the traditional role and place of children in this society.

The review by Redmond (2008) of nine papers on children's perspectives on economic disadvantage demonstrates that child agency matters to children, to their parents and families, in situations where it helps them cope with financial and other pressures. This fits with Ridge's findings (2002) about how children living in families receiving Income Support in the UK act in response to their parents' poverty. In particular, children in low-income families express their agency in the way that they often adopt thoughtful approaches to family circumstances by suppressing, regulating, and controlling their own demands and desires and even protect their parents from discomfort about the impact of poverty on them. When asked what they would wish to change in their lives if they could, the answers did not include lists of material possessions, but rather focused on things of common importance to the whole family. To some extent, low income triggers another component of agency such as purposiveness.

The freedom (or lack of freedom) of actions to suppress one's own needs and wants is personally determined, but is framed and grounded within the wider socioeconomic context. It also links with the outcome dimension of agency discussed further on and demonstrates that agency could promote both the agent's own goals as well as goals other than the advancement of one's own agency. As seen with the previous agency component, poverty tends to impose its own specificity on child agency and therefore the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary agentic actions become blurred. For example, poverty stimulates the consideration of common good in children, but it could reduce children's freedom in taking agentic actions for themselves. In particular, girls who sympathise with their parents' needs and boys sympathising with their lone mothers can exclude themselves from social activities in order to save family money, which are also an exercise of agency. But are these actions voluntarily taken by children or is it poverty which encourages them to do so? Although some could argue such actions are about 'learning to be poor' (Shropshire and Middleton, 1999), one could disagree with this argument, as children are much more agentic than that. This is expressed in the way that children do not necessarily act as the passive victims of low income who need to be rescued, but they make conscious decisions and choices, develop strategic skills and capacities and take control over their own lives to a significant extent.

As discussed, the freedom dimension of child agency is not without its problems. As Redmond argues, child agency '...needs to be understood in the context of social and economic constraint, but also in the context of dependence on, and submission to, the authority of adults' (2009, p. 544). Robson et al. (2007) propose that child agency may include actions either conforming to adults' expectations e.g. children working to earn money and help their families (Punch, 2002a) or resisting the expectations, so called

‘reactive’ agency (Bell, 2007). Generally, the potential for children’s autonomy and agency freedom in the family context depends on the way they are parented within a specific culture. The extent of freedom, understood as the child's ability to act autonomously to fulfil self-determined actions, is largely determined by the cultural norms of the society. The norms legitimise how much power parents can assert over their children and how much or little freedom children can have in their actions. In some cultures, it may be usual that culture is a natural source of children's disempowerment, whereas in others it may be the opposite. This supports Levison's argument that ‘children use what power they have to affect outcomes that matter to them’ (2000, p. 131), but also underscores the fact that children may not have sufficient power to achieve their desired outcomes. This basic observation ties up with the earlier presumption that children lack power, which in turn leads to restricted freedom, and vice versa. Culture, poverty, and family contexts are some examples of structures which set the ground rules regarding the kind of freedom children are allowed to have to exert their agency in most circumstances.

2.4.3. Child agency purposiveness

Having reviewed the characteristics of Sen’s agency concept, Alkire argues that ‘...indeed agency cannot be defined except in relation to goals’ (2008, p. 4). Purposiveness turns out to be important for agency in general, as human agentic action has to have a meaning to the individual performing it. Such purposiveness is thought to be present even in the babies who expend great effort to survive, which the authors claim to be the beginning of agency in terms of making choices and taking decisions (Alderson et al., 2005). However, this view is challenged by others arguing that children are developmentally immature and that their agency needs time to develop (Purdy, 1992). Alderson et al. (2005) further argue that maybe

‘the babies’ efforts were not at all conscious one; this partly overlaps with all human agency, since people of all ages can never be wholly consciously aware of reasons for their actions’ (p. 78).

The studies about child poverty in Kyrgyzstan (Yarkova, et al., 2004; UNICEF, 2009b; Marcus et al., 2002; ILO, 2001) largely do not consider children’s situation from the point of view of child agency, but they rather express a view of children as victims. Some studies talk about ‘denied’ childhood for Kyrgyz children who work and earn money for their own survival (Toursunof, 2008). Although child labour in Kyrgyzstan has certainly some hazardous forms, children were not acknowledged as being able to act as agents who made conscious decisions in control of their lives.

Along with other reasons for child agency actions from the previous literature (schooling, political views etc), poverty seems to be an important structure informing agency purposes. Here again it is difficult to differentiate whether children’s actions are consciously voluntary or this is what children are required to do because of both economic and cultural demands. For example, the study of the lives of children in some of the poorest countries of the world (Lieten, 2008) discovered how children exercise their agency by taking greater responsibilities in their households, as they know the hardships that their families are facing. Redmond (2009, p. 542) claims that based on his literature review ‘children are active agents and use a variety of strategies to cope with living on low income’, which could mean that children give purpose to their actions and make choices concerning the strategies to use in certain circumstances.

A similar argument is put forward by Ridge (2002), who claims that children in low-income families are agentic in a complex web of relationships with their parents (and other adults), as well as agentic in their attitude to their living conditions. Apart from their thoughtful and mindful adaptation to their material living conditions by regulating their demands, children in low-income families have a constrained choice of

working or not working, but see work as an economic activity giving them independence and freedom and a chance to enter a social environment (Ridge, 2002). Working helps them address their economic circumstances and turns them into economic agents (Ridge, 2002). Therefore children choose to work despite their young age at least in part in order to achieve some autonomy. The rationalisation that children give in regarding their work reflects both freedom and necessity, because they feel they are responsible towards their parents. Although such agency gives children more autonomy and freedom, it also creates more benefit for their families - i.e. results that were achieved by exerting agency.

In short, child agency is realistic in terms of taking action, but its purposiveness component, similarly to the freedom aspect, can be largely affected by material disadvantages and becomes less focused on individual wellbeing by prioritising family benefit. The attitudes and purposiveness of children's actions in low income conditions emphasise their value of solidarity towards their families. This demonstrates that purposiveness goes beyond agents' own valuing of action per se, but is considerate of others as well. Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2011) who worked with children living in disadvantaged urban areas in central Accra, Ghana, discovered agency expression in the way in which children value their deepest concerns (e.g. their solicitude for the suffering of the mother) as an end in themselves. They also evaluate their position logically, make judgments and then move '...towards particular courses of action' (p. 9). So children are individual agents, but may also be agentic individuals to the extent that they care about others. The authors go on to describe these experiences as concerns 'irreducible to either the calculative instrumentality of rational choice or the enactment of predefined social scripts or cultural expectations' (p. 9). These are the children who,

as Mizen and Oforu-Kusi say, ‘act with intelligence, empathy and ingenuity, as defined by their understandings of the forces they encounter’ (p. 9).

The degree to which children are able to realise their agency is affected by a range of factors in the context in which they live and settings where they act. The importance of material conditions for child agency and their interplay with other structures, particularly with culture, has not been given enough attention in the literature. Consequently, these factors which contribute to the differences in individual exercise of agency should be further studied to learn about childhood and child agency and bridge the theoretical gap.

2.4.4. Child agency outcome

In the literature review so far, it has been shown that the outcome dimension of agency is crucial. According to Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), literature on people living in poverty shows that ‘...lack of agency is central to their description of ill-being’ (p. 9) and involves different domains of life such as decision making in the family, at work, possessing financial resources etc. In Sen’s account of agency, ‘acting agency and being able to choose are, in this view, directly conducive to well-being...’ (1992, p. 51) and ‘for an integrated person it is likely - possibly even inevitable - that the person's well-being will be influenced by his or her agency role’ (Sen 1985, p. 187). Sen argues that agency is intrinsically valuable and can also be instrumentally effective in reducing poverty. In Sen’s account, agency is potentially key to improving one’s life and reducing poverty and therefore to increasing wellbeing. However, while child agency was demonstrated earlier to be effective in contributing to common accumulative actions against poverty, it is not necessarily good for agents’ own wellbeing.

As Alkire explains (2008, p. 5), ‘agency does not have to advance one's own well-being at all; it may be ‘other-regarding’ and even may compromise one’s own

wellbeing. For example, children can agentially exclude other children and poverty is quite often a reason for children to act as excluders based on material disadvantages (Redmond, 2009). This is poverty, which is acting on the children to make them excluders as well as individual acts of child agency which target other children and pick them out as different. Children can exclude themselves by becoming engaged in truancy and/or drug addiction and removing themselves from school and peer groups, which can have negative effects on children's immediate as well as long term wellbeing. As a study into working children in Kyrgyzstan shows, those who do not study at school see themselves as '...different compared to other children; they can be offensive and abusive to those who are not part of their group or who are not like them' (ILO, 2001, p. 24). Therefore agency can bring negative as well as positive outcomes for the agent him/herself and for others and/or positive for others and negative to the agent him/herself. Therefore, agency itself could be either thickener or thinner (or indeed both) of the agent's wellbeing/illbeing. This is what would be called the 'agency paradox'.

Children's actions such as taking up paid work, based on their evaluation of their own needs against the needs of those who are significant for them, '...move them to resourceful and creative activities in the face of the severest of privations' (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2011; p. 10). Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2011) recognise the children's 'talent for living' under the conditions of extreme poverty and deprivation where they strive to take what is possible out of their living conditions. It is an individual aspect of agency determined by the extent to which the agentic actions result in positive or negative outcomes. In fact such outcomes then enable further exercise of agency for children and demonstrate how agency actions are important both for immediate as well as long term

outcomes. In other words, the action, freedom and purposiveness components of agency have manifold levels of outcomes depending on context and various external factors.

2.5. Core component tensions within the concept of child agency

Situating child agency within the broader analytic scope of agency as based on four main components - action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome - appears to supply us with a satisfactory working model of conceptualisation. However, not all components of agency fit with equal ease within the framework of child agency - the concept of freedom is a prominent example. Freedom in child agency is expressed in a contradictory combination of needs and wishes, autonomy and dependence, self-regarding and other-regarding etc. Such circumscribed freedom in realising child agency is due to conflicting factors that cause children to act voluntarily in involuntary sets of choices or lack of choices. The purposiveness component of agency also stems from a specific context, which can overshadow children's own wellbeing in favour of the common good. Such a circumscribed reality of child agency components is particularly stark given low income and is more nuanced in cultures where such structures as age can have even a greater constraining and at the same time liberating effect on children's freedom to act. Kyrgyz cultural background is one of those examples where one can witness not only distinct cultural and ideological background but also profoundly polarised economic circumstances – a combination of these factors is a worthy subject of research on children.

The examples show that in order to understand child agency, it is essential to consider the concept in its diverse and localised richness and study its relationships with (the context of) structures. Economic circumstances in general need to be included in the model of the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004) and to be recognised as a type of structure influencing child agency. It is hypothesised that when

young people living in poverty do have agency it is not the type of ‘independent’ agency that Western scholars predict (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Rather, young people often exercise agency through building and nurturing social relationships particularly enhanced by their poor material circumstances. Agency can be exerted in different forms in various material contexts and therefore it is useful to study in more detail how children act as agents and how agency is shaped within specific societies and time periods. However how much of it is affected by cultural circumstances and how culture and economic conditions are intertwined in their effects on agency is an additional question. Such an approach acknowledging child agency and structure in the wider framework of national and cultural contexts, social practices, political and economic processes, etc, can unite two research perspectives and engage in a more fruitful debate on the commonalities and diversities of childhood.

2.6. Child agency and structures in the context of material disadvantages, culture and settings

The suggested four component framework of child agency (action, freedom, purposiveness, and outcome) allows us to unpack the nuanced interconnections of different relevant factors, although it by no means exhausts the nature of the concept. The agency framework in this study needs to be complemented with the James and James’ (2004) notion of the cultural politics of childhood, which approaches childhood studies from national, cultural, social and political processes. However, as demonstrated, this notion, in turn, can benefit from being extended to economic factors surrounding children in society, as material conditions matter for child agency. The study of the interplay of material circumstances (economic dis/advantages) and culture as well as parenting and child relationships in different settings such as home, school and neighbourhood represent another gap in the literature.

Given the argument that child agency is locally constructed, culture seems to be one of the driving forces to prevent or promote child agency, with important implications for all its components. Traditional cultures sometimes exhibit dominant/oppressive characteristics vis a vis children. Powerful normative notions such as shame and stigma can also be the drivers of freedom and agency. Mead (1928/1961) studies children and young people in Samoa and the South Pacific and claims that they are products of their culture and the way they were brought up. Kardiner (1945) suggests that there is a link between personality and the culture the individual lives in and that every culture has a 'basic personality' that is common to the majority of people of that society. This is not to say that children are merely culture-blind members of society or, as Mizen and Ofosu Kusi assert (2011), 'culturally programmed', transferring cultural norms and expectations from one generation to next without any internal evaluation. But it is important to underline that culture is still the basic framework of values to which children refer to the extent they think necessary.

While the settings seem to be largely mediated by the children's relationships with other children as well as adults, material disadvantages are one of the structures that directly influence children's freedom to act. One could suppose that economic conditions are an even stronger variable in affecting child agency than culture. Material disadvantages are a strong factor in pushing children to act and giving them family-focused purposiveness, though it can compromise the agency outcomes. Consequently, in cultures such as Kyrgyz, where age hierarchy is the most important factor of organising social relationships and where children are culturally situated as inferior to adults, children's material contribution could equalise their roles to those of adults.

Ridge (2002) suggests that children from low-income families are active agents, but are constrained by their economic conditions, which affect their capacity to exercise

their agency. Redmond (2009) underlines the main ideas present in the literature, such as that poverty is both a constraint for child agency and a facilitator, as children adapt to manage the constraints of economic disadvantage. Klocker (2007) claims that poverty, along with age and gender, is one of the factors affecting child agency as ‘thinners’, as children have to make decisions and take actions in a highly restrictive context, with few alternatives. With the example of Tanzanian girls working as domestic workers, the author demonstrates how being a girl-child (i.e. gender and age factors) living in poor households can negatively mediate their assertion of agency circumscribed by specific socio-cultural and material conditions. Poverty pushes Tanzanian girls to circumstances where they are belittled and their sense of powerlessness and lack of alternatives is exacerbated. In contrast, children may also exert ‘thick’ agency (Klocker, 2007), which is about having a broad range of alternatives.

Presumably, different factors affecting child agency operate as ‘thickeners’ or/and ‘thinners’. So, for example, children in poverty are more likely to operate on ‘thin’ agency and have more ‘thinners’ than ‘thickeners’. But poverty could also be both a thinner of child agency and a thickener by giving children more reasons to exert their agency. In previous examples of child labour, it is demonstrated that children sometimes have no choice but to work, whereas street children in the study of Mizen and Ofose-Kusi (2011) showed a talent for meaningful living despite their difficult life circumstances.

Important questions arise regarding how children interpret larger social processes in their everyday lives, how child agency interacts with other factors, how the factors interact with one another (e.g. culture and material dis/advantages, settings and gender; age and agency etc.), which of these factors are more influential in terms of affecting child agency and to what extent child agency is affected by social, cultural and

economic circumstances. Children's agency is not a popular subject of research studies about Kyrgyz children and therefore there is no relevant empirical evidence on what agency can mean in the cultural context of Kyrgyzstan and how it would relate to children, especially given a specific period of transition and inequalities. James and James (2001) claim that

‘...neither structure nor agency perspectives are sufficient...What is needed, in effect, is to find some empirical evidence in children's everyday lives to support Gidden's structuration theory or Bourdieu's theorizing about the “habitus”’ (2001, p. 31),

as this analysis of their relationship will also contribute to understand childhood continuity and change happening through their relationships (James, 2010). James (2010) argues that rather than exploring child agency at a micro level and therefore contributing to the pluralities of childhoods, it is crucial to look at children from a macro level of their dependence on social stratification, culture, gender, generational relations, etc. The integration of both approaches will lead us to understand that child agency is not only constrained but is also encouraged by structural factors. Low and high income and their effects on child agency will be discussed throughout the four components - action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. The analysis will reveal that the relationships of low/high income and agency is more nuanced than being ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ for which Kyrgyz culture would be an example.

2.7. Research questions

As demonstrated above, children do not exist on their own and develop through their interactions with others. It is argued that ‘children's agency needs to be understood in the context of social and economic constraint, but also in the context of dependence on, and submission to, the authority of adults’ (Redmond, 2009, p. 544). In general, as suggested by Robson et al. (2007), ‘...agency appears to be inhibited or encouraged by

young people's (constrained/opportunistic) locational contexts...' (p. 142), and therefore it is likely to be adaptive under different circumstances and to be locally constructed, as is childhood in general. Christensen and James (2008) argue that although children may share similar developmental characteristics,

'...their social experiences and their relative competencies as social actors must always be seen as contextualised, rather than determined by the process of physiological and psychological change' (p. 176).

In this sense, child agency could be considered as

'a form of social action contextualised by the many different ways in which children choose to engage with social institutions and structures that shape the form and process of their everyday lives' (James et al., 1998, p. 88).

The factors, such as cultural discourses, social and settings-based relationships appear not to be given sufficient attention in terms of their interconnections with material dis/advantages across age and gender dimensions, but which show significant explanatory potential regarding child agency. Having economic conditions as a prerequisite for cultural change and for the exploration of agency within this study, the following research questions have emerged from this review:

- Whether childhood as a social space/a generational unit changed in Kyrgyzstan due to the historical (collapse of the Soviet Union) and economic transition (to market economy) and what factors affected this change, if any (chapter IV).
- To what extent in modern Kyrgyz society culture and economic circumstances affect child agency across settings (home, school, neighbourhood), relationships of children (with parents, teachers, friends and families) and their activities (chapter V, VI, VII, VIII).
- To what extent children can use their agency to mediate the effects of gender, age, economic circumstances (or vice versa) and how these practices vary across the economic groups (chapter V, VI, VII, VIII).

Kyrgyzstan, as an exemplary place to study child agency, is a country where the cultural conceptions of childhood were once almost universalised across all social strata during the Soviet period. However, since the early 90s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyz culture was affected by the economic, political and social upheaval of the transition period (i.e. it is more differentiated now between various economic groups, as it will be discussed in the further chapters). Therefore Kyrgyzstan represents a useful context (both in cultural and economic terms) to generate local data and enrich the knowledge about child agency and childhood and contribute to the bridging of the current gap in research literature.

2.8. Conclusion

Prout and James (1997) have pioneered the socially constructed nature of childhood as the new paradigm of childhood studies. They stress that children are social agents able to shape their life structures and processes and their 'social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspectives and concerns of adults' (p. 8). What this literature review has attempted is to delineate the concept of child agency through its components as they occurred in the literature such as agency action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome and to show the interconnectedness and complexity of child agency and structure in the real daily lives of children. Child agency is a complex concept and children do not escape structural constraints (and indeed nor do the adults). As discussed earlier, children are considered to be less agentic due to their younger age, which is seen to render them as less capable and rational and their agency is subject to nuanced variety of structural constraints.

The bounded nature of child agency allows us to assume that children practise their agency differently in various settings and that their abilities to act depend on their relationships with adults. The chapter has also demonstrated that economic

disadvantages play a key role for child agency and therefore, the literature review highlights the need to include material conditions in the paradigm of cultural politics of childhood. These gaps identified in the literature have been formulated as research questions and Kyrgyzstan proposed to be an exemplary case for this study. This country is the right setting to empirically investigate the added-value of the economic factors to the cultural politics of childhood in exploring child agency and challenge theoretical assumptions about childhood. The next chapter on research methodology will discuss in more detail the arguments for selecting Kyrgyzstan and other methodological issues surrounding the study.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter on the literature review established the case for studying child agency as a local construct subject to various factors. Theis suggests (1996) that research on children's lives should take into account political, cultural and historical perspectives on the situations in which children live, so the literature review aimed to demonstrate that children engage with those situations in their own ways. Their interactions are mediated at the individual level subject to the authority of adults and to the varying degrees of autonomy in different cultures. Moreover, the literature review has argued that although the notion of the cultural politics of childhood (James and James, 2004) is clearly useful, this framework should be extended to include the role of economic dis/advantages in understanding child agency.

This chapter will focus on the research methodology applied in seeking answers to the research questions raised earlier. It will discuss the selection of the qualitative methods and the intricacies of having children as informants about their own lives. It will flag up the cultural specificities of the collected data and the resulting nuances to take into consideration in the analyses. The chapter will also discuss the justifications for the selection of Kyrgyzstan as an exemplary case for studying child agency and the choice of neighbourhoods and schools to represent rich and poor groups. The qualitative research methods (interviews, group discussions, etc.) used in this study will also be discussed along with the methods chosen to interact with children, their parents and teachers. A separate section will be devoted to exploring ethical issues arising throughout the course of the research and their relevant practicalities. Thus, the chapter

will not only serve as an overview of the methodological issues but will also provide context for the analysis and prepare the ground for further discussions.

This research study has been approved by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) and has satisfied the ethical issues and considerations of informed consent, confidentiality and the prevention of harm to research participants and their communities.

3.2. Kyrgyzstan as an exemplary case

I propose to study child agency in the framework of economic transition in the specific socio-cultural context of Kyrgyzstan - a combination of factors which has not been given sufficient attention in the literature. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan is in a period of democratic transition. It is a nation experiencing profound socio-cultural and economic shifts and as such it presents a fitting case study on child agency - a topic which is markedly under-researched in the region where almost half the population is under 18 years of age.

The 1998 Report of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) claims that 'no region in the world has suffered such reversals in the 1990s, as have the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe' (UNDP, 1997, p. 4). Kyrgyzstan was among fifteen countries of the Soviet Union which experienced an abrupt crisis after its collapse in 1991 that led to the decades of transition, but particular social problems did start in earlier years before the transition. Poverty in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was not subject to broad discussion and research. Indeed, the country adopted the term 'neediness' to avoid the connotations associated with 'poverty' (UNDP, 1997). The USSR provided relatively full employment to all able-bodied people, generous social

welfare benefits and services for people with disabilities, and free education and health services for all.

After the collapse of the Soviet welfare states, poverty became particularly acute during the transition years and the quality of social services dramatically decreased. Transition had a high human cost, especially for children. In 2002-2003, 80% of children in Kyrgyzstan were living in households with consumption below PPP US\$2,15 (UNICEF, 2006). There was an alarming increase in new social risks such as ‘social orphanhood’¹, ‘hidden dropout’² rates from schools and a rise in the number of working and neglected children. Previously unseen categories of poor people emerged, such as homeless adults, street children, and refugees. More people were slipping into poverty and inequality became pronounced and visible. But it is important to underline that poverty in Kyrgyzstan does not necessarily mean poorly educated people belonging to a lower class of society. Conversely, many people are poor materially i.e. they receive low or very low income, but they are more likely to be well educated, even hold high education degrees and work (or worked in the past) in the public sector as teachers, doctors, engineers etc.

Political instability and conflict resulted from the revolution in 2005, yet continued protests both against and in favour of the government led to another, this time bloody, revolution in 2010. These events had a direct impact on children’s lives, as emerged from my data. With weaker governments and declining living standards, populations, including children, are likely to feel more pressure to survive and to rely on themselves. The agency of citizens of countries in transition could be markedly different

¹ ‘Social orphanhood’ describes children who are neglected by their parents as if they are orphans but with live legal parents.

² ‘Hidden dropout’ refers to cases where children are enrolled and are in school registers but do not actually attend school.

from the citizen agency in stable countries of relative prosperity and may vary among social classes and cultural communities.

Kyrgyzstan is a country where a Soviet legacy and Asian culture intertwine with a nomadic heritage and where such historical and cultural conditions are affected by the current political and economic transition and globalization. Kyrgyz is the national majority in the country and is the largest among Kyrgyzstan's 100 nationalities (64.9%)³. Due to their majority, this study is focused on Kyrgyz children, Kyrgyz culture and Kyrgyz families. Modern Kyrgyz people have adopted a mixture of cultural attitudes influenced by the values of the Soviet era, the new values of the free market economy, the implications of westernization, traditional Kyrgyz nomadic culture and the cultural heritage of other ethnic groups. Staples of Soviet ideology such as collectivism and gender equality mingle with tribal values promoting respect for the elderly, sanctity of family ties, etc. In practice, values of diverse origins often end up reinforcing one another. For instance, collectivism is also a part of nomadic Kyrgyz lifestyle which was historically based on the dynamics of tribal society, where members of the extended family and clan play an important role.

Kuehnast (1997) suggests that ‘by 1994 it seemed that Soviet socialism had allowed for the continuation of Kyrgyz family-centred practices much more than capitalism did’ (pp. 134-135). Kyrgyz people still attach importance to tribal relationships and maintain extensive networks in and out of the tribes they belong. People are not only interdependent within their groups, but also give priority to the group’s goals and shape their behavior according to their group norms (Mills and Clark, 1982). However, the transition to a market economy with its attendant challenges,

³ See the World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>. Other ethnic groups constitute Uzbek (13.8%), Russian (12.5%), Dungan (1.1%), Ukrainian (1%), Uighur (1%), other (5.7%).

political turmoil and social strife has affected the pre-existing set of values in Kyrgyzstan.

In such a context, the family as a social unit may get undermined - its role as a provider of stability and care for family members is likely to be eroded under various previously unimaginable pressures. When families are affected economically, family ties may become weaker, and collectivism values may be challenged. Social upheaval and poverty may profoundly affect a child's status within the family according to my initial hypothesis. When living under economic disadvantage, younger people are assumed to be more functional in helping the entire family survive economically. As a result, they can attain more importance and earn more respect than they would normally be afforded in a culture that reveres old age and wisdom. Culture is not static for different economic groups facing challenges and the outcomes resulting from the interaction of these diverse variables for child agency end up more nuanced, as demonstrated later. Necessities caused by economic disadvantages may take over cultural boundaries between older and younger people; while the opportunities of high income may have opposite effects. Therefore child agency would be socially specific to the culture and economic context and not globally universal.

The Kyrgyz local context provides a good scenario for studying the relationships of economic and cultural factors and their impact on children and their role in society. The location of the study, Bishkek (the capital city of Kyrgyzstan), provides a sufficient diversity of expected factors affecting child agency and agency experiences. This specific location for this 'socially useful inquiry' (Oakley, 1999; p. 166) will help elicit certain deeply embedded meanings from exercising child agency in daily life and it will also provide an empirical basis on which to challenge some prevailing theoretical assumptions. However, the issues of sample size and gender split should not be pushed

aside when considering the claims that this study will make. Exploring the experiences of children exerting their agency in a country at a time of social, economic and political change will contribute to the conceptualisation of child agency.

3.3. Children as research informants of qualitative research

Research about children has traditionally been undertaken through adults e.g. parents, carers, etc. Boyden and Ennew (1997) point out that much research about children does not take into account their own views, but simply engages with adults as informants. This could be due to the fact that children are generally perceived to be ‘vulnerable’, ‘incompetent’ and in need of external interventions to ‘protect’ them. One of the reasons for children’s exclusion in research was due to the assumption that children lack fully developed cognitive or self-reflective competencies (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Age/immaturity could be one of the reasons for seeing children in this passive way, but this has been viewed as irrelevant by some childhood researchers (Alderson and Montgomery, 1996; Davie, 1996; Pugh and Selleck, 1996; Solberg, 1996; Alderson, 2000; Melton, 2000).

However, theories of child development and models of childhood are being continually contested and this has led to changes in research methodologies and ethical concerns when undertaking research with children. Prout and James’s paradigm of childhood studies (1997) as well as a range of other scholars (Qvortrup, 1994; Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1990/1997) emphasise children’s active role in social life, which should also translate into a similar role in research. The recognition of children’s agency as research participants and informants of their lives has significantly changed children’s position within human and social sciences and weakened assumptions of the conventional approaches to child research (Christensen, 2004). Nevertheless, such views of children in research do not exhaust all the disputes. For instance, according to some

scholars children are ‘essentially indistinguishable from adults’ (James et al., 1998, p. 31) and therefore they do not need different methods of research. This in turn has been critiqued with the argument that such an approach does not address power imbalances between an adult adult research and adult child participant research (Morrow, 1999b). Others argue that children are different from adults and need more ethnographic methods to closer understand their world (James et al., 1998). However, participant observation as an ethnographic method is argued to be inappropriate for adults, who are unable to become full part of children’s worlds (Hill, 1997; Fine and Sandstrom, 1988).

James et al. also suggest another view of children as similar to adults but possessing different competencies (1998). Researchers following this view tend to use methods which are based on children’s skills such as pictures and diaries (Nesbitt, 2000), sentence completion and writing (Morrow, 1999b), drawings (Ennew and Morrow, 1994; Swart, 1990), the draw and write technique (Backett-Milburn and McKie, 1999; France et al., 2000; Pridmore and Bendelow, 1995) and radio workshops (Hecht, 1998). Nevertheless, Punch (2002b) argues that it is paradoxical that

‘...within the new sociology of childhood many of those who call for the use of innovative or adapted research techniques with children, are also those who emphasise the competence of children. If children are competent social actors, why are special ‘child-friendly’ methods needed to communicate with them?’ (p. 321).

As Punch (2002b) argues, researchers should engage in a critical reflection on the use of such ‘child-centred’ methods. It is not about children being incapable of expressing their views about their lives and formulating their thoughts, but rather about ‘the extent to which adults can ‘read’ their voice and provide a supportive framework for them to speak’ (Smith et al., 2005, p. 474). I suggest that using children as informants in this study does not need to be defended and nor does the use of qualitative methods of research. Qualitative research with children allowed me to explore different ways to

‘afford children more opportunities to give voice to their thoughts and feelings’ (De La Cruz et al., 2002, p. 63). This approach is better suited to capture agency and its relationships with culture and social relationships, which is important given its context-specific character.

As Hardman (1973) argues, children are the best informants about their lives and therefore I presuppose that Kyrgyz children are social agents, capable of providing valid data about their subjective experiences and daily lives. Their subjective accounts of child agency provide me with

‘...especially valuable contexts for data-collection, contexts which could lead to detailed accounts, and to revelations of knowledge not commonly known about by adults’ (Mayall, 2000, p. 132).

One could debate whether children’s views are reliable sources of data. This is not to say naively that all that children say is true, as a subjective measure of children’s lives can be framed by adaptive preferences (Nussbaum, 2001; Burchardt, 2003; Sen, 1987), therefore one should analyse subjective measures with caution. In other words, subjective data is able to capture children’s actual feelings and experience in a direct manner, but they may be based on feelings and actions adjusted to their circumstances. For example, children living in poverty may train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies. It is needless to say that children’s data can also be shaped by cultural morals of material disadvantages e.g. what can be seen as poverty in general can be perceived as an acceptable norm in local cultural frameworks. In any analysis, researchers should allow for the tenuous dichotomy of children being research agents, yet bounded by different factors.

Moreover, it should be noted that when approaching data from children, one needs to take into account how children are generally perceived in the society under scrutiny and how locally constructed attitudes to children and their place in society can

affect the way children talk about their lives. In other words, the attitude of the researcher to children and data from them to some extent should reflect the local norms of treating children. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, where age is a structurally important way of organising social relationships, the power imbalance between me as a researcher who is older and the children who are younger could put them in a naturally obedient position. Here the behaviour of the researcher is essential in shaking up the accepted patterns of relationships and establish an equitable rapport. But one should not perceive children as cultural zombies and should trust children's agency in being able to distinguish and differentiate between various contexts and make reasonable actions accordingly.

James et al. (1998) have outlined four models of childhood in the contemporary sociological research (i.e. the socially constructed child, the social structural child, the minority group child and the tribal child), which can be grouped into two research perspectives. The first one suggests that children have competences and therefore they should be seen as social actors, whereas the second type of research studies consider childhood as a structured social space. This current study as discussed in the literature review will combine both perspectives and try to explore how both agency and structure function in daily lives of children.

3.4. Children and neighbourhoods: the process of selection

A central quality of my chosen approach is that it recognises that children have their own knowledge and experience of the social, material and cultural circumstances of their lives and that their experiences can be compared with one another. I have compared two groups of children belonging to wealthier and poorer categories of the Kyrgyz population (accessed through their attendance at state and private schools) to identify the commonalities and differences in children's agency and the main factors

affecting it in the wider social-economic environment shared by Kyrgyz children. School settings provide a child-oriented environment and are suitable for exploring a topic of child agency. School is one of the main settings where children as research participants are more likely to talk about a number of topics more easily, especially in the context of their social relationships (Mauthner, 1997). Moreover, it was a particularly useful setting, as agency covers a broad range of issues other than schooling and therefore school did not have a direct bias effect on children's responses. However, school was a setting where control of authority figures can be particularly strong. There were at least three layers of control and gatekeeping before accessing children such as the headteachers, teachers and parents, which will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

I suggest that there are considerable differences between the two schools and the areas in which they were situated, one being poorer (the state school) and the second wealthier (the private school). Yet in a country where according to international organisations around 80% of children live in households with under \$2.15 per day (UNICEF, 2006), it is not straightforward to decide which category of children is to be sampled as poor and how to approach their relatively richer counterparts. In the face of these issues, a number of questions need to be answered. I do not claim that these two groups are the direct opposite of each other i.e. the wealthiest versus the poorest. However, I do propose that the wealthy groups represent the minority of the Kyrgyz population, being probably amongst the very wealthiest families. The poor children represent the average poor, as I do not aim to target the poorest children, but rather explore the differences between material statuses and the different groups chosen proved to be sufficiently economically divided to enable clear comparison. These two groups still have contrasting backgrounds and give an insight into how life experiences of

children in Kyrgyzstan reflect their material circumstances. Therefore, although the schools and a fee-paying capability in families have been chosen as a divider, I argue that this selection is not about comparing two different schools, but two different strata of society. In a country where there was almost no obvious class-based classification under the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan now represents a country of complex class divisions. Such divisions could be as simple as rich and poor, but also more complex as rich and people living in diverse forms of poverty.

One of the Soviet legacies in educational development is the influence of the language of instruction, which had certain effects on the quality of education at the two schools sampled for this study. In Soviet times, schools with Russian as the language of instruction would be considered prestigious and children (as well as teachers) of Kyrgyz origin would not be accepted, though this was not officially stated. Kyrgyz and Russian schools divided people by the language of teaching/learning, but also by their social and economic differences, preferring Russian speakers, who occupied higher positions in the labour market (Korth, 2001b). The quality of teaching at these schools would also be considerably better. Kyrgyz-speaking schools were neglected, and pupils in Kyrgyz schools were disadvantaged and underprivileged (Korth, 2001a).

Several years later after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the impact of this legacy could still be observed in the learning achievement of Kyrgyzstani pupils. In particular, a Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA) study conducted in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 revealed significant differences in learning achievement between the pupils of schools with different languages of instruction. For example, students from Russian schools scored higher on all dimensions of the test (numeracy, literacy, and life skills), compared to students from state language schools and other minority schools (Open Society Institute, 2002). A further decline in the quality of education was shown

in the second round of UNICEF's Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) in 2005. So the academic achievements of children largely depend on the language of instruction of the school they go to. The general trend is that all Russian language schools are better than those where children are taught in Kyrgyz language, but schools with Kyrgyz language of instruction also differ among themselves. Some of them are highly prestigious, and where the Kyrgyz speaking elite send their children to; some are considerably less so, such as the newly built schools largely located in new settlements.

However, in general, the learning achievements of Kyrgyzstani children are considerably lower than their counterparts abroad. In 2006, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Shamatov and Sainazarov, 2006) revealed that more than 80% of Kyrgyz students performed below the international average and only a small percentage of Kyrgyz students scored at or above the international average. This small percentage of students who did relatively well were more likely to be from private or elite urban schools with considerably better social and economic backgrounds. This demonstrates the differences in quality of education between children attending state and private schools. In modern Kyrgyzstan, the division of schools by their languages of instruction is even more exacerbated by the division of class between rich and poor. If such a division before was more predominant between Kyrgyz and Russian, now it divides rich and poor among Kyrgyz, which means that the state and private schools selected for this study are examples of these differences. Although the private school had Russian as a language of instruction and the state school taught children in both languages, the quality of education differed by the form of ownership, where privately run school provided children with better quality schooling.

3.4.1. The state school and the neighbourhood background

Two schools in two different neighbourhoods were selected for the purposes of my study. One of the schools, which is a state school, is situated in one of the so-called new settlements which were built at different times since the collapse of the Soviet Union when mass urbanization took place. People moved to Bishkek mainly because of greater earning and employment opportunities in the capital city and migration within the country is influenced by great regional differences (Schuler, 2007). Bishkek was chosen for this study as it would have been difficult to identify rich families in other urban and rural areas. The reasons are that wealthy families in rural areas can be considered rich due to having land or cattle, although such possessions would not have necessarily benefited children. Moreover, there is no private school outside Bishkek which would attract particularly rich parents and their children than the ones in Bishkek and therefore this would not have allowed comparison of rich and poor groups.

The majority of new settlements around Bishkek city are inhabited by internal migrants from Naryn (North) and Batken (South). The parents of the children I worked with were mainly from Naryn province with only a few of them from Batken, who moved to Bishkek before their children were born. The characteristics of new settlements are mainly negative, because of a growing number of social problems associated with them and poverty. According to some reports (e.g. UNICEF, 2009a), those areas have the highest poverty rate of any area in the country, which tripled the poverty statistics for Bishkek in the year when new settlements were considered as a part of Bishkek city. All of them are situated in the outskirts of Bishkek and have a poor infrastructure. Some of them are close to different markets, with some of these being the biggest markets in the whole of Central Asia, serving traders from the Central Asian

region, China, Turkey and Russia⁴. Such a habitat promotes crime, poor sanitation, child labour, the unsafe use of electrical appliances, and dangerous living conditions in general (UNICEF, 2009a).

The majority of houses are made of seismically unsafe materials such as mud bricks and have no access to irrigation systems. People living in these areas do not have access to basic services due to their limited financial resources - including those residents without a local registration, who are particularly vulnerable and are not eligible for services. According to the UNICEF report (2009a), some children in these settlements do not have birth certificates and local registration, which leads them to be denied schooling. Apart from that, the ambulance service of Bishkek denies the provision of services to residents of new settlements because of 'a lack of cars, fuel, poor roads, lack of territorial coverage' (UNICEF, 2009a). Although children at the state school, who participated in this study talked about their growing concerns about their family's health during our interviews and their parents did worryingly talk about deteriorating health care in the country in general, these families did not express particular dissatisfaction with regard to access and quality of health services in their neighbourhood. The fact that these children were attending school suggests that they had their birth certificates and were eligible to access health services.

There is total of 47 new settlements in Bishkek city (according to my interview with the head of the municipal authorities) including small ones and there are only 15 schools functioning for the local child population (UNICEF, 2009a). The Kyrgyz government shifted its responsibility for financing public primary and secondary education to local governments and parents, and authorised schools to raise money from

⁴ These are different types of markets e.g. open stall and closed spaces selling different goods, food, cattle and even human labour. The biggest 'Dordoi' market situated in Bishkek is one of 'Asia's greatest public market places, comparable to Bangkok's Chatuchal weekend market or Tehran's Grand Bazaar, according to Wikipedia.

the rental of facilities and other activities. These changes have been affecting the state school and the quality of education provided, as parents were expected to bear the costs of the schooling to enable their children to come to school. There is a high number of children in the new settlement areas not attending school for various reasons including a lack of resources of parents who cannot afford to buy clothes and footwear, stationery and text books as well as give informal payments such as bribes. As UNICEF argues, 'household wealth is the stronger determinant of school attendance in developing countries' (2007a, p. 13), which means that children in low income families are more likely not to attend schools or to attend them irregularly.

Among the 47 new settlements, the settlement I chose was built during the 90s and was approved by the relevant ministries as a residential area for the workers of factories, plants, teachers, and doctors who at that time were in the official queue for housing. This settlement was chosen as other settlements would either not have schools (as there are only 15 schools for 47 settlements), be unsafe and difficult for me to access, or would be mainly inhabited by internal migrants. I intended to include children at the state school who were born in Bishkek originally, but not those whose families migrated to the capital city recently. This is because urban and rural comparison would have distinct differences from urban and urban one.

There were different types of families living in the neighbourhood including families without breadwinners, disabled people, poor families, and families with many children who received government help such as free coal for the winter and cash benefits (500 som per household i.e. GBP7.00 a month). There were 15 disabled children, two of whom did not attend school at all, and the rest went to specialised schools. There were around 5000 residents in the area including 2000 children under the

age of 18⁵. There was initially a small school with Russian as the language of instruction, which was later converted into a kindergarten to accommodate 45 children. Before the new school was built, there was no school at all and children had to go to another school in a neighbouring area which was similarly poor. One of the girls described her experience of the locality:

‘I was in year 1 (aged 7), when I used to go to another school, as this school had not been built yet. There was a bridge on the way to the school, with no railings, with shaky wood and I had to walk on it in darkness. I used to go to school with my friend, but she moved from her house and I had to go on my own. I would finish school around 6pm in winter and would meet Roma people on the way home, which was very scary. Then after sometime I said to my parents I would not go to school and stayed at home for several days. Soon the new school was open and my parents moved me to this school’ (Aisuluu, girl aged 16, state school).

The new school was built for 800 children with two languages of instruction (Russian and Kyrgyz), though there was no Russian teacher. The selected school is relatively big, built in the Soviet style with old-fashioned Soviet type slogans such as ‘No Atomic Bombs!’, ‘Say No To War!’ etc. The physical conditions of the school are poor, and the spaces are not properly used, but it is relatively well constructed i.e. high ceiling, big classrooms, big sport and assembly halls. It is quite underheated in the winter, as classrooms are not suited for the severe Bishkek winters. There are two shifts at school - from the morning to the afternoon and from early afternoon to late afternoon. Primary school children (years 1-5) come to school in the morning and they all have late breakfast at school. Some older children come to school in the afternoon and only eligible children have free meals.

Unsurprisingly, none of the children that I worked with went to any early childhood care and education institutions (ECCE)⁶. This is not only a local problem, but

⁵ All the figures and background information with regard to the chosen settlement were obtained from the head of the local authority (an anonymous interview held on 21 December 2010).

⁶ ECCE in Kyrgyzstan means various forms of preschool care and education for children aged 18 months until 6/7 years old. The enrolment in ECCE is not compulsory and is not free. This is largely a

is spread countrywide, as only 13.9% of children entered primary education with previous preschool experience in 2003-2004 in the country (UNESCO, 2006). However, the situation with preschool education is much better in Bishkek city where 84.6%⁷ of children aged 3-6 are covered by the service, but not in new settlements. This indicator does not include the children sampled for this study and shows, once again, that this is a structurally disadvantaged area.

A contrast should be made here with the private school, where all the children sampled for this research attended either the same or another private early childhood care and education institutions. So the children in this study already started with different education levels and with further schooling, the gap between their academic performances widens even more. But it is worth mentioning that families in the sampled area of the state school used alternative ways of preparing youngsters for school. For instance, elder sisters and brothers, daughters and sons of relatives provided their younger siblings with initial knowledge of reading and basic mathematics. Not only did they teach them, but they also provided childcare in cases in which parents worked or were absent from home for other reasons.

3.4.2. The private school and the neighbourhood background

In contrast to the poor new settlements, there are neighbourhoods of very wealthy people in Bishkek with houses worth millions of Kyrgyz Soms. They occupy separate areas, built in a western style, which look as if they are not from the same city. According to some reports, the urban rich are in the most advantageous position (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004) and enjoy highly comfortable lives. They are not only

consequence of the closure of hundreds of kindergartens owned by state-run firms after the collapse of the Soviet Union (see <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/resources/country-profiles/kyrgyz-republic/early-childhood/>).

⁷ According to UNICEF and National Statistics Committee data accessed at http://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/development.html#_ftnref1.

better-off financially, but are in much more advantageous positions with helpful networks extending abroad with both social and business/trade connections. The urban rich also have extensive access to a variety of resources, private and public services, and most importantly, information about business, investment, and employment opportunities in the Kyrgyz Republic and abroad (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004). The better-off areas do not have their own schools, as they are not big enough and are spread over the city. But well-to-do parents do not mind bringing their children to private schools regardless of the long distances. They choose schools specifically for the quality of education as opposed to convenient location.

Since the 1990s, the Kyrgyz education system has started taking diverse forms, with the new types of schools which have emerged such as academic lyceums, gymnasiums, private schools and schools for gifted children (Holmes et al., 1995; Open Society Institute, 2002). According to the National Statistics Committee, the number of private comprehensive schools increased from 19 in 1995 to 54 in 2009, among which 8 schools offer primary school education (years 1 – 4, for children of 6-10 years old) and 6 schools provide basic secondary education (years 5 - 9, aged 11-16) and 39 with further secondary education for children in years 10 and 11 (aged 16-17)⁸. These schools are largely situated in urban areas and offer advanced coursework with extra academic services in return for higher fees. While lyceums and gymnasiums are still state-funded institutions with better quality education, they cannot be as good and as expensive as private schools. The statistics show that the state comprehensive schools are much larger in number, but they are argued not to be able to compete with the private schools in terms of the quality of education provided. Admission to private schools is believed to mostly depend on the family income rather than academic abilities of the children and

⁸ To put these numbers in context, there were 2137 state comprehensive schools in Kyrgyzstan according to the National Statistics Committee (Table 5.03.01.02. 'A number of educational establishments by forms and types of ownership').

they are affordable only for extremely wealthy families (Open Society Institute, 2002), who constitute only a small fraction of the Kyrgyz population (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2000), so the children I interviewed at the private school were very wealthy. Such a striking income-based division illustrates the stark stratification of Kyrgyz society. These schools have much smaller size classes and often provide a better quality education, increasing their pupils' chances of entering prestigious higher education institutions both locally and abroad (Open Society Institute, 2002), while the curriculum at the state schools does not seem to be as conducive to high educational attainment. Such a division between state and private schools represents the best way of selecting rich and poor children for my study.

The selected private school had its own nursery, kindergarten, primary school, basic secondary and further secondary education i.e. the full school education. Among 54 private run schools, the selected school was one of the 6 schools which offered full school education and was the most prestigious and well established. It was one of the first private schools in the country, set up in 1992 (a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union) and approved by the Ministry of Education. The prestige of the school and its reputation have a great importance for parents despite its high fees and its extremely upmarket positioning helped me access children from exclusively wealthy families. It makes a special educational priority of teaching children English and mathematics. It needs to be said that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, learning foreign languages (especially English) has been considered instrumental for further learning and professional growth in the light of emerging opportunities to study abroad and foreign diplomatic missions opening in the country and running different projects for further employment.

The private school building is relatively small, as it used to be a kindergarten during the Soviet era. Classrooms are small, clean, warm, and comfortable with hot water supply and appropriate toilet facilities. The area is surrounded with metal gates and has its own security system. The school is headed by a Russian woman and the majority of the personnel are Russian - including their own medical nurse present at school at all times, their own psychologist, - except for one Kyrgyz staff member teaching Kyrgyz language as an academic subject. Children are given meals several times a day (breakfast, lunch, snack) with good quality food cooked at the school premises. Children start in the early morning and work until around 5pm., but they are free to leave school after 2pm. whenever they are done with their homework. Every day, there is a special period allocated for children to go out and be in the fresh air, the school organises extra activities (e.g. a no drug day, healthy lifestyle day etc.) and trips (e.g. entertaining as well as educational). When it is time to take children home, the parking area gets full of expensive cars, - an obvious indicator of wealth in Kyrgyzstan. According to the headteacher, the clientele of the school was particularly wealthy families. The headteacher⁹ said some parents brought the children up in the spirit of 'Do not worry, we will buy everything'. This was, as she called it, the 'New Russian' type of parenthood which meant that money solves everything: everything can be bought and sold.

3.5. First phase of the fieldwork (December 2010)

3.5.1. Group discussions to select age groups, to formulate child agency and to test research instruments

I had several preliminary meetings with school officials to introduce myself and the purposes of the study. I prepared information leaflets in Kyrgyz and Russian for both schools to explain what the study was about, its goals and my own personal details. It

⁹ An anonymous interview held on 17 December 2010.

should be mentioned that the headteacher of the private school attempted to influence my research design e.g. she tried convincing me to have surveys with children.

However, eventually she demonstrated full cooperation and provided me with valuable logistical assistance. Although finding a private separate space at school for research activities can be an issue (Mouthner, 1997), there was no problem in this case, as I had separate classrooms at both schools to conduct my activities.

Once the schools had been selected and access was established, I started working with children of various age categories to pilot research instruments through group discussions and decide which year and age group to select for the actual study. Group discussions are claimed to be a useful way of investigating children's own understanding of an issue (Scott, 2000). Mayall (2000) suggests that children learn by talking with other children and therefore group discussions provide a useful environment for discussions about child agency. Children are claimed to be positive rather than negative in group discussions and enable and support one another to speak up (Mayall, 2000). Kitzinger (1994) offered nine advantages of focus group discussions including giving insights to social processes, highlighting languages and frames of reference and encouraging a wide range of communication.

From the practical point of view, group discussions served their best purpose for the initial stage of the study by covering a larger number of children and a range of views to be obtained in a limited period of time. In total, I had 11 discussions with children of year 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 (aged 8-12 and 15-16) at both schools. All the group discussions were recorded which was previously agreed with headteachers, teachers, year tutors and children. The purpose of the first stage was to test the instruments for different age groups, to investigate the best way of talking about child agency, to explore whether the perception of child agency and its practice varies between young

and older children and to select the age of children to continue to work with. It was not straightforward to decide on the vocabulary to use and how to provide a simple and easily understandable definition of child agency. I formulated child agency as taking decisions and making choices and tried to focus our discussions around these two issues, assuming this would be relevant to gauge children's own understanding of child agency.

The main title of my study for the children was about childhood, and group discussion topics were developed accordingly (Appendix 1), though the order and formulation of questions were improved as the activities were carried out and a complexity of vocabulary was adapted for younger children. However, the topics and questions were kept similar between the schools to be able to compare them with each other. Every discussion lasted 45 minutes, i.e. the normal duration of one lesson and was conducted with all children as well as 2 teachers of the younger groups (aged 8-9) who wanted to observe the activities out of curiosity.

The main function of group discussions in the first and in the second phases of research was to generate data which would otherwise not have been produced, to gain insight into shared experiences of children (Morrow, 2007) and to get multiple views about issues. These experiences included children's main activities in different settings and their positioning in relation to their parents and other adults. In general, during every discussion, we talked about the children's daily routine, I asked who the main people were in their lives, what activities they engaged in and who decided on them, how they felt about being children in terms of taking decisions and making choices etc. As my confidence grew with every activity and analyses of previous activities were conducted, the quality of group discussions rose. Group discussions were structured around some activities such as drawings with younger children (my daily routine, drawing and talking: 'a child and an adult') and group works with older children.

In addition, I circulated copybooks among all children except year 2 at both schools to keep diaries of the main decisions they made in their daily life. These materials collected through group and individual activities were used in addition to the verbal input from children to develop further research instruments for the second phase of the fieldwork. Group discussions and diaries showed that '*making choices and taking decisions*' was not a popular word choice in children's vocabulary and they were not the types of actions that children did independently from adults. Instead children mainly talked about their relationships and abilities to take actions in relation to their parents, other adults and children. The more common actions mentioned by children were '*to help parents*' – at the state school, while agency for children at the private school was more focused on being '*successful in the future*'.

Children in both schools were very welcoming and eager to make contact with me; talkative and keen to socialise. There were different numbers of girls and boys in every year group, with class sizes bigger at the state school than in the private school i.e. on average 10-15 children in every class at the private school and 20-25 children in every class at the state school. The majority of children I met were Kyrgyz, though there were a few other nationalities at the private school. Children said they felt comfortable to be with their friends and classmates and that they also enjoyed the topic, which they did not discuss before. They exchanged ideas among themselves very effectively and sometimes it was difficult to manage children when they got very excited and would speak loudly and I had to be especially attentive to keep on track with the topics discussed. Moreover, although group discussions encouraged participation of children, it also allowed non-participation for those who were shy. So I needed to make extra efforts to create special possibilities for some silent children to talk, who otherwise would not have done so. Atmosphere in the groups were joyful, especially with younger children,

who also had less controversial opinions in comparison with their older counterparts. Younger children in group discussions were mainly referring to me when talking rather than creating conversation among themselves, while older children were better at talking and disputing with one another.

In general all children agreed that their parents were one of the most important people in their lives, as well as their classmates at schools and other people from their neighbourhoods. Children at the state school raised the issue that their behaviour varied depending on where they were e.g. at home, at school and in the neighbourhood. The role of locality was more obvious for the children at the state school in comparison with their counterparts at the private school. These children also thought that the types of activities they undertook in those settings such as helping their parents, looking after siblings, doing work at home, were important, as they made them feel more agentic, i.e. agency identified with adults. The initial group discussions already brought up differences between schools, as well as between ages and genders. The relationships of children with their parents varied between young and older children and between girls and boys, e.g. older girls were treated more strictly than boys in terms of going out; boys in poor families were freer than their counterparts in rich families; some poor children were working and contributing financially; young children in year 2, 3 and 4 (aged 8-9) at both schools did not have any conflicts or any problems with adults, in contrast with children in year 5 and 6 (aged 11-12) at the private school.

To my mind, children in year 6 and 9 were at the age of more nuanced relationships with their parents, when they challenged adults' authority - i.e. the most crucial factor in their lives as well as for their agency. Year 6 (aged 12) was also special in terms of being a transitional year - the first year of secondary school - and year 9 (aged 16) was the last year of compulsory school. For many children, the transition from

primary to secondary school is about growing independence, greater spatial freedom and expanded social networks (Valentine, 1997; Stace and Roker, 2005). The last school year of compulsory education, year 9, is claimed to have a lot to do with choices that young people need to make. According to the structuralist models of choice a transition from school for young people at 16 is largely shaped by institutional, economic or cultural constraints over which they have no control (Gambetta, 1996). Moreover, the model of 'pragmatic rationality' sees these choices as being constrained by young people's realistic perceptions of opportunities and their own individuality (Banks et al., 1992). In the end, the selection of year 6 and 9 (aged 12 and 16) was decided on not because of developmental considerations, but in order to compare experiences of agency across different ages and to try and establish how age structure interacts with other relevant factors. Having conducted the discussions with the children, I decided to think about child agency from the perspectives of children-parents relationships as well as their relationships and activities in different settings (e.g. home, school and the neighbourhood).

It needs to be noted that although the state school represents a poor neighbourhood, I have not used the word 'poor' with regard to specific children I worked with. Moreover, the management of the state school and the children themselves did not know that they have been compared with wealthier children. Despite the fact that schools were used as markers of rich and poor groups, my stance in terms of poor people is that 'poverty is a circumstance that a person experiences rather than a personal quality' (Lister, 2004; p. 113). Although in this study 'poverty' is juxtaposed to the 'non-poor', it is not to contrast poor people or 'other' (Lister, 2004) them. Moreover, people living in constrained circumstance are considered as able to cope with the painful

experience of poverty. Equally this is not an attempt to romanticise agency and its consequences and to ignore the strains that poverty places on many.

3.6. Second phase of the fieldwork: determination of sample size, selection of children, additional activities with children and meetings with parents (January – February 2011)

3.6.1. Sample size and its consequences

The first phase of the study with group discussions helped me to establish a rapport with children. I visited both schools every day except Sundays during the two months of the fieldwork (within a three month period¹⁰) and participated in school events such as assemblies, celebrations and musical events. I attended lessons and meetings including parents' evenings and observed children playing and socialising at school etc. I managed to establish good relationships with all children who called me 'Saltanat eje' (sister Saltanat) and I managed to keep their attention and curiosity on the research subject. This was especially helpful for the next round of activities. Having selected the year group, the next step was to select children within the tutor groups for the next phase of the study.

At the private school, the size of every tutor group was limited, though it was enough for the purposes of sampling. There were more children wishing to participate in the study than I could have, so I had to select children randomly using a group register. At the state school where tutor groups were bigger, again a group register was used and children were selected by the alphabetical order. There were 40 children in total - 10 children in year 9 at both schools and 10 children in year 6 (5 girls and 5 boys from every tutor group + 5 girls and 5 boys from other tutor group). Attempts were made in the relevant literature to suggest guidelines for qualitative sample size, but it is

¹⁰ My fieldwork could only extend over two months and was carried out in two separate visits to Bishkek due to family reasons.

unsurprising to find that actual sample sizes vary considerably in qualitative research. Although there are some expectations about minimum sample size in qualitative studies, 'there is very little agreement about what that minimum sample size is' (Bryman, 2012; p. 19). So, for example Charmaz (2006, p. 114) suggests that '25 (participants are) adequate for smaller projects'. However, Gerson and Horowitz (2002) claim that 'fewer than 60 interviews cannot support convincing conclusions and more than 150 produce too much material to analyse effectively and expeditiously' (p. 223). The sample size of 40 participants in this study includes boys and girls aged 12 and 16. Hence, certain inherent data limitations are likely and some caution needs to be exercised when interpreting the claims in this thesis. However, several points should be highlighted in an attempt to justify this sample size, as discussed below.

Sample size in qualitative studies depends, among other factors, on the theoretical underpinnings, the methodology and the questions of the research. Studies similar to the current inquiry, belonging to the tradition of phenomenological research, are known to have a smaller sample size: five to 25 according to Creswell (1998, p. 64) and at least 6 according to Morse (1994, p. 225). Arguably, there is often no need for producing large quantities of data – in certain situations, this could even be seen as counterproductive. As argued by Green and Thorogod (2009, p. 120) 'the experience of most qualitative researchers is that in interview studies little that is 'new' comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people'. Moreover, Sandelowski (1995) suggests that sample sizes may be too large to support claims, as 'any sample size interfering with the case-oriented thrust of qualitative work can, accordingly, be judged too large' (p. 180) Overly large samples, thus, can undermine the core of qualitative research which favours deep analysis. However, in-depth analysis is not the only element necessary to understand the phenomenon of child agency - possible variations

in its applicability are important, too. So another feature of qualitative inquiry is to describe variations of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This means that the present inquiry needed to include as many qualitatively different cases as possible to explore child agency in Kyrgyzstan. I intended to capture at least some sub-group variability and therefore including different gender and age groups for the purposes of the study became paramount. These social variables presented as important analytical variables from the earliest stages of this research.

This study started maximising the variations of child agency from the very beginning of the fieldwork when more than 100 boys and girls aged 7-16 were part of the first round of activities. Although those activities were also designed for piloting purposes, the obtained data was used to explore the understanding of child agency within the variation of the phenomenon among the different age and gender groups involving a greater number of children. These early data also contributed to the claims made subsequently based on in-depth interviews with the 40 sampled children. Since sample size in qualitative research can refer not only to numbers of participants, but also to numbers of interviews and other events sampled (Sandelowski, 1995), sample size in this study was not limited to 40. The main local variations and interpretations of child agency were discovered during the larger scale early fieldwork, so then the next logical step was the application of an in-depth approach to the understanding of the phenomenon - the result of the second round of fieldwork. Although gender representation for each age group of the study is small, it has all the potential to generate such data which would stand for other children with similar characteristics and living in similar life conditions in Kyrgyzstan. In this respect further studies are required to strengthen the potential of analytical generalisation of this study, as discussed in the Conclusion chapter (IX).

3.6.2. Additional group discussions and interviews with children

Having selected the children, the second round of group discussions was conducted during the second trip to the field i.e. 4 in total - 2 at the state school, and 2 at the private school with both age groups. This time every group discussion was conducted only with those children who were selected for the main part of the study. This round of group activities was meant to complement the previous ones in two ways. Firstly, smaller groups were easier to manage in order to create the appropriate group dynamics and ensure the participation of every child - something that was not fully possible in the first phase. Secondly, the topics of the discussions were based on outcomes of the previous discussions and were around children's relationships and activities within the main settings that were identified by them in the first visit to the field (home, school and neighbourhood). The first round of group activities was crucial in terms of discovering the main direction that the data collection should take, so that the second round of group activities were designed to concentrate on specific issues of children's relationships and activities.

These group discussions were organised in the way that children could work together in pairs or in small teams, which proved to be more effective and preferable for the children ages 16. Children had such activities as happy and unhappy childhood; daily routine, my neighbourhood. These activities are the adapted versions of the child-focused and participatory methods used by the Young Lives study¹¹. It is argued that the proper way of using participatory approaches could encourage dialogue and learning and mediate communication between interviewee and interviewer (O'Kane, 2000; Christensen and James, 2008). They are also effective in creating a more flexible

¹¹ Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty following the changing lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years. For more details see <http://www.younglives.org.uk/>.

environment in which children are not only expected to answer the research questions but also to give their own explanations. In addition, these methods are helpful to ease possible tensions between a researcher and children as a result of power relations between them. These additional methods were used not because children are different from adults and have different competencies, but simply because these methods were additional ways of getting data and facilitating more discussions among children. Nevertheless, in addition to group discussions, the deployment of disposable cameras would have been useful to capture younger children's experiences of agency in several aspects (their relationships with neighbourhoods and with people important in their lives) to validate their verbal inputs, which was not possible due to a lack of resources.

After the group discussions, I conducted a semi-structured interview with every child i.e. 40 children in total. As Boyden and Annew (1997) suggest, no single method is best or sufficient in itself and each research study will require a different combination of methods. A combination of both individual and group activities enabled different children to participate in discussions, as it is noted that some children are shy in a group but open in an individual interview, while others are nervous on a one-to-one basis, but confident in a group (Punch, 2002c). There were several children at both schools who were shy and did not talk much during the group events, but they were considerably more open and sociable during interviews with me. Interviews are believed to be one of the fundamental research methods in social sciences (Punch, 2002c). They are particularly suitable for personal stories and 'gaining access to "inside" experience' due to its nature of "emotionalism" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). A semi-structured interview¹² (Grix, 2004) is chosen for the collection of qualitative data due to the depth of information it can offer and its ability to reveal interviewees' own perspectives on

¹² An interview, in which the interviewer may have in mind a number of questions to put to interviewees, but in which the question do not have to follow any specific, predetermined order (Grix, 2004, p.127).

their experiences (Bryman, 2004). The interview falls under the category of ‘children’s life story’ interviews (Boyden and Annew, 1997), which can provide ‘a wealth of information on the life and personal circumstances’ (Boyden and Annew 1997, p. 123) of children and therefore be a good tool to use when exploring child agency.

The main function of interviews was to enrich the data collected and to get more in-depth knowledge and narratives of children’s experiences of agency, which was impossible during group activities. If group activities were crucial to discuss the group experiences of the activities they shared with one another, interviews were intended to explore a specific set of issues based around both collective and individual activities. All interviews took place at school, in a separate classroom, which was enabling for children to talk as they were in the environment familiar to them. Nevertheless, it could have been more relaxed, if the interviews (as well as group activities) were conducted in a less formal environment e.g. outside school, in the park, or some other neutral place. Nevertheless, children were keen to talk to me, especially older children at the private school found it fascinating to talk about themselves to somebody they did not know well and to share some personal experiences. By that time, the children had become to know me better and I managed to establish a good rapport with them, which had a positive effect on interview dynamics. In general, interviewing was organised and presented as an informal chat, rather than a formally structured questioning, although some formalities were held such as asking every child for his/her permission to be recorded.

The starting knowledge from previous group activities informed the topics and directions of personal interviews with each child. During the interview (Appendix 2), I used such methods as ‘like/dislike’ and ‘the life map’¹³ for children aged 12 along with

¹³ Children were asked to draw representations of the significant events that were important to children (De La Cruz, 2002; p.126) and then we discussed issues around those events i.e. why this event was important; what main decisions were made to make this event happen; what decisions followed from this event; what the role of the child was etc.

‘listening’ to them. Children were also given a choice of drawing while talking. Some children did choose to draw their own favourite pictures and talked to me at the same time, but the majority of children did not, probably because of their relatively advanced age (12). The chosen activities gave me additional tools to discuss children’s personal experiences of being able to act within home, school and neighbourhood, which was impossible to obtain during group activities. With children aged 16, I used the listening method meaning ‘an active process of communication involving hearing, interpreting and constructing meanings’, whereas with younger children listening was ‘not limited to the spoken word’ (Clark, 2005; p. 491). Nevertheless, I could have also engaged children in producing freely written accounts on specific topics such as relationships, responsibility, choice, autonomy etc., which would have helped me to develop these concepts in more depth. All children who were selected for the second round of research were given certificates of participation at the end during the final assembly meetings at schools and were thanked for their contributions.

All the research methods were selected and tailored to specific types of information to tackle the research question as well as to work best together (Appendix 3). The order of activities was also carefully thought through and special attention was given to meet children first and their parents afterwards. Table 2 gives an overview of research questions and the research methods through which they were answered.

Table 2. Research questions, relevant chapters and methods

	Research question	Chapters where question discussed	Methods to answer the question
1	Whether childhood as a social space/a generational unit changed in Kyrgyzstan due to the historical (collapse of the Soviet Union) and economic transition (to market economy) and what factors affected this change, if any	(chapter IV)	Group discussions with parents; teachers, head of local authorities
2	To what extent in modern Kyrgyz society	(chapter V, VI, VII,	Interviews, group

	culture and economic circumstances affect child agency across settings (home, school, neighbourhood), relationships of children (with parents, teachers, friends and families) and their activities	VIII)	discussions with children
3	To what extent children can use their agency to mediate the effects of gender, age, economic circumstances (or vice versa) and how these practices vary across the economic groups	(chapter V, VI, VII, VIII).	Interviews, group discussions with children

3.6.3. Ethical issues arising during the course of the research

Dissemination of information about the study

This study recognises children as agents with the capacity to give meanings to their actions as well as agents subject to structural relationships with their parents and other adults. Having acknowledged theoretically the potential of children as research participants, the task was to reflect it in the methodology of the study. It took ethical issues at its heart and every measure was taken to think through them in every stage of the study. Ethical issues indeed not only relate to the traditional areas of concern but also to the research process itself in terms of well designed methodology, the correctly selected methods, appropriate skills and knowledge of the primary researcher (Save the Children, 2004). These areas were discussed above, while this section will deal with specific ethical issues of consent, confidentiality, prevention of harm to participants, power relations and the right of children to be informed about the research and data management.

The entire process of exploring children's agency and childhood experience was designed on the basis of negotiation with all the participants and obtaining their consent in every stage of the study rather than imposing them certain activities and their timing. The process started with giving all participants extensive information about what the research entailed in terms of the research inquiry, its objectives, use of data and methods

involved; timing and location of activities together with an opportunity to reflect on them before committing themselves to taking part. Therefore there were several stages of explanation and gaining consent from the headteachers, form tutors, parents and particularly children. The participant information sheets outlining research questions, objectives, methods and expectations were sent out to both schools before my visit in December 2010. There were several versions of the participant information sheets adapted to various age groups of children and parents and languages of instruction at schools. The headteachers were the primary focal points to make themselves familiar with the study details and to communicate and discuss them with teachers, parents and children. At that stage the aim was to give teachers, parents and children overall information about the study and raise their interest in case if they wanted to take part.

More targeted information sharing took place after I arrived to the country. Apart from written materials, I briefed the children, their parents, teachers and headteachers during school assemblies, parents' evening and teachers' meetings about the study. Children not only knew about the study in general, but they were also explained the order of activities and why certain types of activities were carried out and why in the specific order. I also explained the ways in which findings will be analysed and informed them that a summary report will be shared with their schools.

Year groups were selected through the registers to avoid a possible coercion from the headteachers which some year groups could have felt, as headteachers could have selected the classes by their personal assessment of their academic performance to represent their respective schools in more favourable ways. In addition, children were also selected using the class registers to avoid a possible intervention of their form tutors. Therefore children were rather invited to participate in the study if they wished to, instead of being told to do so. Such an approach promoted an element of ownership

in the research from children, which was likely to generate a positive impact on the quality of the data and also relationships between children and myself.

Informed consent

All the efforts in giving schools full information about the study were necessary to ensure that children were able to give informed consent. Prior to approaching children, participant consent forms and extended research background documents were discussed and distributed among all the parents at both schools during school assemblies and also sent back to every child's home. There were 2 versions of consent forms separately for parents and children and for children only. Parents and children were requested to discuss the study together and consent to be part of it, if they wished. These discussions attempted to prevent situations where children would feel under pressure by their parents to participate in the study against their will. Therefore, children were crosschecked for their consent in every research activity when their parents were not present. Children were also asked for their permission to be recorded at the beginning of every activity such as individual interviews and group discussions. No child refused to participate in the study except one boy at the state school who misunderstood my status and thought I was a medical doctor instead of a doctoral student. All children consented to be part of the study and signed consent forms individually in addition to the ones signed by their parents. There was no difficulty in collecting consent forms from children who were part of group and individual activities, as there were only 40 of them. It was more difficult to get consent forms back from individual children who only participated in the piloting of instruments designed for group activities. In those cases, I had teachers and form tutors sign the forms for each tutor group.

Moreover, it was made absolutely clear that parents and children could opt out at any point of the study, if they felt uncomfortable. They were also able to stop during any

activity without explaining the reason for such a decision and without any bad outcome for them. In fact, consenting to be part of this study was an ongoing activity rather than a one-off event (Morrow, 2008), as children had an opportunity to have a choice to change their decision in every level of the study. This was important as one of the drawbacks of obtaining a written consent is that 'it can create a sense of obligation in the respondent' (Save the Children, 2004; p. 36). A constant consenting process helped children think and think again about decisions to participate in this study and consequences of their decisions, as taking decisions may take longer for younger children.

Confidentiality and prevention of harm to participants

The school setting for the research activities helped avoid active intervention of parents in children's responses, which could have been a real problem, had the activities taken place in their homes. Classrooms as settings were useful in making children feel more at ease when interviewing alone with me. Younger children were asked if they would like someone else to be present while talking to me, but none of the children expressed such a desire. The school setting may have given them some feeling of control over the space, where they were 'the local' and I was 'the visitor', which may have had a positive balancing effect on the power relations between us. Moreover, the subject matter of the study did not specifically involve any sensitive issues and no upsetting moments emerged during the activities which could have caused children any physical, social and psychological stress or distress. They were mainly talking about their social relationships e.g. friendships, boyfriends-girlfriends, family relationships, parents breaking up, but also about changing and leaving school, studying after school, future ambitions etc. These are the topics of the wider setting of children's lives which children are believed to talk about more easily (Mauthner, 1997). A selection of such topics helps with equalising 'power relations' between a researcher and children (Mauthner, 1997),

especially when children can talk about them in their own order and pace. Although these topics were part of my research interest and therefore imposed by me, children overall appeared genuinely interested in discussing these issues – they often commented that they'd never had any chance of exploring them before in their lives.

Moreover, to avoid any harm, children were made aware that they should not tell me anything they did not want to. Most importantly children were assured that nothing of what they told me would be passed to any third party and that their names would not be recognisable in my thesis and articles published as a result of the study, as I would use pseudonyms instead of their real names. They were also told that nobody would be working with the transcripts of their interviews and group discussion except me and that recording of them will be destroyed after the completion of the Doctorate degree.

I was alerted by the University Ethics Committee to assess the context that I was working in in terms of what options were available for help and support to children at risk of violence, in case I observed any such indications. Such occasions did not arise and I did not need to act in this regard. The only instance where such sensitive topics came to my attention was a case where 3 boys at the state school aged 12 reported having been subject to physical punishment by a teacher. However, given the fact that this was in the past and that the teacher in question was no longer working at the school, I decided not to inform the school headteacher. In this respect, I judged that my further involvement would contravene one of the key conditions of the study which was to NOT share children's comments with any of the adults in their school or home environments. I admit this entailed balancing on a very fine edge between my duty to safeguard the participants and my promise to maintain the confidentiality of their statements.

Power relations

As discussed above, one of the challenges in terms of the ethical issues relevant to this study was the imbalance of power between an adult researcher and a child. This was especially exacerbated by the characteristics of the cultural setting of Kyrgyzstan where children's views have a particularly strong influence of views of the older generation. Power is a relationship (Hawthorne, 1997) used in everyday lives which is not necessarily resisted (Kothari, 2001) but must be engaged with (Kesby, 2005). To mitigate this issue and reduce the power differential, in addition to the abovementioned points, I endeavoured to build a strong rapport with children and always demonstrated my respect for children's views (Save the Children, 2004). All children were treated as equals and there was no particular minority group which could have been excluded. Boys and girls participated in the study on equal grounds and both seemed to feel comfortable working with a female researcher. This was possibly more easily accepted by children given the fact that all the teachers and headteachers were women and the majority of parents involved in the study were also mothers. I used 'a child-centered approach' which respects and values children as individuals in their own right, who are considered not only as children with rights, but as full human beings with rights that are equal with all others (Sinclair, 2004). Therefore, any patronising and 'teaching' language was avoided. In this framework, the study was designed as a jointly negotiated process (Voice for the Child in Care, 2004). It had a clear vision with consistent activities complementing one another and was conducted in a safe research environment supportive of children's inputs.

Although the fieldwork did not extend for many months, I took steps to minimise the power differential by accessing the children's environment not through ad hoc unorganised one-off events, but rather through a continuous process spanning over two months. I was observing children when they were playing football, or cleaning the

school premises, when they were chatting on the ground floor near the mirrors, timetables, etc. I was reading books when they were doing their homework in the classroom, or sitting around during their PE classes. I tried to act as somebody who is ‘an adult’ but not the same adult as children’s teachers, parents or school managers. The fact that I was a student myself and shared a somewhat similar position with children helped them accept me in that sense, whereas our age difference did not totally equate me to teachers, staff members, or parents. So I was someone who was not a ‘proper’ adult Mayall (2000), but a ‘...professional with a distinctive and genuine purpose’ (Christensen, 2004; p. 174).

3.6.4. Meetings with parents, teachers and local authorities

In addition to the activities with children, I conducted discussions with their parents/carers (Appendix 4). Parents/carers are likely to be the main actors in shaping child agency in Kyrgyz society and are an important source of current adultist views. The aim of the discussions was to reflect on the cultural perceptions of childhood and children and their role and place in society; how traditional cultural perceptions were reflected in contemporary life and how they were affected by economic circumstances families lived in; what kind of childhood they had experienced when they were children during the Soviet era and what were the differences between their childhood and that of their children; whether child agency is relevant to the Kyrgyz cultural norms of childhood, how it is built and experienced and how cultural and economic conditions, parents and families as well as other factors shape child agency. I conducted one group discussion with the parents of year 6 at the private school and 2 groups of parents at the state school of year 6 and 9. I could not gather the parents of year 9 at the private school and had to conduct personal interviews with them instead.

In addition, I had interviews with tutors of year 6 and 9 at both schools to talk about their views of students, their family lives and school performance - the findings were complementary to general analysis. In addition, I met the head of local authorities in the new settlement who provided useful background information about the neighbourhood. Both interviews with teachers and local authority were aimed to elicit the socio-demographic descriptions of the neighbourhood and information on general topics such as children's home environments in terms of their school performances. Table 3 summarises the list of all the activities conducted and their objectives in answering the research questions.

Table 3. Core activities, their details and objectives

Activities	Quantity	Age groups	Aims
1 st round of group discussions	11 discussions	Year 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 (aged 8-12 and 15-16)	- to test the instruments for different age groups - to investigate the best way of talking about child agency - to explore whether the perception of child agency and its practice vary between young and older children and - to select the age of children to continue to work with.
2 nd round of group discussion	4 discussions (10 children in each group)	Year 6 and 9 (aged 12 and 16)	- to create appropriate group dynamics and ensure participation of every child - To elaborate on the topics emerging from previous discussions in smaller groups
Semi-structured interviews	40	Aged (12 and 16)	To get more personal and in-depth information about children's experiences of agency, which was impossible to obtain during

			group activities
Group discussions/interviews with parents	3 group discussions, 6 interviews	Around 30-60 years old	- To explore cultural perceptions of childhood and children and their role and place in society - To investigate how these perceptions were affected by economic circumstances families lived in and how they changed since the days of the Soviet Union - To explore what factors affected these changes
Interviews with tutors of year 6 and 9 at both schools, and headteachers	6 interviews		To talk about their views of students, their family lives and school performance.
Interview with the head of local authority in the new settlement	1 interview		To obtain background information about the neighbourhood

3.7. Working with data and analysis

The working languages of the study were Kyrgyz and Russian. I am a native speaker of both languages and I am fully able to write, read, speak and understand in both Kyrgyz and Russian. All activities have been carried out, recorded, transcribed and coded by myself. Initially an attempt was made to use NVIVO 9 for data analysis and I attended a full course of NVIVO 9 at the Oxford University Computer Service and obtained the requisite software programme. However, having discovered that the programme does not support my working languages and due to limited resources available for translations into English, all data analyses were carried out manually, which did not affect the quality of analysis. I have applied modified versions of methods of analysis of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) e.g. open coding, axial coding

and selective coding, the conditional matrix, etc. These methods enabled a conceptualisation of data by identifying phenomena and categories, making comparisons for their similarities and differences, revealing connections between different conditions. Constant comparison of data, rigorous coding, systematically refining and validating the instances of concepts allowed me to minimise my own potential biases towards data analysis. Based on my background such as professional and social statuses, theoretical beliefs and cultural background and having been a former student of the Soviet Union and a daughter myself, my personal biography could have affected data coding and analysis as well as conclusions deduced from the data (Elliott et al., 1999; Walford et al., 2010).

I also incorporated Kyrgyz proverbs regarding the role and place of children in Kyrgyz society. Proverbs reflect a nationally recognised framework of conduct and values which have deep historical roots which still influence current life in Kyrgyz society. I presumed that parents'/carers' views about cultural demands on childhood had been affected by current socio-economic and other conditions and therefore proverbs were important to get deeper insight into such knowledge. Proverbs did occur during the interviews with children at the state school and their parents, whereas children at the private school did not mention them at all. This can indicate that private school-families tend to be more modern and state school families tend to be more traditional.

3.8. Conclusion

For the purposes of the research questions raised in the literature review, poor and wealthy neighbourhoods, schools, children and families in Kyrgyzstan were chosen and justifications for these selections were given. Kyrgyzstan is unique in terms of its distinct culture and especially dramatic ideological and economic changes - a combination of which offers a rich and multifaceted context in which to study child

agency. The chapter has demonstrated that these are not two schools under the radar of comparison, but two different strata of society which represent two different but partially similar models of childhood.

Punch (2002b) suggests that the way in which a researcher perceives the status of children influences the choice of methods. Children are seen as agents of their lives as well as agentic informants of research studies. However, their agency is recognised to be bounded by specific cultural, social, material as well as personal factors, and therefore children are both agents and dependents at the same time. This perception of children is reflected in the research study's methodological design where children are treated as social actors with competences, but also as representatives of the structured social space of childhood. Children, as agents of their lives, are still constrained by the various different structures including culture and institutions in which they are located, which shape their experiences of childhood. Consequently an enquiry into children's experiences of agency was designed in the way to find out structural circumstances and their influences on them in various aspects of their everyday lives and the ways children navigate through them.

The choice of methods, their order and contexts have been carefully thought through in terms of their optimal ability to respond to the research questions, complementing one another to fill the gap of missing information, create an environment for children to enjoy their experience of participation and allow me to learn at every stage of the fieldwork. Therefore the selection of qualitative methods such as interviews and group discussions with children, their parents and teachers allowed me to uncover the nuances of structure and agency relationships with regard to children. The methods I have used have certain limitations and some themes emerging from my research could have been explored in much greater depth, though they produced some

very important data. The next chapter is the first chapter to include some empirical data to give the country context of Kyrgyzstan and how the current changes in the country affected parents' social and personal views on children and childhood.

CHAPTER IV KYRGYZSTAN - POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: TWO MODELS OF CHILDHOOD

4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to outline the relevant local background of this research endeavour and to give some basic understanding of the recent changes in Kyrgyzstan and the way they are reflected in children's experiences of childhood. In doing so, this chapter will navigate a rather complex interplay of factors and discuss the conceptualisation of childhood from a social, historic and subjective perspective, as they play a significant role in constructing modern childhood. The social aspect will be defined by the prevailing societal norms of Kyrgyz culture, while the subjective dimensions will be derived from children's as well as parents' stated perceptions of childhood. The historical overview of childhood will be focused on the child-rearing practices in the Soviet Union (when the parents participating in this study were children themselves) and the ways in which these practices have evolved since 1991.

The discussion will not be complete without describing the political, economic and social situation in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union and further post-independence changes. Thus, this chapter will attempt to provide a detailed picture of the impact of these profound societal transformations on families and on children in particular. The children in this study are growing up during a time of change and insecurity, but also a time of new opportunities brought by the transition. It will soon emerge that the ratio of difficulties versus opportunities is not equal or even similar for all the children and families in the sample of this study.

The chapter will begin with a short introduction to the literature on childhood and then move on to the historical background and the traditional cultural views and practices of childhood. The main part of the chapter will be focused on the children's

and parents' views of childhood and comparisons will be made between the schools representing rich and poor. This chapter will unpack the meanings of childhood for modern children and parents and trace how child agency fits into their larger interpretation of life, given the interplay between recent Soviet history and traditional Kyrgyz culture, since Kyrgyzstan was a part of the USSR for 70 years - the better part of the 20th century. It will then describe the period of the collapse of the Soviet system and its effects on the country's development in general and on children's lives in particular. Parents' and children's views of childhood experiences will be discussed to demonstrate the differences between rich and poor.

The intention is not to 'freeze' or 'idealise' the previous Kyrgyz and Soviet inheritance, as they would have shifted over time and there will have been tensions within them. The chapter will elucidate the emerging conflicts between generations and their varying material circumstances as well as the effects these have on structure and agency. It will enrich current knowledge about the cultural, material and ideological distinctiveness of the conceptualisation of childhood and most importantly contribute to the study of the ways children shape their childhood.

4.2. 'Childhood' contested.

Childhood could be described as the early period of human maturation which involves biological and social factors affecting children's growth and development. Children are generally considered to be weaker and less capable than adults and are also immature and lack social power (Boyden and Mann, 2005; Boyden et al., 1998). Moreover, children are considered to be incomplete human beings, who are 'immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial and acultural' (Mackay, 1973, p. 28). They usually occupy a 'marginal social, economic and legal status' in relation to adults (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998, p. 1). Until recently, childhood was argued to be a universal,

biologically and psychologically determined phase of human development. Children are usually assessed as incompetent (Lee, 1998) and childhood is considered a time for learning and play, which should be separate from the adult world of work, sex and politics (Ennew, 1999). In this sense, Piaget's theory of children's cognitive and moral development through universal stages determined by chronological age (Piaget, 1947) has been and continues to be extremely influential (Woodhead, 1999). Researchers, such as Vygotsky, challenged the universalism attributed to childhood and explored the role of cultural contexts in children's learning, which 'takes place in an active adaptation to the external environment' (1978, p. 34). His findings contest the use of age as the sole determinant of children's capacities and suggest that children's development must be analysed in relation to the social environment within which it takes place.

Recent recognition of children's diverse experiences of childhood both within and between societies led to what Prout and James term a new paradigm of childhood studies, which views childhood as socially constructed (1997). As Prout and James (1997) stress, children are social and economic agents able to shape their life structures and processes and their 'social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspectives and concerns of adults' (1997, p. 8). From this perspective, the role of child agency appears to be especially important, as it has a central role in constructing childhood practices, which are locally and socially constructed. This chapter will contribute to the theoretical framework described so far by discussing not only cultural aspects of children's experiences of childhood and agency but also their transformation throughout historical developments.

4.3. Soviet childhood: a historical overview

4.3.1. Character formation as child agency

Under the Soviet Union, the main pillars of child rearing were for parents, educators and the wider community to develop such characteristics in children as obedience and self-discipline. Obedience towards any adults and respect were shown by the way that children followed their demands, instructions, and advice from an early age. Obedience was crucial to developing self-discipline and without these two qualities any independence could have resulted in 'ugly' and 'anarchistic' behaviour which was not possible under the Soviet rules of living (Bronfenbrenner, 1971).

Within the framework of obedience and self-discipline, however, the Soviet upbringing ideology promoted some form of agency, collective agency in particular, with the individual responsibility of knowing that collective welfare was based on personal conduct. However, in the predominantly collective ideology, the agency of a particular individual and thus the role of the child's his or her own upbringing was acknowledged. A child's individuality, circumstances and upbringing were the main forces in his or her formation (Azarov, 1983). Parents were to create conducive conditions for their children's learning, to organise their life and captivate them with suitable activities. Developing certain characteristics encouraged children to be agents of children's collectives and to take primary responsibilities themselves. It is important to mention that collective upbringing promoted girls' agency, as girls would normally take a more active role, while boys would usually be the target of the collective discipline (Bronfenbrenner, 1971). This was because girls were particularly good at learning and behaving at school, while boys tended to misbehave, not to look neat and clean or to be left behind in learning. In general, the female population of the Soviet Union was, incidentally, better educated than the male population. So for example, there were six women and four men per ten people with a higher education diploma (Kotlyarskaya, 1990). In fact, the Soviet Union had declared the equality of women with men in 1917

after the October Revolution, believed to be the first proclamation of this kind in the world (Kotlyarskaya, 1990). Consequently, gender inequality in the Soviet context actually meant men being behind women, at least academically.

The Soviet Union put a lot of stress on upbringing or rather on ‘character education’¹⁴ (Bronfenbrenner, 1971) in line with Communist morality. These objectives developed agency in children with some sense of altruism and concern about the world, the people and the motherland. Children attached a high importance to learning and working, which was the Soviet aim, but also reality. These were reflected in the way Soviet children engaged in different activities, behaved at school, made friends, treated their parents and other adults and were members of the Soviet brotherhood and sisterhood. For example, in studies where English, American and West German children of the same age were compared with them (Bronfenbrenner, 1971), the Soviet children were much less willing to engage in any antisocial behaviour. In fact, the main logic of the Soviet collective upbringing was that children were supposed to think of others before thinking about themselves and this was how the relationship between ‘I’ and ‘We’ were expressed by some Soviet writers (Azarov, 1983). In other words, the collective interest had a higher priority than the individual one, as the highest form of happiness for the Soviet person was to help others (Azarov, 1983). Within Soviet understanding the collective meant several things, including the socialist principle of control by the state of all means of productive or economic activity, cooperative

¹⁴ Children were supposed to have the following desired characteristics within the complete list of five main domains such as 1) communist morality (e.g. trustworthiness, honesty, kindness, duty, honour, patience, diligence in work and care of possessions, friendship with classmates, love of one’s locality, patriotism) 2) responsible attitude towards learning (e.g. interest and striving for learning, understanding the social significance of education, initiative in learning, organizing intellectual and physical work, striving to apply new knowledge in life and work); 3) cultured conduct (e.g. care, accuracy and neatness, courtesy and cordiality, cultured speech, proper behaviour in public spaces), 4) bases of aesthetic culture (e.g. artistic creativity, understanding the beautiful in nature, in the conduct of people, in creative art) and 5) physical culture and sport (e.g. strengthening one’s body, sanitary-hygienic habits) (p. 30-31). These five domains were taught to children within the framework of obedience and self-discipline.

enterprises, professional groups, ideological units (collective farms, trade unions, communist leagues etc.), whereas an individual family was nested in the collective but was not its separate structure. A family alongside schools, kindergartens etc. was responsible for bringing up a member of the collective.

Nevertheless, the priority of the collective over the individual was not something new to Kyrgyz culture, where people traditionally have tight intra- and inter-familial relationships, as it has been traditionally based on tribal and clan relationships as well as historically reliant on mutual networks of support and protection (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004). Despite a relatively short exposure to Islam i.e. since the late seventeenth century (Gardaz, 1999), this religion is argued to influence Kyrgyz social norms by enforcing family solidarity and mutual assistance (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004). It should be noted that the word ‘collective’ is not part of Kyrgyz colloquial language, (though it was one of the key words during the Soviet time). Instead, Kyrgyz people use such words as ‘family’, ‘home’, ‘home/family members’. So for Kyrgyz, ‘collective’ means a nuclear family, an extended family and a tribal community - the meanings used in this study. Ownership and belonging start with the immediate environment of a nuclear family (every family member shares reciprocally with one another) and then includes an extended family and a tribe if needed (the latter mostly in big family events). In addition, ‘collective’ involves not only financial exchanges and commitments but also moral obligations. Given such an interpretation of ‘collective’, the Kyrgyz society falls into those types of societies which are called ‘socio-centric’¹⁵ (Feeny and Boyden, 2003b), where children are raised to carry responsibilities and obligations towards their families from an early age and become part of society through

¹⁵ The opposite of this society would be ‘ego-centric’ societies, where ‘individualism’ is the common value of living and childhood practices are built up with respect to individual space, independence etc. (Fuyee and Boyden, 2003b).

the fulfillment of these expectations. Therefore, this heritage encouraged mutual reinforcements between the Soviet ideology and traditional Kyrgyz culture.

The Kyrgyz values of respect for older people and collective wellbeing generate a particular way of constructing childhood. These values lay the foundations for a number of specific expectations for each family member, and these expectations are also further enforced by the social convention of 'shame'. These concepts and practices will be explored in depth in following chapters where the collective will emerge as a crosscutting theme in all the settings of child agency discussed. Given the Soviet legacy of obedience and collectivism reinforced by the Kyrgyz cultural framework, child agency, which is argued to be an individually based phenomenon, becomes an even more challenging and contested subject of research, especially now that both of these cultures are under challenge.

It is important to underline that the Soviet Socialist system had not been the same for all the 70 years of its existence, but had rather been exposed to different factors which caused systematic failures in various areas. The last few years especially witnessed a weakening trend in the entire political, financial and ideological system which finally culminated in the collapse of the regime. Nevertheless, this was the overall ideological framework under which the parents of the children who participated in this study were brought up. However, despite sharing a similar childhood background, parents at the state school and parents at the private school displayed remarkable differences in their views of their own Soviet childhood and their children's lives in modern Kyrgyzstan, which will be discussed below. The discussion will now turn to the historical event which generated dramatic changes in parents' and children's lives.

4.3.2. The early years of independence: economic fluctuation and further political changes

Kyrgyzstan was among fifteen countries of the Soviet Union which experienced an abrupt crisis after its collapse in 1991 that led to decades of transition. It is one of the smallest and least economically developed countries among former Soviet Union states, being the second poorest country in Central Asia after Tajikistan. However, since 2008, Kyrgyzstan has become worse off than Tajikistan, with a negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figure in 2010 and becoming the poorest country in the region, see Table 4.

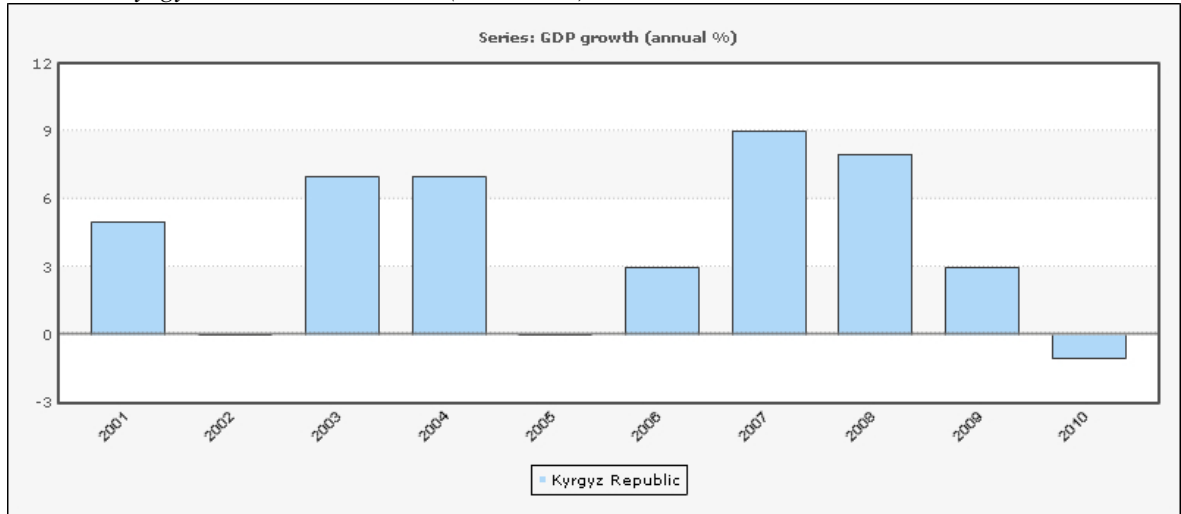
Table 4. Central Asian GDP Growth (Annual %) by country

Country Name	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Kazakhstan	14	10	9	10	10	11	9	3	1	7
Kyrgyz Republic	5	0	7	7	0	3	9	8	3	-1
Tajikistan	10	9	10	11	10	7	7	8	8	4
Turkmenistan	20	16	17	17	13	11	12	11	6	8
Uzbekistan	4	4	4	8	7	7	10	9	8	9

Source: Author's own table based on The World Bank Group Data at <http://databank.worldbank.org>

A closer look at the Kyrgyz GDP in Chart 1 demonstrates a rather unsteady growth, fluctuating from no growth in 2002 and 2005, to a peak of 9% in 2007 and then falling in 2010 to -1% growth. According to the International Monetary Fund's assessment (IMF, 2011), the Kyrgyz economy was subject to '...several high impact internal and external shocks' (p. 5).

Chart 1. Kyrgyzstan's GDP Growth (Annual %) 2001-2010



Source: Author's own table based on The World Bank Group Data at <http://databank.worldbank.org>

The negative economic growth in 2005 was associated with political upheaval, the so-called 'Tulip Revolution', which resulted in President Akayev's flight from the country. After the first revolution, the political situation deteriorated further with more frequent demonstrations, picketing, strikes, uprisings and rising criminality (Bekbolotov, 2006).

The most dramatic drop in the annual GDP growth of the country was witnessed in 2010, marked by more political turmoil followed by the inter-ethnic clash between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south of the country¹⁶. This second revolution again resulted in a change of political leadership and brought the interim coalition government to office, led by a woman President. The interim government succeeded in developing and adopting a new constitution through a nation-wide referendum, changing the country's political system from presidential into a parliamentary republic.

This political picture has prompted scholars to classify Kyrgyzstan as 'soft authoritarianism' (Bingol, 2006), 'weak autocracy to near democracy' (Wood, 2006), 'partly free country' (Freedom House, 2006), and 'faltering state' (International Crisis

¹⁶ In fact, the country is divided into two by the Tien Shah mountains: the South and the North. This division is not only geographical, but goes deeper and further affecting the areas of life, with the South being closer to Uzbekistan and having more Uzbek impact and the North including the capital city (as well as the most remote mountainous regions of the country). The North part has the image of being more modernised, so-called more 'Russified', and the South is more Islamic and traditional.

Group, 2005). It has also been argued that democracy will not be sustainable in the country as long as it remains a weak state (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2007). Kyrgyzstan is increasingly classified as a weak state with a tendency towards a failure to provide security (Rotberg, 2004; Bratton, 2004) as well as basic social services (Rotberg, 2004). Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan is a country, once known as authoritarian, where citizens freely express their opinions and participate in opposition politics (Ruget and Usmanalieva, 2007) and exercise their political agency.

4.3.3. Families and poverty at the time of transition

Transition in Kyrgyzstan has had a high human cost so far, especially for children. Children living in contemporary Kyrgyzstan are witnessing the impoverishment of large numbers of people, weak governance and a lack of basic social services for those in need (UNDP, 2003). The Soviet regime could arguably be criticised for a variety of reasons. However, in terms of stable state support for families and children, the socialist system was almost ideal, with egalitarian and universal state social services where pensions, child support, health, education and other social services were the norm (Pomfret, 1999). Pre-school care was well funded by the state and there were generous maternity leaves. Education was compulsory through secondary school and almost universal literacy was achieved. Schools were accessible for children regardless of their gender and their family's economic and social background. With the times of transition, Kyrgyzstan struggled to keep these achievements at the same level and quality. The transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to fundamental changes in the education system in Kyrgyzstan. Although the literacy rate of the population remains traditionally high, the coverage of school-aged children with compulsory education has declined slightly, and there was a lack of sufficient trained teaching staff,

pedagogical materials, equipment and textbooks, as well as stagnating curricula and management systems, according to the Open Society Institute's report (2002).

As UNICEF analysis claims, 'household wealth is the stronger determinant of school attendance in developing countries' (2007a, p. 13), which means that children in low income families are more likely not to attend school or to attend irregularly. According to national labour surveys, older children in Kyrgyzstan are often engaged in child labour to make ends meet (UNICEF, 2008). There were several children doing paid work regularly among the state school children who participated in this research, in addition to those who did it occasionally. School fees were clearly a big issue for parents at the state school, which they struggled to pay, as emerged in group discussions with parents during this study. Although the Kyrgyz education system is legally recognised as free of direct cost, material difficulties in meeting indirect costs (e.g. transport, clothes, stationery etc) are the most important reasons for non-attendance, linked with child labour, along with the poor conditions in schools (e.g. lack of heating in winter, low morale among teachers who face low pay and pay arrears, and a lack of qualified teachers, etc.) (Yarkova, et al., 2004). The situation with teachers' salaries and their low morale was also a concern for the headteacher of the state school in this study. She commented that these factors strongly affected children's learning, given the fact that some children also lacked parental attention at home due to their parents' regular absences from home for earning purposes. However, this view was not supported by the opinions expressed by parents and children.

In 2008, 32% of families in Kyrgyzstan lived in absolute poverty, as estimated by the national measures¹⁷ (Gassmann, 2011). Poverty rates appear higher for children

¹⁷ Poverty measures are calculated by the National Statistics Committee using average household consumption per capita. The extreme (food) poverty line is equivalent to the costs for an individual to purchase 2100 kcal per day, taking into account the actual food consumption patterns of a representative

than for the population as a whole. In 2002-2003, 80% of children (aged between 0-15) in Kyrgyzstan lived in households with a household consumption below PPP US\$2.15¹⁸ per person per day (UNICEF, 2006). The Kyrgyz figures are the highest among 19 countries studied with regard to child wellbeing indicators in the CEE/CIS region (Richardson et al., 2008), though the subjective perception of Kyrgyz children with regard to poverty show that less than 13% of respondent children worry about money.

Nevertheless, Kyrgyz children are poor in several dimensions. Using consumption-based poverty, material deprivation and housing deprivation to measure poverty, Chzhen (2010) reveals the traditional categories of children who are most vulnerable to poverty. These categories include children in larger families, with two or more siblings, if the youngest child in the household is under 6 years old, if they live in families headed by persons without secondary education, if they live in female-headed households and if they live in rural areas. Poor children are significantly more likely to live in materially deprived households and to live in poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding and a lack of important housing amenities. Such living conditions were also present among the children who participated in this study at the state school.

Consequently, Kyrgyzstan experiences growing numbers of people leaving the country for work, mainly going to Russia (World Bank, 2005; UNICEF, 2006). According to UNICEF (2004), the impact of migration on children can be both negative and positive. Children who are left behind and are separated from their parents are often left with their extended families and may experience psychological, economic and emotional problems. They may also have higher income in comparison with children

share of households. The absolute poverty line includes an allowance for non-food goods and services based on households around the food poverty line (Gassmann, 2011).

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that the ratio of the population aged 0-14 to the population aged 15-59 in Kyrgyzstan is 49.7% (UNICEF, 2007b).

whose parents do not migrate, due to the remittances they receive from their parents, and therefore have a better economic position.

However, this is probably achieved at the cost of children's deprivation of parental upbringing, care and love which are crucial for their overall wellbeing and development. Families of working migrants were also present among the children selected for this study, and their particular condition will be discussed further in the following chapters. Nowadays, with the internal and external shocks to which Kyrgyz families are exposed, the traditions of cooperation and mutual aid can be crucial for survival. However, families in poverty are becoming gradually excluded from some important networks when costs are involved. These families can be either excluded by themselves or by others from participating in ceremonial events because of the costs of such occasions. When important kinship support is absent, it may put poor families in an even more vulnerable situation, leaving them with no financial or other forms of support. A few families within this study were also exposed to social exclusion from their extended families for material reasons, whereas the majority of them relied heavily on support from their wider family network.

4.3.4. Families, culture and globalization after the collapse of the Soviet Union

Either gradually or rapidly, within 21 years of independence (1991-2012), change entered every home, and affected every family and individual in Kyrgyzstan. Many abrupt transformations were taking place and indeed it was difficult to grasp the scope of the changes and the nature of them and they generated many conflicting attitudes towards the present, the future and the desirable outcomes of children's upbringing. Almost all the parents in the group discussions held at the state school agreed that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing westernization did not

benefit them and were not right for the Kyrgyz mentality. This negation of the Western influence stems from the legacy of the Cold War era (these ideas were common among the parents from the state school, but not among those from the private one), the shock value of foreign movies with physical violence and sex (which were absent in Soviet television) that dominate Kyrgyz television today, and the prevalent general assumption about Western culture as lacking such qualities as respect and shame:

‘Now, what television shows is only bad foreign movies and our children wear clothes like them. They are following them. This is dangerous, as they are at the age when they are particularly susceptible, so they are learning bad things. When we were children, we never saw such things; even kissing we did not see on screens. Since we have opened our borders, we feel foreign influences. We were happier as children in the past, than our own children in the present’ (Kachyke, woman aged 50, state school).

These effects of globalization not only affect children’s agency, but also challenge traditional cultural norms with regard to children’s behaviour and their relationships with others. According to the parents from the state school, they became less strict with their children than their parents were and their children could claim more independence from them.

Economic changes were particularly influential, as many parents at the state school mentioned that people and their values had changed to the detriment of mutual assistance, honesty, respect and dignity, as all these basic values were replaced by money and the struggle for it:

‘Now people’s intentions are wrong, real bad. There is a lot of envy around. Everybody wants to be richer than somebody else. This affects children. They sit and say “that one got richer, we must get rich too”. This is a bad influence on children, who would think that money is all we need’ (Akim, man aged 45, state school).

These changes seem to be quite influential in terms of agency and its collective purposes, as the latter can be undermined by the individual struggle for survival. However, evidence from this study demonstrates that children, their families and

neighbourhoods were quite collaborative towards common good and that children's agency was largely focused on the family's collective wellbeing.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet ideology stopped being dominant and all-encompassing, but it did not disappear altogether - either at the family or at the institutional level. State schools which were thought to have the effect of enhancing the role of the family, obedience and self-discipline in the upbringing of children have been weakened (poor quality, resources, reputations etc.) and an overall gap was left in terms of child upbringing principles. To start with, families faced unprecedented economic pressure, although it was not distributed equally in society, yet they also faced an empty ideological space after the collapse of the Soviet structure. Certain populations gradually returned to their cultural roots (e.g. local languages, religion etc.). But through globalization, a wave of external influences previously kept at bay by the strict Soviet rules suddenly came to play a key part in the new (but culturally old) independent country. These fundamental changes played out differently for richer and poorer children within Kyrgyz society, but before exploring the impact of recent years, I will discuss the traditional Kyrgyz cultural patterns.

4.4. Kyrgyz childhood – a social and cultural view

In Kyrgyz culture, child upbringing is regarded as hard work, but children themselves are regarded as fundamentally valuable. As the proverbs express it:

'Not to have a child is one trouble, to have a child brings thousands of troubles', 'To bring up a child is like shaping a stone'. 'A parent is not the one who gives birth, but the one who brings the child up' (National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic, 2001)

However, despite their being hard work, children are intrinsically precious for Kyrgyz people, as reflected in numerous examples of Kyrgyz proverbs which describe children as happiness for the family:

'A house with children is a field of flowers; a house without children is a desert'. 'A house with children is a happy house'. 'A house with children is a market, without them it is a tomb'. 'A house with children is a centre of laughter, without them it is a destroyer of joy' (National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic, 2001).

Early childhood is culturally regarded as innocent, work- and responsibility-free. Such a perception of childhood echoes the early scholarly claims about childhood and is similar to the views of children in the private school, but contrasted with those of the state school children. Even children aged 8-11 studying at the private school who participated in the primary group discussions during my first visit to the field were still treated as 'innocent and sheltered' and they were more childish in their behaviour and speech than their state school counterparts of the same age. Children from years 2, 3, 4 and 5 (aged 8-11) at the private school did not report helping around the house and even the year 6 children (aged 12) did only minimal chores and were rather occupied with various entertainments. Those aged 12 thought that the best thing about being a child was that they did not have to work and had no problems whatsoever. In their understanding, work only represented paid work and did not include work at home, which was one of the main types of activities for the children at the state school. At the same time, the private school children were not allowed to do many things and were not given many choices, as they were believed to be incompetent to make the right decisions and not reliable enough to carry out tasks. Very young children were not seen as social agents within their families, as the early years of childhood seemed to them to be immune to agency. Such parental perceptions of private school children profoundly affected their roles and activities at home and their relationships with adults (chapters V and VI).

What emerged from the children's perspectives at the private school was that childhood was carefree and materialistic. For them, being a child was highly connected with having certain goods such as clothes, books, stationery, mobile phones and other

gadgets. One of the mothers said: '*Children nowadays are more mercantile [market-oriented]. They are more interested in and pursue financial wellbeing*' (Murok, aged 35, private school). There were also views expressed during my discussions with children aged 16 at the private school, suggesting that modern children were more consumerist. As one of the children mentioned, children living in their privileged conditions were spoiled by material possessions, they did not lack anything, which was not the case for their parents, who were more capable of doing things themselves and had been more independent as children. Burul, a mother (aged 40) from the private school shared the same observation - she perceived her children as spoiled and admitted that to a certain extent, it was the parents who do the spoiling by buying things just for the sake of having them.

In contrast, childhood in the experience of state school children was much less associated with the acquisition of goods. Childhood experienced with a relative lack of material resources or at best modest material resources (as it usually was during the Soviet era) encouraged children to contribute and be agentic at home to a greater degree than childhood spent in material abundance. Aged as young as 8, the state school children helped their parents by cleaning the house, looking after younger siblings, caring for elderly etc., though they did not use the word '*work*' (from my group discussions during the first visit to the field). These activities were not happening ad hoc here and there, but were instead a consistent part of their daily life. Almost all children in year 6 (aged 12) at the state school when writing about their daily routine reported doing household chores, helping their parents, and many of them used the words '*I work*' to describe their contribution at home. Hence, their experiences contradict the scholarly view that childhood must be work-free.

Moreover, it demonstrates that children are capable of not only participating in family life (unlike the children at the private school) but also helping the family to function properly. This particular positioning of children in the family reflects local understandings of childhood, which, at certain ages, traditionally support the idea of children as young helpers for their parents and extended families (as well as for teachers at school). Children were purposefully developed through the upbringing efforts of adults and grew themselves through culture and work (cleaning, washing up, looking after younger siblings and older parents, looking after cattle, working in the garden and doing seasonal work in the field, maintaining household utilities etc.), passing through particular domains of life starting at an early age. This gradual socialisation through exposure to work was previously common for Kyrgyz culture regardless of economic status, as discussed earlier in connection with the Soviet legacy. However, as seen here and discussed more in the following chapters, such perceptions of children as young helpers appear to have become less evident for the new class of rich Kyrgyz families.

Additionally, the issue of material conditions in childhood in the case of the state school-children had a different emphasis. There, material side of childhood was about a lack of resources, as one of the parents at the group discussion expressed it:

‘Childhood is not static, it changes according to the time and world we live in. Our society has changed too. When we were children, we did not think about working in the market and trading, as our parents were feeding us and looking after us and we did not know where money came from and what life was. Nowadays, children get involved in these things early and do not have any childhood at all’ (Churok, woman, aged 50, state school).

Qvortrup (1994) claimed that children living in similar geographical, temporal, socio-economic circumstances have common characteristics and share similar structural conditions of childhood as well as the broader society of which such childhood is a part. However, one can witness that commonalities in all those dimensions can actually be disrupted by the material advantages in particular. Therefore, it is possible to argue that

childhood is not only a social and cultural construct, but is also shaped by economic circumstances and so is child agency (more evidence in support of this argument will be presented by further chapters).

However, at the same time, regardless of what childhood experiences children from the two schools had, all children were supposed to obey adults' control and supervision and do what they were told and not contradict, which was considered to be impolite. This was one of the structural conditions that made two childhood practices similar. Such converging expectations could be a legacy of both Kyrgyz tradition and Soviet upbringing. Children at the private school in year 6, aged 12, for example, wrote that they did not like the fact that they had to obey parents, teachers and other adults and that adults could tell them off, whereas children at the state school did not even mention it. On the one hand, we have children at the state school who appeared *more* obedient both at home and school with *less* control from parents, who were also treated as agents consistently and thus seemed to not mind being controlled. On the other hand, there were children at the private school who were not treated as agents at home and were subject to more control from parents and thus did not like being controlled. There was a clear difference between schools; specifically - state school children were more agentic and hence more obedient, private school children felt disempowered and thus resentful. This adds to the previous argument that material factors play a role in shaping child agency.

As discussed earlier, material disadvantages emphasise and promote children's roles and contributions to family life; children stand out as family agents, as both social and material actors. There are parallels with the Soviet environment, when wealth was not meant to be material and labour was a normal part of childhood. But material advantages can take child agency in another direction, where different dynamics come

into play. A Western influence, to which rich families are more exposed (associated chiefly with freedom and individuality) brings a view of childhood as freedom from cares, duties; yet ample material resources seem to diminish the sense of responsibility as part of childhood. Interestingly, a lack of material resources, which could be seen as a thinning factor of child wellbeing in general, seems to be thickening child agency. And vice versa: material advantages could thin child agency, though they thicken child wellbeing overall.

4.5. Modern childhood - (subjective) views of children

All children in the study alike, regardless of their gender or age, considered childhood as a period of life characterised as the best time. It was associated with positive memories which would never come back and but would never be forgotten. It was perceived as the time when children were free of any obligations, responsibilities, decision-making, concerns and worries (though this was not true for all children's lived experiences of childhood). It was a time when children played and enjoyed life and got lots of their parents' attention and time. In fact, playing was an essential part of being a child, and was mentioned by every single child (although children's experiences and forms of playing were different between the two schools, as discussed later). Children clearly separated childhood from adulthood and considered playing as a major differentiator between children and adults. These views of children about childhood describe it as a particular stage or moment of time, when children are different from adults and this difference is expressed in the activities that they do and do not do. Children in the study tended to describe children as passive vis a vis adults, but active in their own circle of activities such as playing. Consequently adults are thought to have a more active role towards children and more agentic, while children are less agentic in the way that they do not do what adults do.

4.5.1. Childhood and adulthood

Childhood is the opposite of adulthood, according to the majority of children in the study. Adults are those who work, earn money and have their own families. At the same time, they have many responsibilities and work to complete and *'too many thoughts to think about'*, as some younger children described it. Parents care about children and help them when they need help. They are capable of solving problems, advising children, helping them to become adults, and arranging their future and their plans and dreams. In the views of younger children at the state school who participated in group discussions, parents were the most knowledgeable and educated ones, whom children should trust and listen to. In addition, the private school children considered their parents as the carers, the ones who buy them different things. Although the private school children seemed to be less agentic as home members, they represented a consumerist's agency in their early age. In their case, childhood was demarcated from adulthood by the roles of parents as providers of material goods and the children as consumers. This will be further explored and discussed in chapter VII.

However, the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were blurred in the perceptions of poorer children. It has emerged from analyses of children's views at the state school that childhood and adulthood were not absolutely separate. They were the opposite of each other, as many children thought, but, as it emerged from children's discussions at the state school, children's and adults' worlds were also interdependent and interactive in many ways. Children from the state school in year 3 (during the group discussions in the first visit to the field) and year 6 mentioned that they felt older when they were doing certain activities such as helping parents, looking after siblings, etc. as well as studying at school, doing sports, and walking in the streets. Already at an early age, children appeared to engage in many activities at home and help their parents in

many ways (though they did not conceptualise it as work themselves). This resonates with Punch (2003), who claims that the more appropriate way of studying childhood is the one which encompasses the multiple and overlapping arenas of childhood with adulthood and that children move in and out of the different versions of adult - and child-centred worlds. She argues that this happens because children

‘...not only take on different child or adult roles in different contexts or with different people, but can also negotiate both roles at the same time, changing almost simultaneously’ (2003, p. 14).

Nevertheless, one could also argue that in the case of Kyrgyz society, this was not only about moving in and out of childhood, but about getting older faster than one would expect they would in their age (as discussed in chapter V). So sharing household chores and paid work with adults was part of being agents for state school-children (though without sharing an equal status with parents), which probably could demonstrate that they would be getting ‘older’ sooner than their counterparts at the private school, as they had more reasons to move in and out of the adults’ world. While younger children felt older depending on what they did, older children in year 9 aged 16 at the state school felt themselves younger or older depending on where they were - i.e. at home, at school, in the neighbourhood. This will be discussed in later chapters.

4.5.2. The happy childhood versus the unhappy childhood

Paradoxically, what was good for the state school children was bad for their private school counterparts. While the private school children seemed to be still tolerant towards adults’ dominance and control in child-adult relationships, their view of childhood reflected their material position and passive standpoints as unable to act for themselves and being dependent on adults. Although childhood for private school children was already clearly divided from adulthood, they still wanted more independence and freedom from it. In general, analysis suggests that the difference

between private and state schools (i.e. rich and poor) were more important than other divisions such as between younger/older, and girls/boys. Given these positions, the private school children did not see the life of the state school children as happy and proved how children could live in two different models of childhood divided by material advantages. Consequently one could argue that economic circumstances have become the main construction material of modern childhood.

When it comes to children's views of happy and unhappy childhood, all children shared the same opinion that a happy childhood was about having parents, whereas an unhappy one was about being without them - as well as being disabled. But the children's views of happy and unhappy childhoods were not without differences and school-specific nuances. Firstly, children at the two schools talked and thought about children in different ways. The views of children aged 16 at the private school can be summarised in one phrase - the more active children are, the unhappier they are. For example, they said that happy children are those who are loved, provided with everything and fed, whereas the children who do things themselves are unhappy. In particular, they thought that unhappy children are those who have to do things themselves, to do physical work, who get older faster, have no education and have to feed themselves and to survive. Girls generally had very ambitious views and were particularly supportive of the idea that a happy child is one that is healthy, educated, materially provided for, respected, heard, free of worries and concerns, does no labour, has their own life objectives and is loved and cared for by parents and friends. Material provision was a key issue for all children aged 16 and 12 at the private school, though a few of them mentioned that parental love is more important.

The children at the state school were overwhelmingly convinced that to have parents and to be able *'to drink tea'*¹⁹ with them sitting at the table constitutes a happy childhood. Conversely, the formula of an unhappy childhood being equal with not having parents was quite strong. This was probably the reason why children did not mention the lack of material resources as something they thought was a problem - it was generally viewed as less harmful than not having parents. But they also considered that children can deal with any situations and even children in orphanages do not stay unhappy for a long time, as they are keen on making plans for the future. The girls mainly talked about unhappy children as being unable to study and only one girl mentioned that to do hard work in their early years could make children unhappy. Interestingly, this age group started talking about responsibilities and discussed that they felt happy to be able to help and take care of parents, to come to school, to study and learn, to do military service, to help mothers and *'pay back to their parents for their maternal breastfeeding'*²⁰. Seeing children as active agents was also common for the children aged 12 at the state school. Although, younger children did not mention the word *'responsibilities'*, they still talked about what children should do - study, work, help and respect parents, think about parents first before themselves.

Secondly, child labour was an issue which generated different opinions among the two groups. Although for all children an unhappy childhood is linked with some kind of child labour, the state school children did not mind working as such, but did mind doing hard work (e.g. working in construction and pushing hand trolleys in the markets). In children's opinion, a child cannot be happy doing this work, as it makes

¹⁹ 'Tea drinking' in the words of children means to spend time together with their parents when children make the table and prepare tea and food for them. This is the time when the whole family gets together and children can show their parents their respect and do something for them.

²⁰ Almost every child in the state school wished to 'pay back to their parents for their maternal breastfeeding'. This means that they want to express their gratitude to their parents for being brought up and cared for when they were young. Now when they were older, children wanted to help their parents as their abilities allow them, but most importantly care for them in the future when their parents get older.

them tired as well as harms his/her health. If a child goes to school and works at the same time, it is good for him/her, as a child can '*earn money for their own bread*', in the children's own words. The state school children agreed that children should think about their parents first and then about themselves. As they say:

'Of course, every child does all he/she can to help their own parents, and all they are able to do is household chores around the house indoors and outdoors. Although we cannot earn money for our parents, we can help them with the work at home' (Ruslan, boy aged 12, state school).

In contrast, for the private school students, any work, especially working at an early age, was seen as harmful. During the group discussion with 12-year-old children, they were making fun of working children and portraying them in a negative way. Moreover, one of the mothers from the private school recounted how she used working children as a possible bad scenario of childhood to frighten her children:

'We were walking in the market and saw a child polishing shoes. My children did not understand what the child was doing and I explained to them that the child was working to earn money. I told them if they do not study, I would send them to the market to clean shoes for people. At that moment, my son's face expressed something like how lucky he was not to work. Then I said to my daughter that she can work in the market too and weigh people for money' (Kulusun, woman aged 35, private school).

She said this and then laughed during the interview. On the one hand, both parents and children at the private school considered children's paid work as a marker of poverty and unhappiness, or even of a dangerous childhood, which should not happen to their own children. Child labour bears a stigma of poverty and misery, which well-to-do parents use as a scare tactic to discipline their own children. On the other hand, the children at the state school considered certain types of paid work as a way to live a meaningful life and to fulfil the goals that were important in life such as to thank their parents for their (happy) childhood.

Finally, financial issues were another matter which generated differences among the two schools. For the children at the private school, a happy childhood was to have wealth, so that their parents could buy them what they wanted, though they did not say absolute wealth was necessary (i.e. to have everything), as the most important was still love. Children aged 12, when drawing their ideas of a happy childhood, drew parents in the house, a car and themselves playing with friends outside. Although the state school children did not approach a happy childhood in terms of having material possessions, they said that not having bread and a place to live would constitute an unhappy childhood. In their drawings, the 12-year-olds showed well-dressed parents and children with siblings spending time together in the park. In the worst scenario, unhappy children beg for money and get bullied and lose the money they earn (state school children) and those who do not have education, freedom of speech, personal space and safety, and alcohol and drug-abusers are also unhappy (private school children).

So children sharing the same culture, the same historic time period and living in the same geographical area, with parents brought up under the same political system, could and did have not only dissimilar views, but also very dissimilar experiences of childhood. Children at the private school consider children as consumers of goods and care provided by their parents, who do not necessarily contribute to meeting their own needs. Not only did they think children should be free from any labour or doing things for themselves, but they attached these attributes to unhappy childhood, as this is a characteristic of children born into poverty, who have to provide for themselves. The old Soviet and Kyrgyz traditional practices of being a child were witnessed among the state school children, where helping adults and obeying them was paramount, while material wealth was not viewed as a key issue. The way they talked about children favoured describing them as active agents able to make decisions and plans to overcome difficult

situations. Thanks to their agentic way of living their childhood, children were able to act as children with adults' responsibilities and demonstrated their complex ability of reconciling two different worlds of childhood and adulthood. They saw themselves as closer to their parents and did not express a desire for independence and freedom, personal space and the right to be heard.

4.6. Modern childhood – (subjective) views of parents

Parents of the private school children stressed in particular the importance of the freedom that children should have. In their opinion, children should be able to talk freely about different topics - unlike their own time during the Soviet era, when they could not discuss taboo topics with their own parents. They thought that it was important to be friends with children. In general, these parents talked more about the importance for their children to be successful in the future and that they must provide them good education. In their opinion, not to have parents and to be exposed to excessive control by parents could make children unhappy, whereas the happy ones are those who have choice, are heard by parents and have responsibilities.

Although this was what the parents in the study stated in fact, it seemed to contradict what their children reported regarding family dynamics during group discussions. They appeared to perceive themselves as less free and more controlled by their parents (compared to the children at the state school) and to have a minimum of responsibilities (again compared to the children at the state school). So the parents saw their children as agents whose voices should be heard and who should be given certain freedoms, but they did not see them as agents able to carry responsibilities and be knowledgeable about what was good and bad for them. Parents agreed that children needed to be free and to be heard, but they should also be aware of limits - which should be determined by parents. This is what I would call '*regulated freedom*' when parents

and children valued freedom and its importance in their own lives, and parents claimed that their children had freedom, though their children's opinions challenged that notion. This includes agency and material dimensions, as although material wealth gives children some form of agency freedom, their parents would not consider them agentic enough to be responsible. This dichotomy will be a crosscutting theme and will be explored in more detail throughout other empirical chapters (V, VI and VII).

The parents of the children at the state school considered childhood as a time for playing, not studying too hard, not worrying too much and not listening to parents (when very young) and being innocent. And as they get older, when their thinking is developed enough, children will begin to understand that they need to provide service for their parents and relatives. Children need to be brought up strictly, starting with year 6 (aged 12), to prevent possible misbehaviour, which can be done by keeping children busy with studies and some work. This is what I would call '*unregulated control*', when children were brought up under strict norms, but with a certain level of trust from their parents in their agentic abilities to carry out responsibilities (see more in chapters V, VI. VII). This outlook on child development recalls the Soviet upbringing rules about exercising children's obedience and self-discipline. Again, it was markedly more likely to be upheld by these parents than by the parents at the private school. In the views of the state school parents, children need to be healthy, to have parents and basic things they need.

A child who never experiences a mother's care, who is beaten by their parents, or whose wishes are never realised, is unhappy. Parents were more concerned about providing their children with the same quality childhood they themselves had and also saw their children as able to take on responsibilities - as they did themselves in the Soviet times. The state school parents clearly saw their children as agentic in the present

in more ways than the parents at the private school did theirs. Because this category of parents lost significantly more in terms of resources and status after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for them the Soviet regime remained better than their current life conditions and they still saw contemporary childhood through the lens of their own experiences. The ways in which parents talked about their own children differed noticeably between the two schools, matching the pattern of their children's differing attitudes to childhood.

In general, all parents agreed that childhood is a universal stage of human development, when children are very young and therefore innocent. All they do is play and enjoy their childhood, which would supply the best memories of their lives. Childhood is equated in some ways with happiness, innocence and enjoyment. The private school parents thought that to give a child freedom was important, while the state school parents were more concerned about giving them what they needed to have in terms of food, clothing, education etc. Freedom in the language of the private school parents was to listen to children and to not suffocate them with control, though some limits were needed. At the state school, parents agreed that they should be strict with their older children, though this was not necessarily about control but about more cultural requirements of regulating the behaviour of older children.

Interestingly, in children's opinions, parents at the private school talking about freedom and less control gave their children less freedom and exerted more control, whereas parents at the state school, who were concerned about not being able to provide for children enough, were not doing badly, according to their children. This could show that in fact the children themselves also played a significant role in shaping the parenting they experienced and therefore their own childhood. In particular, it was seen that children at the private school, who tried to challenge their parents' control and

supervision, probably succeeded to some extent in making their voices heard or at least making their parents think about it. In turn, the children at the state school were especially successful agents, because their parents' ability to provide for them, to a significant extent, was actually aided by their children's activities at home (e.g. household chores, care of siblings etc.) and outside home (paid work). These examples (as well as further analyses) show that childhood is not only constructed by cultural, social and economic circumstance and as discussed earlier, but is also shaped by children themselves. This resonates with the basic axiom of James and James (2001) that 'Childhood not only shapes children's experiences, but children also help shape the nature of the childhood that they experience' (p. 30). Especially from this point of view, child agency needs to be studied in order to understand how exactly children shape their childhoods.

4.6.1. Parents' childhoods and their influence on current parenting styles

The private school parents

All the parents reflected on the fact that the difference between the current childhood of their children and their own childhood under the Soviet Union was huge. While in the Soviet Union parenthood was mostly supported by the state - e.g. via jobs, housing, child care, education and schooling – modern parenthood was about parents' own abilities. That was why, according to parents, they had to spend much more time earning money instead of spending time with their children. The private school parents mainly talked about the positive aspects of their children's current childhood. The children had a chance to see other countries and broaden their thinking, while they (parents) had had to live in the world of restrictions in which they were not even able to talk openly about certain issues such as sexual relationships. Parents thought that their

children had more opportunities than they had and more freedoms. And even the children themselves said, for example:

'We think that the life behind the oceans is ideal. We want to be like them and make efforts to be similar to them. We watch their television and listen to their music' (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school).

They clearly saw the Western lifestyle (as symbolised by pop culture and celebrities) as better than local fare. They were certain that the West had more freedom than their own environment, including freedom in parent-child relationships. The private school children were open-minded, civilised and democratic, but they did not have much communication with their peers, as their parents did in Soviet times. Instead they spent more time at home, at their computers. Some parents said that their children were more market oriented (which was also evident from the discussions with children) and were interested in the consumerist side of life. In terms of certain skills, nowadays children were not independent and could not do things on their own, as their parents did things for them. In addition, their children were used to comfort and could not tolerate discomfort for long, though it could be exotic for a while (e.g. public transport). However, parents thought their children were more knowledgeable about the world, knew better how to work with technology and were different from them in terms of attitudes, e.g. more likely to be impudent and arrogant.

The state school parents

For the state school parents, the issue of money was the biggest issue which made the Soviet childhood very different from the modern Kyrgyz childhood. They recalled the Soviet Union as a better time and place to live as children and claimed that they had better childhood than their children. All pointed out that when they were young children did not have to work, whereas all parents were employed and did not have to pay for school and health services, since everything was provided by the state. They also

discussed how the quality of life was better in the past and how they had to deal with unsafe food nowadays and shared their fear about their children's health:

'Before everything was cheap and available and the air was clean and food was safe. Now, so many fake things are out there, even food is fake. Our children cannot eat safe food, we cannot buy what they want. Even in case we buy something, we fear, as we cannot be sure of the quality of food. Our health was better than the health conditions of our own children' (Toktokan, woman aged 40, state school).

In parents' views, their children did not have a proper childhood, unlike theirs, particularly because of the economic and political situation in the country. As a result, children witnessed various unseemly and dangerous behaviours on the streets, which were no longer a safe environment; they watched Western movies which parents perceived as corrosive to their value system; and they got involved in adult matters such as money and earning from an early age.

When the parents, who participated in this study, were children, their parents did not face any problems and they had all they wanted. But now, being parents themselves, they find it extremely hard 'to realise children's thoughts, dreams and wishes'. But children also felt ashamed to ask their parents to buy them things, as they did not want to burden the family budget. This particularly worried their parents, as they thought that if they consistently failed to respond to their children's desires, their children would feel deprived and excluded. Instead parents struggled and had to make hard choices, sometimes between things which ideally should not be prioritised, but should be available without question, such as clothes and food. These parents thought that childhood, in fact, depends on the material status of the family and therefore can vary not only between different socio-economic and political regimes such as Soviet and post-Soviet, but also within the same timescale of contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

4.7. Conclusion

Today, Kyrgyzstan is struggling to integrate the traditional customs inherited from its nomadic way of life, the legacy of the Soviet era, as well as the transformations brought about by the post-independence period of economic transition and globalization. Nevertheless, there is no dividing line between local and global, old and new, the past and the modern. Contemporary Kyrgyzstan presents a complex environment, so that it is challenging to trace what came first and what affects what. Global, modern and new are now played out in local circumstances and families and probably children especially are experiencing and performing the global within the local, the new within the old and the traditional within the modern. All these dichotomies are infused in the local daily lives of children as they negotiate their place and role in Kyrgyz society.

From total reliance on the state, with no independent thinking and questioning in almost all areas of life, Kyrgyzstani people moved to the era of struggling and fighting, surviving and living on their own. As the UNICEF reports claims,

‘the majority of the population of Kyrgyzstan lives in a crisis permanently, so the reaction to the shocks of the current food and energy crisis is rather a customary reflex than a response to an emergency event’ (2009a, p. 20).

As one of the respondents of the UNICEF report said (2009a, p. 21) ‘...*Our children have grown up in these conditions, they do not know, and we do not remember either, what it is like to live another life (a man, Chuy region)*’. In modern Kyrgyz society, childhood was more individual (the private school) than collective (the state school) - a departure from uniform Soviet childhood practices structured mainly around the collective wellbeing. Children are now supposed to contribute not to the country’s development, but instead to the survival of the family, as illustrated by the case of the state school. Obedience and respect for the elderly were expected from children, but such practices have survived more strongly among poorer families. Traditional

childhood practices encouraged children's agentic abilities of moving in and out of childhood and adulthood and therefore demonstrated that children not only shaped their own childhoods, but also affected adulthood and parenting.

The cultural conceptions of childhood in Kyrgyz society were challenged more by economic advantages than disadvantages. Children's great involvement in family survival has challenged the boundaries of childhood as social space, whereas children as a generational unit were still under the established framework of being treated as less able than adults due to their younger age. The differences between the lived childhood practices as well as the subjective views of childhood between the children and the parents of the state and private schools allow it to be argued that childhood is not only a social and cultural construct, but is also shaped by economic circumstances. Child agency is a major part of the equation and appears to increase when high income recedes in the lives of families. The conceptions and practices of childhood which were more or less universal across all societal groups in the Soviet Union now depend on their material dis/advantages.

The views of parents about their own childhood and that of their children differentiated the two schools in several ways. If the state school parents were looking back at a better past, the private school parents were focused on the promising future. The latter group was concerned about children's future chances, their capabilities and skills, whereas the poor parents were worried about meeting their children's basic needs in the present. Being able to enjoy choosing between different ways of living, or what Sen (1990, p. 114) would call "actual freedom" represented by the person's "capability" to achieve various alternative combinations of functionings, or doings and beings, did not characterise the poor children, but seemed to be the ultimate, most desirable outcome for the rich. The wider importance of this argument is that child agency is not

only about being able to act, but being able to do so now and in the future. This future oriented argument of child agency will be explored in further chapters and more arguments in support of child agency as being shaped by economic circumstances will be presented in the next four chapters on home and non-home environment.

CHAPTER V CHILD AGENCY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT: RELATIONSHIPS

5.1. Introduction

Across cultures, children are brought up in various ways with different expectations and responsibilities. A number of diverse cultural priorities govern child development and children's societal roles. In many societies, children have less power relative to adults, especially to their parents. The literature review has demonstrated that child agency is manifested differently in various settings and children's abilities to act depend on their relationships with adults and other children. The modern Kyrgyz society is not an exception and this argument has been largely supported by data gathered from the children in this study. The children talked during the group discussions and interviews about the importance of their parents in their lives. The bounded nature of their agency was reflected by the way children navigated between parental control and their own agentic development.

However, child agency is not only limited to immediate relationships with parents, but is also affected by the normative legacy of Soviet upbringing as well as westernization more recently. Therefore, child agency is not only about children being children in such circumstances, but also about their parents, who, having come from different rearing background (as discussed in chapter IV), had to function as parents under different political, social and ideological frameworks. In this mismatch of the current childhood and parenthood and given other factors, the modern children at both schools were still subject to major cultural norms. Age, gender and birth order were still key in organising social life in the Kyrgyz family. However, children at the state school tend to be more traditional, whereas the private school children showed certain

influences and repercussions of access to the foreign world, which ultimately affected their agency experience.

This chapter is the first of the four chapters of empirical analyses and discussions of child agency within various settings (home, school, neighbourhood), relationships (with parents, siblings, teachers, friends, peers etc.) and activities (studies, household chores, making friends, competitions, support, etc.), as they emerged from the data. Home is the first setting to start exploring the role of settings for child agency, which will be covered in the first two empirical chapters (V and VI). This chapter will discuss how children aged 12 and 16 in years 6 and 9 respectively at the state and private schools built their relationships at home and how parents and families affected their agency. The selection of age was not made because of developmental reasons, but for exploring the experiences of child agency among children aged 12 and 16. Children in these year groups were transitioning from primary to secondary school and finishing their last year of compulsory school education. These children were also engaged in more activities and a broader spectrum of social relationships. The chapter will discuss, compare and contrast the ways children approached their agency within their home environment to mediate the effects of age and gender. It will also analyse how much the material dis/advantages of the families account for differences in children's exercise of their agency.

5.2. Agency and age-related relationships

Scholars were guided (Kuczynski, 2003) traditionally by unilateral models of parent-child relations, with the direction of impact coming from parent to child. This pattern of relationships is not at all new to the Kyrgyz society, as it was of great significance for the Soviet era children and parents. The supremacy of parents was matched by the obedience of children and not only to parents, but to all adults. However,

recently sociological, anthropological and developmental research has begun to argue that children are far more capable not only to actively determine their own lives but also to influence those of their families (Waksler, 1994; Mayall, 1994). Though taking this new insight on board, this study will demonstrate that children's contributions to their lives in contemporary Kyrgyz society is still largely influenced by parental/adult control and dependency for both schools and both age groups. Such a culturally influential position of parents and adults has a direct impact on children's agency actions and mostly on their freedom to act agentically.

Moreover if under the Soviet upbringing model children (as well as adults and parents) were supposed to be obedient and orderly only to the collective as the pillar of the Soviet ideology, today the state school children also have to conform to varying life circumstances i.e. the material shortcomings of their families, in which they were not only reared, but also born into. However, culture and material dis/advantage and their relationships with child agency are more nuanced than it might seem at first glance, as will be discussed below.

5.2.1. To be the youngest or the eldest

Kyrgyz society believes that older people have wisdom. People in Kyrgyzstan have a culture of respect for elders and therefore younger people are often apprehensive to express their disagreements and concerns, and to confront senior people even if they are not blood related. As the Kyrgyz proverb says: *'The one who does not listen to the elders does not live long'*; or *'Listen to the words of the elders, think about those of the young'* (National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic, 2001). Older people would be considered more agentic as well as with the most legitimate right and the most developed abilities to be agentic. In fact, age is the most crucial factor determining children's role and their position within the ladder of authority and power. Regardless of

the gender of children, the older child always has more authority in comparison with the younger, with the latter having no moral right to contradict their seniors i.e. between children as well as between adults and between adults and children, as one of the boys said: *'The eldest are in the first place'* (Duishon, boy aged 16, private school). Age is an important factor for all the components of agency hindering as well as promoting it based on cultural as well as historical roots. However, it is unavoidable that culture does change and its norms become subject to different dynamics and trends at various times. In particular, such a political and economic shakeup as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union (after 70 years of ruling), with an unexpected exposure to foreign cultures, has had an enormous effect on Kyrgyz society.

What was common for all children at both schools was that the composition of the family and birth order were another determinant of parents' attitudes to the child and his/her relations with his/her other siblings:

'In our family, it is the way that the eldest can rule the young. I can ask my younger brother to do something, command him to do something and he will do it, because he is obliged, it is his duty. In his turn, he can ask our youngest brother who will do the same. But the youngest cannot command the elder one; he can only politely ask him for a favour. The elder will consider doing it or not; this depends on his mood' (Nazim, boy aged 16, private school).

The same is true for girls: *'I will get married, will have a baby, but anyway, I will always stay the youngest for the family, as I am the youngest'* (Aisuluu, girl aged 16, state school). Sociologists recognise age as one of the most fundamental categories in social life (Riley et al., 1988; Settersten and Mayer, 1997). Age in Kyrgyz society directly affected how parents treated their sons and daughters as they grew older. Parents' attitude to young children considered them to be innocent and free of any responsibility or duty and without any knowledge of life and what was good and bad (such a view was also expressed by the children themselves during interviews and group discussions). Age was a powerful force dividing both girls and boys among siblings into

the youngest and the oldest. All children who were the youngest in their families shared the same situation:

'I listen to everybody at home, because I am the youngest. I do not like being the youngest. I always do something, bring something for somebody, go somewhere for somebody. I tried to tell them to do things themselves, but they said they cannot do it and that is why I have to do things for them' (Timur, boy aged 12, private school).

The age predicted the attitudes of others as well as the position of the child by default in the family, which also depended on the presence of older children at home. This is linked to the suggestion made in the previous chapter that child agency needs to be considered in relation to parents or any other adults and children themselves including siblings, friends, peers, etc. This is because child agency seems to be exercised differently within these divisions. Age makes child agency a cultural construct in this case, as it is age which mediates children's agency.

When the child was a girl and was the youngest one in the family and had an older brother, the situation was even starker in terms of age-based hierarchy. Unfortunately, although girls at state and private schools shared similar attitudes in the home, none of the private school girls had an elder brother and they could not be included in this discussion. Girls at the state school with older brothers experienced control over their physical freedom by their brothers, which girls accepted unless parents stated otherwise:

Aisuluu: *I ask for permission to go out from my mother, my sister and brother – all three of them. All three can decide. They are older than me. No matter how old they are – 1 year, 2 years, my mother, brother and sister are older and I must listen to them'-*

Interviewer: *what will happen if you do not?*

Aisuluu: *nothing will happen. Sometimes when I am angry, I shout and argue verbally, sometimes, when you blow up, yeah, when you are very angry, then I shout and they say nothing.*

Interviewer: *when do you blow up?*

Aisuluu: *when too much control*

Interviewer: *whose control?*

Aisuluu: *from my brother*

Girls at the state school experienced supervision by their brothers, who seemed to be concerned over their sisters' honour, safety and education.

'My brother treats me very strictly' -... 'I try to work, but my brother says "no", he says I must study. He wants me to be intelligent and be well-educated' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school). Then Jarkyn continued: *'When I am at home, I am shameful of my brother (and sisters) and I go about silent'*.

The girls, as the youngest siblings, had restricted freedom for their agency actions and even if they decided their daily routine, their brothers were in a position to challenge those decisions. However, girls should not be portrayed as totally restricted in their movements. Girls at the state school did have reasonable freedom of movement, but parents and brothers were taking precautionary measures for their safety in the late hours, which is considered crucial for their honour and family's reputation. The things that daughters/sisters were expected to focus on was the most important activities as studying and looking after the home. Girls were free to do whatever they wanted, unless it involved going out at evening times in the darkness or contravened norms of behaviour (perceived as shameful and harming girls' honour). The pattern of relationships and attitudes to girls and daughters in terms of honour was not observed among the girls at the private school, which could partly be because of their greater access to Western influences. Instead, these girls were more concerned about their safety especially as a result of social unrest during revolutions and deteriorating standards of life, which brought on more noticeable anti-social behaviour.

Hence girls' agency actions were restricted to certain settings as well as activities, which could be interpreted to mean that child agency within settings is gendered. The issue here is twofold. Firstly, brothers acted as family agents to safeguard and control their sisters voluntarily, maybe based on the cultural expectations of boys and secondly, girls regardless of their age were better positioned culturally and

traditionally to obtain education for their future agency regardless of the material positions of their families (discussed in the next chapter). Consequently girls had more chances of being more agentic than boys in the future, though they had less freedom to act now. With regard to fathers and daughters, girls occupied the most desired position within their own home by being the favoured by the heads of the families, which will be also discussed in the next chapter with regard to girls' agency freedom to control the money they earned.

5.2.2. How culture, material wealth and poverty interact to create differing maturity

Another dimension of age related parenting was how parents directly intervened in children's experiences of childhood, which differentiated the state school children from the private school children. Children were engaged in their own practices of childhood, but they were sometimes redirected and constrained by their parents, culture and work they had to do. At the state school such an age related attitude to children was characterised by parents giving the eldest siblings more responsibilities, but also by the child's own agency actions of the voluntary acceptance of responsibilities as reflexive agents e.g. children's involvement in household chores and paid work, as discussed in the next chapter. In addition, age restricted certain actions which were not characteristic for older children such as playing, visiting relatives with parents, etc. As a result, children who used to play at a very early age stopped doing so after they transferred to secondary school as some parents and children would say it was shameful at their age to do so:

'I used to play outside and forget to do tasks at home. That time I was young, but it does not happen any more, as I am older now' (Ruslan, boy aged 12, state school);

The same was true for girls when they were younger:

'We used to play with water with lots of girls and boys. We would look at the stars at night, the clouds drawing pictures in the sky – all was very beautiful. When I was younger, we played until 9-10pm and we had a special spot on the street, where one could see the best picture of the sky' (Aisuluu, girl aged 16, state school).

However, at a certain age parents made children consider their age and believe that they were too old to play:

'My mother says I should not play, as I have grown up. I used to play in year 5, but even then she used to say I was old already. I agree with her. When older girls in year 6 play, it does not look nice at all' (Aida, girl aged 12, state school)

The same situation was among the older girls:

'I stopped behaving like a child when I was 15 years old. If you continue to act like a child when your parents cuddle you, when you talk like a child, then it is very shameful. It is better to look confident and well-organised' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

In addition to not playing, older children were also told to stop accompanying their parents when visiting relatives, as only young children could do so. Girls liked spending time with their mothers, especially going to the market and visiting friends and relatives. But both were rare occasions due to material circumstances, and also because their mothers would say that girls were too old to accompany their parents and it would be shameful for them to do so.

This kind of superficial transition to children's mature conduct was encouraged more by parents at the state school in children in both age and gender groups. In other words, the recognition of age-related maturity did not fully happen to boys and girls of both age groups at the state school gradually, but was rather delegated from parents to children. To some extent, children were pushed to change the area of their agency actions from playing to performing tasks associated with being older due to the strong social and cultural force of shame - a code which state school families were more likely

to abide by. The notion of shame²¹ in Kyrgyz culture is not only feminised and masculinised, but it is also age-based, as seen above. There are gender-specific peculiarities for boys' and girls' being shameful and shamed, which are relevant to their behaviour, appearance, skills, personal character qualities, and which are meant to develop with years. Moreover, shame also acts as a strong age-specific marker with certain gender expectations from old and young to demarcate them from each other, but also specify age-based characteristics. Consequently shame reinforces the effects of personal structures as gender, age and birth order on child agency components of action and freedom.

All this adds up to show that childhood is not only about play and responsibility-free time, but it takes the argument further and demonstrates how parental power and shame can impose certain pressures to change the course of child agency. Age culturally portrayed children as capable of acting agentically rather than childishly and gave them culturally defined freedom and purposes to do so. However, such freedom was not quite voluntary from the perspective of the children. From the interviews with children aged 12, I could gauge that although they said they did not play outside any more due to their age, they would have preferred playing if they had had a choice. Nevertheless, children managed to use different settings to compensate their childhood practices and to use the time to combine different activities. Outside the home, children could still behave in 'young' ways - especially in the case of the boys in year 6, 12 years old, who managed to continue playing at school. This demonstrates another way in which agency in

²¹ In Kyrgyz culture 'shame' is a defining concept in people's everyday life. According to the Kyrgyz proverb '*shame is stronger than death*'. Shame has several synonymous words which have the same meaning, but there are also words which are closely related to it such as honour, virtue, modesty, shyness, discipline, respect etc. It is important for women and men alike, equally for old and young, for husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, etc. It plays an important role in upbringing children, developing relationships with sons and daughters-in-law, getting older, etc. Shame is experienced individually and collectively and is closely related to the external environment where it is performed.

children is expressed in terms of settings and levels i.e. with other children/adults. I often saw boys playing football on the school pitch before school hours, during classes if there was no teacher or after school. Although parents were affecting their childhood culture by preventing them from playing, children could still find place and time to enjoy things they liked, though some did it less than others and in different ways. Girls, in particular were more restricted in terms of their actions, as they were confined to their homes more than boys (as they could not accompany their parents, spend much of their time outside idly doing nothing, play in play grounds, as they were not available etc.).

In addition, the parents of the state school children stopped demonstrating overt affection to their children to encourage their maturity:

‘I am now old – year 6. Now I can understand many things and my understanding is broadening every year. My family noticed that and their attitudes are changing to me. They say I am getting older and they do not cuddle me any more’ (Sabina, girl aged 12, state school).

This practice of reducing physical affection towards a child is used in order to make him/her feel older. Although children were seen as young and incapable of being agentic in Kyrgyz culture, it is the same culture which in fact pushes them to become so sooner than later. However, such maturity of children informed by parents was more evident among the state school children than the private school children, which does not suggest that wealthy children did not have culture-related age markers, but at least indicates that ingrained cultural practices of child-rearing got modified depending on material conditions.

In the case of the private school children, the discovery of their own maturity seemed to happen later. This echoes the previous chapter where it was demonstrated that parents at the private school did not consider their children to be agentic enough to carry responsibilities. Although parents accepted that their children were getting older, those of private school boys used more control over their sons’ social contacts and time, as

they feared boys may start smoking, drinking alcohol and that is why they tried to protect them from misbehaviour. One of the boys interviewed said that it was in year 7 (13-14 years old) that he understood himself, that he became more mature and that education became more important to him: *'My attitude to my parents, studies, even to my class tutor with whom I always fought has changed'* (Duishon, boy aged 16, private school). Some children felt themselves older in year 9, aged 16:

'I need to be more attentive to studies. Before we used to come to school to play with a ball, but then I realised that I come to school to gain knowledge, to get good merits, to have some feedback'. (Nazim, boy aged 16, private school).

Such attitudes to school and parents' values of good school performance increasing by age were also observed among the children at the state school.

Similarly to their richer counterparts, state school children did their best to study well, but they did not spend as much time learning as the children from the private school. In other words, maturity for children at the private school meant realising the importance of being agentic at schooling and therefore they were less agentic at home (as the next chapter discusses), whereas for state school children it was also about sharing more responsibilities with their parents including economic ones. Children at the state school started doing tasks at home earlier than those at the private school and obviously the work they did was harder and more demanding, as discussed in the next chapter. Low income seemed to strengthen cultural norms of exposing children to increased roles and abilities as they grew, whereas high income did not speed up children's growing older and modified the cultural views of children as less able to act. This resonates with the previous findings in chapter IV, that child agency can be expressed in different aspects such as actions. If in the next chapter children at the state school will appear to be more agentic at home and have less bounded agency than the

private school children, here children at the state school emerge as more exposed to parental influence in their childhood in general and early maturity in particular.

Age culturally is one of the most fundamental factors in organising social life in Kyrgyz society with specific meanings attached to maturity and adult status. So in the case of the private school, the impact of age on agency for the older boys was expressed in increased parental control. For the boys at the state school, age symbolised more freedom to act, being responsible and less playful and being treated by their parents like grown up children. Getting older for girls and boys were different experiences in the way that girls were more restricted in physical freedom due to safety concerns (for the private school) and concerns for preserving honour (for the state school girls). Although age was an important factor affecting parenting and child agency at both schools, low income made a considerable contribution in the way children took actions and chose purposes for agency. Age can have various effects on child agency actions depending on birth order, gender and economic positions.

Cultural norms exacerbated by material poverty generated subjective age identity, making the eldest feel relatively older and self-identifying as an adult child. At the state school, parents tended to affect children's maturity by preventing them from doing certain acts such as playing, visiting relatives and friends, as they thought these actions did not correspond to children's age. Apart from its structural effect, age as a biological category also affects children (mainly at the private school) who at some point of their growing older became more responsible themselves. Cultural norms towards maturation play out differently in the context of material wealth, when children are not promoted to carry adult-like responsibilities and agency actions. In other words, culture, material wealth and poverty as well as maturity interact to create 'differing childhoods'.

So the impact of age on agency is multidimensional, but culture also plays a significant role. Needless to say, age also affects agency vertically (such as agency capital developing as children grow older), and so does social factors as shame. So whatever the external factors are around the child, his agency will be more in action with the years as he learns how to navigate between other impacts i.e. children would be more able to mediate the effects of the gendered and age-based norms. James (2010) suggests that such discussions of age are seldom raised because it

‘draws us perilously close to the developmental perspective, a perspective that was directly challenged and largely rejected by the new paradigm that informed the social study of childhood’ (p. 491).

In the context of this current study, however, age acts as both biological as well as social structure, instead of being the hegemonic developmental force (meaning being more fluid than in the developmental idea) and adds to the problematic nature of the boundary between child agency and structure, culture and nature.

Although all children in the sample had the same childhood in the way they all shared the same categorical space due to their younger age and age-related social norms in Kyrgyz society, they still had different childhoods demarcated with material wealth on the one hand and material poverty on the other. In addition to culture as a strong influential factor, poor material conditions seemed to give more freedom, but also purposiveness for child agency and create unregulated control for children. Although children were considered young and lacking agency, their parents encouraged their early agency actions of responsibility and discouraged the actions associated with young age. In contrast, high income was more about regulated freedom where children were not bounded by their families’ financial living conditions, but by their parents’ control which these children tried to challenge. Their parents did not see their children as

capable of taking responsibilities, but did see them as capable of taking negative actions in the case of boys. The effects of culture on the one hand and material dis/advantages on the other create certain contexts of child agency where agency and structure are interrelated in the way that children are obedient and free at the same time as well as agentic and interdependent.

5.3. Sibling relationships

Almost all children at both schools had siblings, and the majority of single children attended the private school. Kinship among siblings at the state school was based on solidarity values, mutual obligations and emotional attachment:

'I pity my brother and sisters. I ask God for their long life and that they never see any bad times. I always want to help them. I wish to support them and want them to be always next to me. I never want to be apart from them' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

Boys at the state school also shared similar feeling towards their siblings:

'I respect my older brother very much. We talk very well and he knows all about me and I know all about him. He was strict with me when I was young, but he would always say that I should tell him if I need help. Now we are almost equal and consult with each other and do all work together' (Kadyr, boy aged 16, state school).

In some families (in 7 cases out of 20 children in both year groups), older children left for Russia, leaving behind their unfinished university degrees, personal relationships etc. in order to earn money for their parents and younger siblings, and exposed themselves to risky working and life conditions (as discussed in the next chapter). According to the children, such decisions were voluntary, decided by their older sisters and brothers, although the outcomes of such agency actions were not at all voluntarily wanted and equally positive for all the siblings. This adds to the discussions that children at the state school would be more likely to have less agency in the future, especially the older ones in comparison with the private school children. This is because what they were doing

now would not necessarily increase their agency in the future, as these agency actions were more likely to be focused on the immediate needs and did not have long-term benefits. Such agency actions based on moral rationalities and purposiveness towards their families, although determined by the agents themselves, were bounded to reciprocal moral obligations to their next to kin. Moral agency for the state school children was based on the valued personal relationships and commitments children had with their families (whereas the moral commitments of the private school children were expressed by their learning achievements). Moral agency is linked to the discussions in chapter IV about 'collective' in the form of 'a family' and 'an extended family' in which a member of these units is obliged to contribute to the family's collective wellbeing. Moral rationalities of agency will also be discussed in chapter VI.

At the private school, siblings demonstrated higher preference to individual agency and wellbeing over collective family goals, sometimes at the expense of their own siblings (there were a couple of exceptional examples where siblings were quite close to one another). This proves that Kyrgyz traditional culture is undergoing changes mainly resulting from transforming from one material status to another i.e. getting markedly richer. If in the case of the state school, siblings were ready to sacrifice their own personal agency outcomes for the sake of their siblings, some children at the private school not only had very poor relationships with siblings, but also considered each other as a source of rivalry and conflict. This is how wealthy families were following the route of 'ego-centric' societies, where life is built up with respect to individual space, independence, personal success (Fuyee and Boyden, 2003b). Therefore agency purposiveness for children at the private school was not reasoned by the collective wellbeing of the entire family, as it should be according to traditional cultural norms.

The family relationships have become materialistic not only between parents and children (as discussed in chapter VI), but also between siblings - they competed for better investments in the future based on more recognition in the present.

'I tell my mum why she does not praise me ...[the conversation at this point was about a girl's younger brother, whom she did not mention at all until the very end of the interview], but she says she forgets to do so, as I am older. We fight with each other all the time, he starts first. I tell my mum to do something with him, but she says he is not old enough [9 years old added by the author]'
(Ainura, girl aged 12, private school);

A similar situation was found in Marat's family:

'My brother is 2 years older than me, but my parents have shifted their hope from my brother to me. He will stay here and work here (in Kyrgyzstan), but in terms of rising above the crowd and becoming successful it is now up to me. My brother can improve his own situation only if he gets married to a rich girl. I am the last hope of our parents' (Marat, boy aged 16, private school).

In this particular case, parents seemed to play a key role in shaping the relationships between the brothers by investing more in one and advancing his role and as the boy said *'putting a cross'* (i.e. giving up) on the older son. As mentioned in chapter III, parents at the private school paid a great importance to their children's agency 'to succeed in the future' and therefore they supported actions towards such purposiveness.

In contrast, children at the state school, 12 and 16 years old, girls and boys alike, engaged in childcare of their younger siblings. Such care towards siblings at the state school went beyond providing physical care and did not happen only in the absence of parents. In addition to conventional caring activities, that one could think children could do, it involved taking full responsibility for different areas of life of the younger children. Children purposively exerted their power heralded to them as older siblings over their younger ones. This equalised children's responsibilities with those of their parents, and symbolised another area (in addition to paid work), through which children went in and out of adulthood and demonstrated their agency. As the Kyrgyz proverb says: *The younger brother grows up looking at his elder brother, the younger sister*

grows up looking at her elder sister' (National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic, 2001). Girls at the state school appeared to be engaged in learning with their younger siblings and transferring their academic and practical knowledge to them and monitoring their academic progress: *'I am responsible for my younger sisters and if something happens to their learning, then it is me to blame'* (Aidana, girl aged 16, private school). When children carried out such responsibilities they did so as carers capable of teaching, supervising and being responsible for younger siblings, not as simply imitating the behaviour of their parents. This is an example of serious responsibilities and agency actions that the state school-children agentically took over their siblings.

The picture at the private school was different, where a few of them did not like having siblings, as one of the boys said he hated looking after somebody and *'solving somebody else's problems'* (Murat, boy aged 16, private school). Although sibling-care was not particularly gendered (i.e. presuming that it was mostly provided by girls) among the state school children e.g.

'I like looking after my young brother (8 months old), but sometimes when he cries, it makes me feel bad. I know that when he cries, he wants to sleep and I make him sleep by rocking him on my lap' (Maksat, boy aged 12, state school),

some boys at the private school thought that to be seen outside with a baby was shameful for boys as it was purely female work. Moreover, the relationships of the older children with their siblings (in the case of those who had young siblings) at the private school were play-based. In other words, siblings played roles of play-mates to one another, rather than being carers. In contrast, the same age children at the state school carried out caring responsibilities for their siblings and tended to play with them whilst holding the position of older members of families i.e. those who provided care. Therefore, the situations of noncompliance or refusals from younger siblings were

handled by the children at the state school in an adult way. Children at the state school demonstrated how they could use power themselves with younger siblings while responding to the power of their parents and therefore acted as subjects and objects of power at the same time (Reynolds, 1991). Similarly children exercised the action component of agency and could also exert power ('power over'), which they could do only when dealing with somebody younger than themselves. This is another illustration of age as a powerful director of agency in Kyrgyz society, which is more attributed to older than to the young, but nevertheless, does not eliminate agency only to the older age. This makes one think about agency operating not only in different settings, but also in relationships with parents/adults and other children/siblings, friends/peers.

The next chapter will demonstrate the way children at the state school not only contributed to the home as an entity, but also to the running of the home by encouraging the earning capacity of their parents and older brothers and sisters. The same pattern is evident here by children's care activities of the younger ones. In this context, the term 'reproductive work' (used in the analysis of the Time Use survey - see Budlender et al., 2001, p. 10) can be used to capture the productive nature of domestic chores in general and child care in particular. Such a dimension of children's agency actions - unpaid work - was not considered as such either by children or by their parents, as it was culturally taken for granted. Looking after siblings was another activity, which boys and girls at the state school liked doing and were able to do in combination with other tasks, in contrast to their counterparts at the private school. In the context of the state school, looking after siblings was about drawing on siblings as a source of support and knowledge inside and outside home with a positive outcome for individual agency. This is because reciprocal relationships within a family and cultural expectations of

responsibilities for one another create relevant agency purposiveness for children to act for the common good.

Young girls and boys moved in and out of adult and child roles: girls took the role of their mothers, when the latter were absent, while the boys took roles of their fathers. Such caregiving practices among siblings emphasised child-to-child interactions based on an age-based hierarchy governing sibling relationships (Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). Such a practice was not unusual for Kyrgyz children, but what was unusual is the behaviour of the private school children. Low income somehow enhanced sibling kinship, while wealth seemed to be making it competitive. The agency of children at the two schools had contrasting underlying purposiveness, which ultimately would bring different outcomes. This is another difference between the two models of childhoods in modern Kyrgyzstan and two ways of children's exercise of their agency.

5.4. Child agency and gender-based relationships

Parents are the key actors in influencing the lives and development of children, according to family research, with a greater focus on the mother. The nuclear family has been idealised as if mothers and fathers act in harmony and their attitudes to children are synchronised. However, in this study mothers and fathers appeared to have different causality and power relationships with sons and daughters: *'If father says 'no', then I bow my head and leave, but with my mum, I can argue and tell her that I do not like it'* (Duishon, boy aged 16, private school). Bolot expressed a similar view: *'What I tell mum, I cannot tell my dad – they are just different'* (boy aged 16, private school).

The following sections will discuss some details of the son-daughter-father and son-daughter-mother relationships and their implications for child agency.

5.4.1. Boys' relationships with parents

Boys and girls aged 16 at both schools revealed that as they got older, they were told off less by their parents, were not hit as they were used to when younger (boys) and were not scolded without any obvious reason. Some parents seemed to use corporal punishment as a means of boys' rearing, when boys were much younger, which stopped after a certain age. So when children were very young, parents let them play as they were not old enough to do anything else, but were small enough to be hit; when they got older, parents punished them less, did not raise their hands, as they were older and cleverer, but exercised more control in case of the private school boys as boys could get engaged in bad behaviour.

In fact, the UNICEF study (2010) on violent methods of discipline²² in 37 middle and low income countries discovered that eighty-six per cent of children aged 2-14 years experience violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression), which means that two out of three children are subject to physical punishment in the sampled countries. However, Kyrgyzstan was the third country where children were subject to such forms of discipline the least. This is surprising, given the fact that Kyrgyz parents tended to be authoritarian and controlling of their children and child agency, according to this and the following chapters. This could mean that although they were controlling, they chose not to use violent rearing practices as much as they could have done. Then the question is if fathers did not use corporal punishment

²² The study used the following terminology: Violent discipline is defined as actions taken by a parent or caregiver that are intended to cause a child physical pain or emotional distress as a way to correct behaviour and act as a deterrent. It can take two forms: psychological aggression and physical, or corporal, punishment. The former includes shouting, yelling and screaming at the child, and addressing her or him with offensive names. Physical or corporal punishment comprises actions intended to cause the child physical pain or discomfort but not injuries. It includes shaking the child, slapping or hitting him or her on the hand, arm, leg or bottom, hitting the child on the face, head or ears, or hitting the child hard or repeatedly. Available from http://www.childinfo.org/discipline_challenge_progress.html.

with their sons, then what did affect the sons' attitude to fathers, which I could describe as tactful and reverent (discussed further in this chapter)?

Fathers are largely seen to be the heads of families whose primary responsibilities are to earn money and make important decisions (though this plays out differently in reality), rather than actively dealing with the children. That's why fathers and men in general were not involved in child rearing, and even in the Soviet era were mostly absent from the educational institutions such as kindergartens and schools. Sons culturally are supposed to continue the family lineage (unlike the daughters) and hold superior positions within the patrilineal social hierarchy²³. So fathers treated boys as the future heads of families and had more character and behaviour-based expectations from them such as not being childish, being hard-working etc. (especially so at the state school but with more emphasis on their abilities to be responsible and to carry responsibilities), which means that being a male child already predicted boys' agency of actions, freedom and purposes. Thus, it appears that child agency for boys at both schools not only consists of components and is settings-based, but also gender-related.

According to various researches, the absence of fathers can have a critical impact on boys by making them more submissive and dependent, whereas the fathers' more subordinate role in the family can produce boys who lack such qualities as initiative and independent decision making (Bach, 1946). In the Kyrgyz culture, a fathers' presence demanded a strict behavioural framework from the boys aged 16 (at both schools) and although it seemed to have a negative influence on the boys, similarly to what those studies suggested, they were conversely meant to develop masculinity among them. In particular, such strict demands became more evident as boys grew older. The age of children acted as the determining variable in parents' attitudes to their children, which in

²³ Senior males officially are the heads of households, though it is not straightforward due to the Kyrgyz nomadic way of living and the Soviet legacy and their effects on the female status.

fact was based on the view that older boys at the private school needed more masculine control by their parents than before and that their counterparts at the state school needed to become more responsible for others. Boys' reputations in the family seemed to develop as they grew, but their fathers' expectations, control and strictness increased accordingly with various effects on their agency components.

The fathers of the boys aged 16 from both schools stood out as the ones with whom older boys needed to use special tactful agency actions to negotiate certain issues, while mothers were friendlier and approachable and boys were more comfortable with them than with their fathers. Boys' agency actions were adjusted to their fathers' mood, expectations and their power within the family. They shared that they were accurate with wording when talking to their fathers, and also tried to catch the moments when fathers were in a good mood. Older boys took tactful agency actions: *'...I don't say 'I want'', but I ask father "can I or may I do" ...'* (Nazim, aged 16, private school). Fathers also did not tolerate any contradiction, any dispute and therefore boys could not defend their agency purposes: *'My father says things and I do them. His word is the rule of law'* (Duishon, aged 16, private school). Nazim (aged 16, private school) also said that he can only express his desire, and it is his father who makes the final decision. Whatever fathers said, it was expected to be done without any rebuttal on the part of the boys, which was a part of their habitual behaviour: *'The father says no, then no'* (Duishon, aged 16, private school). Marat found himself in a similar situation: *'I listen to my mum for 70%, but with father I always listen. If he says something, I must do it, no one can change it'* (Marat, aged 16, private school).

A similar pattern of relationships between sons and fathers was also found at the state school: *'My father is strict; you cannot talk to him'* (Aidar, aged 16, state school). Boys not only could not communicate with their fathers easily, but they also could not

behave naturally with them: *'There is no laughing with him'* (Adyl, aged 16, state school). Fear of the father was an issue brought up by the boys and they needed to apply specific behaviour with him, even though this was not what they felt:

'My father is strict, and he does not like childish behaviour. When he comes home, I feel myself an adult. I talk to him and joke only sometimes, when he is in a good mood' (Aidar, aged 16, state school).

According to the boys, therefore, fathers were the ones who ruled and led their lives with tremendous effects on their abilities to act agentically. Some boys suggested that such patterns of son-father relations are specific for Kyrgyz culture in particular. As one of the boys said:

'My mum was brought up in a European way, so that children can also make decisions, but my father grew up in a Kyrgyz family where a younger one should listen to an older' (Duishon, aged 16, private school).

If in the case of younger children aged 12 at the state school, fathers played the role of not only caring parents, but also teaching guardians (as discussed in the next chapter), than in the case of the 16 years old boys, fathers at both schools acted more as cultural gatekeepers. Boys normally did not show resistance to their fathers and seemed to largely accept such culturally specific father-son relations, which have an immense effect on the boys' agency actions and freedom to act:

'I often sacrifice my own view to the benefit of my father's. I do not usually exert my view. If I know it does not help, I do not try. What for?' (Nazim, aged 16, private school).

Such patterns of relationships based on gender of children created especially circumscribed agency with the greatest effect on agency freedom. This is because even when boys were able to act, those actions would have to be in compliance with their fathers' expectations and purposes.

Boys did not mention ever purposefully acting against their fathers' wishes, but those at the private school did say, for example:

'I have some Russian friends who say that they do not want and they do not do, which I think is wrong, because it is not good to say such words against parents, but it would be better if I could argue and defend my own view' (Duishon, aged 16, private school).

This was a sign of them getting older and entering the stage of the exploration of their own identities with regard to their parents and maybe the demonstration of some rebellion against them and doubting their parents' unquestionable correctness. This shows tension and conflict the boys in better-off families experienced due to cultural changes emerging in their home environment due to their exposure to the Western individualism. The case of boys sheds light on the nuances of the freedom component of agency, which is initially understood in the literature review as the ability to act voluntarily. It turns out that voluntarism in agency also means not only being able to act but to do so in the context of adults' opposition.

From the discussions above, it could be argued that the gender of the parent and of the child emerges as an important factor for child agency. The gender of the child, especially of the boys, played a more essential role, as they grew older, for which the cultural expectations of male members of families are responsible. In Kyrgyz society, where the father's authority at home was derived from cultural traditions, it was most likely to survive economic failure. This was common for both schools, because paternal authority in the family was based on cultural traditions rather than objective economic productivity. The similarities of father-son relationships between the state and private school parents indicate that such patterns of relationships are entrenched cultural traits passed down from one generation to another, rather than a dynamic occurring in certain social and economic groups. This could mean that the current boys have high probabilities of following the same fatherhood practices as their fathers. So boys' agency as their abilities and freedom to act is largely predicted culturally and is maintained across economic groups in Kyrgyz society.

Mothers and fathers had different effects on the boys' and girls' daily lives and their agency. With regard to older boys, fathers more than mothers acted in such a way that children had no freedom to follow their own decisions. They suppressed the power-related agency of their sons, but they expected their sons to act as adults and promoted their agency by having increased expectations of them in terms of their abilities to study (private school boys), to behave and carry out responsibilities as grownups (state school boys). Such father-son relationships were not present in the case of the younger boys at both schools, which again emphasises the importance of age.

Although fathers seemed to engage with boys to some extent, in many situations they were not the ones with primary responsibilities for childrearing. They mostly serve as the safeguards, the policing, the gatekeepers of the cultural masculinity affecting the boys' agency in their own gender-based ways. Therefore, this male authority is not vulnerable to economic circumstances and their status within a family is not undermined, (but does function within the boundaries of personal choice, as some fathers chose not to be authoritarian or not to be engaged in rearing at all). Such cultural explanations of rather stable positions of fathers within families also explained the fact that earning capacity of boys at the state school still did not shake their fathers' authority, as discussed in the next chapter with regard to paid work.

This discovery contradicts my initial hypothesis that poverty and low income encourage cultural changes and promote child agency as children start contributing financially to their household economy and their roles within the family rises. In fact, it was the better-off families who were experiencing new patterns of child-parent relationships, but not as a result of their changing role within the family due to a lack of income. In particular, it was the richer boys who expressed some interest in having their own views heard and challenging the authority of parents. Here one could claim that low

income has a specific effect on purposiveness of agency less focused on the individual, whereas high income has more liberating effect on the individual. Although the latter type of actions of agency is atypical of Kyrgyz cultural expectations of children, it is in line with the Western view of agency i.e. more emphasis on the individual. If in the previous discussion children's agency among the two schools varied by its collective and individual purposiveness, then here boys' agency went beyond individual to at least considering the possibility of challenging culturally prevalent son-father relationships.

5.4.2. Girls' relationship with parents

In contrast with boys experiencing strict relationships with their fathers, girls at both schools aged 12 and 16 talked about their fathers being soft and kind to them:

'I have always been closer to my father than to my mother. He always buys me everything; he always allows me everything. When I was little, we would visit other houses and I would never get out of my father's hands. I only sat on his lap' (Saadat, aged 12, private school).

The girls who were the youngest daughters in the family were in particular in the most favourable position, enjoying special treatment from their fathers and freedom to act.

'I can call him "you"',²⁴ all my siblings call him "you" as they would when they are addressing an older person, but I can be informal, maybe because he cuddles me. I can even tell him off' (Nazgul, aged 12, private school).

Despite the fact that some girls wanted to work to help their families, their elder siblings and parents did not let them take agency action - a case of thwarted agency regulated:

'I wanted to work as a distributor of Avon products, but my father prohibited me. He said if I do not have enough money that I'd better direct all my attention to my studies' (Aidana, aged 16, state school).

In general, fathers' particular favouritism towards their daughters was present in both schools, but more at the state school:

²⁴ In Kyrgyz language there are two different words to say 'you'. One is used with regard to people of the same age, who do not require formality. Another word should be used when one addresses someone who is older or who s/he does not know, to show respect. Traditionally children, of any age, always address their parents with a polite word, although this practice is fading.

'I never have any disputes with my father – I am the youngest in our family and he cuddles me a lot. We always protect each other and take each other's sides when all the family argues' (Mahabat, aged 16, state school).

It is a long-established cultural pattern passed down from one generation to another regardless of the social and economic background of families. Girls were treated differently from boys and the main difference was that boys were more controlled within the home setting, whereas girls had more freedom to act within the home:

'My father was a driver and when he would come home in the evening, there would be money left here and there in his car. My brother and I would fight over this money, but my father would always make him give all the money to me. I was his daughter; I was very close to him' (Aisuluu, aged 16, state school).

Furthermore, later chapters will show that boys will have more freedom outside their homes, while girls will be more restricted.

In general, the position of daughters in the parental house is of the great interest and importance. As the Kyrgyz proverbs say: *'A man with a daughter can climb any rock'*, *'A daughter is a guest'* or *'Even the 40 strands of a daughter's hair should be respected'* (National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic, 2001). Daughters, of any age, be they older or younger, are traditionally treated as guests at their own house, as they leave it after marriage. That could probably generate more emotional dependence of parents on their daughters, as the latter leave their parental house, which in turn, produces special daughter-father relationships. But before leaving the parental house, daughters need to get the best education to secure their future away from the parental house. This seems in line with the argument that investing in girls can break the transmission of poverty from one generation to another (Jones et al., 2010; Levine et al., 2009). Kyrgyz cultural belief goes further and states that better education for girls guarantees their ability to feed themselves and their future children whatever happens, but education also is thought to enhance their reputation and image as a bride.

Successful schooling, getting further education, being a reputable bride and an honourable daughter were one of the main purposes and outcomes of girls' agency actions. Several girls in the interviews told me that they needed to get higher education degrees, as they did not know who their husbands would be and whether the prospective husbands would be able to provide for their families (although they are culturally supposed to provide).

Indeed, the importance of education for girls was to the greatest extent a result of the Soviet legacy, which fit in well with the Kyrgyz traditional attitudes to females. The equal gender education had always been promoted under the Soviet Union and girls performed better than boys at schools. Girls were not only the agents who studied agentically, but also participated in the numerous school activities, were the right hands of the teachers and usually helped the school administration. They were the ones who would be the exemplar of the best Soviet behaviour, learning and looking and school was the main setting for girls' agency actions and purposes. For a girl to study badly was a real shame, as they were not expected to be poor at studying, while for boys it was somehow excusable. Such a historical attitude to girls' education seems to be still valid for the current attitudes to girls in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and families seemed to play a key role in promoting their daughters' education.

What was different between the schools was the fact that although fathers and daughters had close relationships, according to the girls at the state school their fathers did not get involved in the personal and female issues of their daughters. In Kyrgyz culture there is strictly stipulated respect to daughters' femininity and privacy as well as shame of daughters in front of their fathers²⁵. This shame dimension of daughter-father

²⁵ For example, fathers are not supposed to raise either their voice or hand at their daughters, to say bad words to them, discuss sex or any issues surrounding puberty and sexual behaviour; whereas daughters should be ashamed to wear revealing clothing in front of their fathers, to be seen with their boyfriends etc.

relationships was prevalent among the state school girls, which again demonstrated how traditional social conventions were stronger motivators for poorer families. Shame was closely linked with and had more effect on girls at the state school than on boys. Such factors seem to relate to child agency in the way that shame contributes to and emphasises social expectations of children's maturation and their adult-like abilities and skills. Consequently, girls as they grew older were expected adhere to certain rules of physical behaviour.

In Kyrgyz there is a verb used specifically with regard to girls - people would say it is not good for girls 'to walk' much, which was often mentioned by the girls at the state school. 'To walk' would mean when girls walk around the streets without any purpose and/or permission which is considered harmful to girls' reputation and honour, though the literal action has not necessarily a bad connotation. So older girls who 'walk' a lot are not considered to be well-behaved girls, as this compromises their image and their safety in terms of sexual relationships before marriage.

'They (parents) do not say anything to them (youngest sisters aged 14 and 9) when they are late. When I am late, they quarrel and ask where I was. Recently my sister (14 years old) came home at night. Parents did not say anything to her and she simply said she was together with friends. They still consider her young. If it had been me, they would have scolded me for a long time!' (Aidana, girl aged 16, state school).

The physical ability to act in 'wrong' places, in 'wrong' time with a 'wrong' company was not a desirable quality in girls, who were instead supposed to act within home or school settings. This directly affected girls' abilities and freedom to act, but outcomes of such a cultural restriction on girls were good for the family as a whole, though did not necessarily serve the girls' immediate wishes. Such attitudes towards girls were more prevalent among state school girls aged 16 who were more concerned with cultural observances i.e. honour, while those at the private school were merely concerned about safety. Again, social conventions such as shame and honour, are not directly linked with

low income, but are still more prevalent among the poorer families, who tended to be more traditional in contrast with wealthy families whose cultural framework was changing more evidently than that of the poorer families. Low income in alliance with social conventions represented a strong influence on child agency in girls and made agency gender-based by distinguishing certain gender-specific settings and activities.

Overall, older girls (aged 16) at the private school claimed that these days everybody had conflicts with their parents but all the sides tried to achieve a balance satisfying more or less everybody. They all somehow wanted agency freedom to do things on their own, to decide on their own, to move around based on their own decisions and they did not like the fact that they could not do things without parents' approval. These girls had personal purposes for their agency and wanted to be free from their parents' control, although they could not be so. Such tensions sometimes escalated into conflicts with parents:

'I do not like talking to my mother, because she never understands me. She misunderstands me, then scolds, scolds and scolds over and over. That is why I do not talk to her. I am so fed up quarrelling with her. She makes me suffer, offends me' (Tinatin, aged 16, private school).

Here girls were more agentic in making their voices heard.

By contrast with the private school girls, girls at the state school aged 12 and 16 did not mention any desire to be independent or a need to be more on their own and do things on their own. In general, state school girls did not disagree with their parents and did not declare their desire for freedom from parents. In some cases, girls said that even their tastes matched those of their mothers and whatever mothers chose to buy for them or do for them, they would like all, as their mothers knew what was best for their daughters:

'I never thought that my parents do not think about my views, because my mother's thoughts and my thoughts are the same. Whatever she likes, I like it too. That is why there is no need for her to ask me' (Aida, aged 12, state school).

Mothers were the most important for the girls and they tried not to make their lives difficult in any way. Girls did not ask them to buy anything for themselves, even food. If in previous cases, agency was about claiming more freedom among the private school children aged 16, then here agency was manifested in the way of suppressing children's own desires and childish behaviour, but putting first the parents i.e. mothers' wellbeing as one of the main elements of purposiveness of their agency actions. This is a form of moral agency - girls felt a moral obligation towards their mothers to be good daughters, but not only, as it was a mere act of love. Although here girls' agency had purposefulness for their actions, it did not do justice to the girls' personal wellbeing as their agency actions could compromise their outcomes. In this case, girls could have been less considerate of their own interests, wishes or needs and prioritise those of their mothers, though this quality can be considered good as it symbolises modesty and respect.

The difference between girls' and boys' relationships with their parents was distinguished by the father-daughter relationships and girls also demonstrated more freedom in claiming their right to be heard, to act and to disagree for their own purposes. In the case of girls at both schools, fathers were the opposite. Fathers accepted girls as young children in need of protection and affection (especially the youngest daughters) and treated them as mostly domestic agents highly capable of studying. This resonates with what mothers reported during the group discussion at private and state school alike. Such a pattern of attitudes of fathers to daughters and sons (as discussed earlier) were similar in both schools, but not both age groups (younger boys were not subject to strict attitudes). Mothers were more flexible with their sons than their husbands were, but were in term more demanding of their daughters to develop certain skills in order to secure a good marriage and be able to obtain further education. The attitudes of mothers

towards their daughters could be explained by their desire to prepare the girls for better secured future, while fathers prepare their sons for being the heads of their own families. In other words, parents looked at their sons and daughters as ‘becoming’ in the future and therefore their agency has a future-oriented characteristic.

Nevertheless, the majority of girls at the private and state schools were able to contrast their opinions with those of their parents. It suggests that gender in the Kyrgyz context does not necessarily represent thin agency, but actually gives girls opportunities to be more agentic with regard to their parents. However, girls at the state school aged 12 and 16 alike chose not to use this freedom of agency action to position themselves away from their mothers and fathers, which could seem agentic in its own respect, but was not totally free from a cultural influence. Unlike boys and their relationships with their fathers, girls with their mothers were more culturally aggressive in expressing their own views and acting on their own behalf (in this case gender acts as a strong mediator of child agency, which underlines its cultural nature). This could be due to the position girls hold in their houses (as discussed earlier) and their especially warm relationships with their fathers, but also due to the fact that all the girls at the private school were either the only child or the oldest of the children in their families. Gender both of the children as well as of the parents, still matters in the child-parent relationships in the contemporary Kyrgyz society.

In general, with the practice being focused on age-based authority, the tenets of the new sociology of childhood, insisting that children are social actors worth being studied on their own and prioritising child agency to structures (see Prout and James, 1997 for a review), is challenging in some ways, as children in Kyrgyz culture are not independent from their parents and cannot be considered without their relationships with them. Without generalising this claim, this study underlines that particularly studies with

regard to child agency in cultures similar to Kyrgyzstan are better studied with a special focus on parent/children relationships whilst taking into account material circumstances. In other words, Kyrgyz children cannot be seen as separate and autonomous beings as children tend to be in the new sociology of childhood. In contention with the idea of Brannen and O'Brien (1996) that the focus should be not on 'families with children' but on 'children in families', this study proposes the focus to be on the former. Children in both schools seem to represent more the 'families with children' due to the fact that children are largely under the supervision and control of their parents. Nevertheless, the way children at the state school exercised their agency in relations to their siblings and parents could possibly be more towards 'children in families'. However, because these children took agency actions mainly oriented at their families, their purposiveness was also predominantly aimed at the family, their freedom to act was regulated by the family and their outcomes were family-friendly more than individually focused, all these strongly associate them with 'families with children'.

5.5. Low income and relationships

The relationships of children at the state school with their parents had a certain specificity, which was possibly adherent to low income. They all demonstrated special attachments to mothers: *'When my mother is not here, I feel like I lack something, when she is with me, then everything is full and I do not need anything else'* (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school). Aidana (girl aged 16, state school) said that: *'My mother is my mother and is also like my best friend, as she gives me good advice and also shares her own secrets with me'*. Then she continued: *'She would never decide anything which would upset me, as what she usually likes, I like too – we have similar taste'*.

Girls and boys reported very caring and considerate attitudes to their mothers, who mostly worked for long hours and were at home on Sundays or at nights (at best):

'My mother comes from work very tired and late and I pity her. She does everything to earn money and make sure that we are not left behind other children' (Dastan, boy aged 12, state school).

Children shared a feeling of pity towards their mothers who worked hard doing long hours or worked away from home. Children at the state school were extremely concerned about their mothers' health due to their bad work conditions:

'I ask God to give my mum long life. I want her to be alive forever. I wish I could take her illness, it would be better for me to get ill, but not her' (Kadyr, boy aged 16, state school).

It was very important for children to make sure they did not upset their parents or somehow destabilise their wellbeing with bad marks, by quarreling with younger siblings, not cleaning the house in time, forgetting tasks to be done at home, etc. The feeling of pity towards their mothers led them to endeavour to avoid conflict with parents, although they did speak up against other members of their families:

'I never contradict my mother, as I am afraid to do that to her. If I say something like this, her heart will be hurt and I will feel pity for her. I cannot say anything to her. I can only contradict somebody younger than me' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

A feeling of pity towards mothers was one of the main purposes for girls and boys at the state school to exercise their agency with regard to their mothers, which was partly also motivated by the traditional respect for the elders as well as by the authority of the older over the younger. Children at the state school had more bonding social capital connecting them strongly with their families, relatives, kinship (Woolcock and Sweetser (2002). Such determination strongly prevailed among the state school children, who were also committed to pay back to their parents for everything they have done for them. But no matter what they did and how much, according to some boys, they would always remain in debt towards their parents, as they could never be able to pay them

back in full. So in terms of children at the state school, their agency actions were directed towards their families and parents in particular, for which their life circumstances were also adding up to. However, these two did not necessarily go together, as for example, in the case of the private school, children tended to be respectful, but not full of pity towards their parents. The feeling of pity towards mothers could compromise the girls' and boys' agency to some extent, but it could also give them certain freedom and purposes in another way, as children saw themselves as able to help their mothers, though it could be negative for agency outcomes. This highlights some of the complexities and some of the paradoxes arising from the evidence on children's and families' engagement with material hardship.

Overall, this creates an understanding of child agency as a complex phenomenon intertwined, interrelated and inter-affected by different factors among which parents, age, gender, material circumstances and children's own priorities play significant roles. However, the economic background of children seems to be acting as a differentiator of child agency experiences, while societal norms affecting parenthood taking into consideration such structural factors as age and gender are something uniting the two groups under the same cultural umbrella. Girls' and boys' relationships with mothers and fathers, age and birth order, their controlling relationships within families are mainly similar to both schools, despite the impact of the culture of wealth.

5.6. Conclusion

In a traditionally hierarchical society disrupted by violent revolutions, abrupt economic transition, high child poverty and sudden exposure to globalization, as discussed in the previous chapter, child agency in Kyrgyzstan still operates within cultural boundaries. Age and gender are crucial factors for child agency as a cultural construct. These cultural markers signpost the way of bringing the two models of

childhood at the state and private school together. This could be seen best with the example of son-father and sister-brother relationships, the fathers' attitudes to daughters and the role age and gender played in locating children within the family. Parents were distinct actors in promoting as well as hindering child agency. What emerged as common in Kyrgyz families regardless of their economic position was that traditional culture acted as a safeguard for parental roles and children did not experience a change in parents' status and their relationships remained authoritarian. In Kyrgyz society, where the father's authority at home was derived from cultural custom more than from his objective economic productivity, this male authority was not vulnerable to economic circumstances and the father's status within a family was not undermined. Such an advantageous position of fathers informed their behaviour towards daughters as 'guests' at their houses, and towards their sons, who were seen to continue the family blood line.

The role of mothers and fathers in moulding the children and childhood strongly focused on assigning children not only to certain settings such as homes, but also to certain roles and cultural characteristics of interpersonal behaviour. In the latter case, children at the state school were under more parental pressure to perform adult-like behaviours and respond to such social conventions as shame, while private school children had a more gradual process of maturity. Such type of attitude to children encouraged their agency actions to take responsibilities, act in a parent-like manner towards their siblings and underlined their role for the family's collective wellbeing. As Hirschfeld (2002) aptly suggests, children create and maintain cultural spaces for themselves while at the same time sharing it with their parents. This was observed in this study by the way children negotiated the boundaries of childhood (especially girls) by moving in and out of it by the way they shared responsibilities with their parents and

found time and place to play (the state school), and also by negotiating their independence (the private school).

Home was a setting where girls had more freedom to act within their relationships with parents than the boys, though girls at the state school were considerably affected by cultural norms in terms of their agency actions. Consequently these influences exacerbated the effects of age and gender among the families of children at the state school with a direct impact on agency actions and purposes. Although children at the private school did not have cultural boundaries and their economic situation did not intensify their purposes to act, they were more restricted and controlled by their parents.

In general, children's agency is not culturally resilient, but instead economically adaptable, though certain changes of cultural practices could be observed in the richer families, while the poorer remained more traditional. An argument emerged about child agency being affected by economic circumstances and creating different agency purposes: individual and collective wellbeing. The moral rationalities for child agency to put others' wellbeing first and preferring collective to individual were more characteristic of low income families, where children felt able to purposively act for their parents who needed help and to be good children and siblings. However, despite being more collectively oriented and culturally constrained, children from the state school were in fact more individualised in terms of being more responsible for their own actions. In comparison with them, the children from the private school who seemed to be more individually oriented and less constrained by tradition and income, were in fact less individualised in terms of having less responsibility for their own actions. More than just practical decisions and culturally informed actions, boys and girls at the state school succeeded in finding purposes and exercising their abilities in the ways they built

relationships with their families by taking rational steps. Such rationality at the same time did not destroy their childish creativity and thankfulness for what they had and transcended the age, gender and income related structures that children faced.

This study contributes to the problematisation of the tendency to universalise culturally specific assumptions about what constitutes child agency and consequently childhood. This chapter supports the argument that settings-based agency is gendered (further discussed in the next chapter, which will argue that the activities children were engaged also varied across gender and material positions of families). It has been shown that children had the ability to actively construct their agency, but did not have the equal leave to do so with adults in the given cultural context. Therefore children were both responding agents to the parents' actions, but also the agents whom parents needed to confer with regardless of their younger age. This chapter also supports the argument that child agency functions at different levels such as at the level of children and the level of parents, which means that children's agency varies between children themselves and adults. These kinds of observations are premised on the idea that child agency is extremely dynamic, is mediated by both internal and external forces, and involves considerable adaptation to parental control and low income. Children experience their childhood in terms of a combination of agency, cultural norms and structure. However, certain variations in individual and cultural forms of agency that paint a highly nuanced and complex picture have also been identified. This chapter was the first empirical chapter discussing child agency within settings. The next chapter will move on to children's activities within the home, which will be further complemented by two more chapters on the non-home environment.

CHAPTER VI CHILD AGENCY AND HOME ENVIRONMENT: SETTINGS AND ACTIVITIES

6.1. Introduction

This is the second chapter focused on child agency within the home environment. If the previous chapter discussed the relationships of children within the home and their effects on child agency, this chapter will supplement that knowledge with how children's relationships and their agency affected children's activities at home. The focus will be on the characteristics of home to understand how it functions as a setting for child agency and how agency is exerted through the activities children carry out. In other words, settings-based analysis will provide a way to understand the overriding importance of child agency in conceptualising the activities of children as a resource through which they display and exert their agency. It will demonstrate that children at the state and private schools not only had different family and home background, but also their relationships with home and their activities varied dramatically from each other. Such differences were circumscribed by the way parents built their relationships with their children and the way they informed children's roles within the home. Economic dis/advantages seem to be a key underlying factor for those differences identifying a family from a household, a home from a house, collective from individual, moral from rational etc. Low and high income act both as thickening and thinning factors for child agency, enhanced by the cultural expectations of children in low income families.

The chapter will start with describing home as a setting and give some details about general family background. It will continue with discussing home as a setting for agency from the perspectives of the two different schools and the children's contrasting roles within it. The analysis will expand to the activities children at the state school did

outside the home environment, but still essential for the family such as paid work and a variety of unpaid work. Children at the private school were occupied with inter-parental relationships and their agency was expressed in finding their own solutions for family problems. Differences in home activities, children's roles, cultural expectations and gender patterns will be explored to illuminate agency as a construct shaped by economic circumstances.

6.2. Family characteristics as conditions for the construction of child agency

Each child's circumstances and their agency were influenced by their particular family context, including the composition and socio-economic status of their households and the locality they lived in. Immediate families were the main figures in the lives of all the children, with a direct and significant impact on their agency and its components. However, the 'family' assumed different shapes for the children of the private and state schools: in the private school, the families were limited to immediate family members such as parents and siblings (and some children often mentioned nannies, drivers, cleaners with whom they had close relationships); whereas in the case of the state school, one should probably talk about 'households' consisting of family members of different generations and familial relations. Such different forms of the 'family' among state and private school children have been informed by the social, economic and cultural factors, to which different strata of Kyrgyz society have been subject since the 90s. To understand how households and families vary, operate, what implications they bring for children in specific situations and how children adapt to specific household structures and what activities they undertake is essential in analysing children's lives and therefore child agency. This is what this chapter will attempt to do.

6.2.1. Numbers of children and child agency

The total number of children in each family at the private school varied from one child to five children as maximum. The number of children in families was higher at the state school, which also increases the risk of being poor (Table 5). If in the case of the private school eight families had two children, at the state school nine families had three children. According to Gassmann (2011) the number of children in a household in Kyrgyzstan is closely linked with poverty and it increases rapidly with each additional child. Families with three or more children have the highest poverty risk (UNICEF, 2009b). Therefore children at the state school were likely to be poor given their living conditions and parents' low paid jobs.

Table 5. Number of children per family at the state and private school

No of children per family	1	2	3	4	5	Total
No of families at private school	5	8	4	2	1	46
No of families at state school	2	4	9	5	2	62

Source: Author's own table

6.2.2. A family or a household: implications for child agency

So what constitutes the 'family' in the case of the private school children?

Although asking children about their parents' work and education during the interviews was not my aim, I still managed to get some background information. Five children out of twenty at the private school had parents who were divorced (divorce was another topic that emerged during interviews). Divorced families had different arrangements such as divorced parents living at the same house (for the sake of children, as they said to their children); divorced couples with contact arrangements between a non-resident

parent and a child; divorced parents not living together etc. In all the divorced-cases children were actively involved in the parental disagreements and emotional struggle and even tried to intervene for the sake of a possible reconciliation, which served as purposiveness of agency actions for children to help their parents to come to terms with the changed situations.

The family in the context of the state school children meant more households with more members, less space in the houses and lower ranks in occupations, lesser number of divorced parents, but more families separated due to other reasons such as low income. In particular, six families out of twenty were not full families (three lost either of parents who died and three couples were divorced). One of the girls whose mother died when she was young lived with her elder brother only and their father worked in another part of Kyrgyzstan, whereas her other two siblings studied away from Bishkek. In all divorced cases, children were under the care of their mothers, who worked in Moscow and therefore children were left with their extended families. The rest of the families were full families although some of the parents were not present in the houses (during the fieldwork) for instance, parents in three families who were working in Moscow and one who was working in a remote village in Kyrgyzstan. These children were not only the children of working mothers, but working absent mothers when children either did not see their parents most of the days, weeks, but also years on end. Having been separated from their parents at an early age against their will, especially from mothers, children at the state school showed me how they took control over the painful situations and did not let them overwhelm them with negativity. Children, especially young ones, seemed to cope with the long separations from their parents and suppressed their emotions. As one girl aged 12 said with clear purposiveness explaining her mother's actions: *'I do not miss my mum and do not suffer, because I*

know that she is making money' (Nurzat, girl aged 12, state school). The importance of distinguishing 'a family' from 'a household' is reflected in the way in which it affected children's responsible actions within home settings. The shape of the family in the case of the state school seemed to be not only a cultural construct but also to be shaped by economic circumstances, which united several families and generations under one roof in some cases and separated parents from their children in another.

As will be discussed further, not only the parents who were physically present in the daily lives of children affected child agency, but also the parents physically away from children were equally influential on promoting their agency actions and affecting their agency freedom, purpose and outcomes. Separations due to labour migration were accepted by children as a purposeful decision for the sake of their families, which required actions from both parents (to leave) as well as children (to cope). This was one of the reasons why children put high emphasis on being together with parents, took agentic actions and employed moral rationalities towards their wellbeing. Moral rationalities (as discussed in chapters IV and V) are about moral relationships and obligations towards their families, parents and siblings as well as the sense of being 'good' brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, etc. The private and state school children had family backgrounds which gave the children different agency purposes: in one case a family breakdown was the purpose of agency actions to intervene in family arrangements, whereas the case of low income as a structure pushed children to find ways of helping out their parents.

6.2.3. Differences in parental employment: implications for child agency

More differences between the state and private school parents existed in terms of their employment. Separation from parents of children at the state school was caused for the reasons of their employment abroad or locally. The study of Kyrgyz migrant workers

(Lukashova and Makenbaeva, 2010) working in Russia showed that this income comprises 64% of all the income they had. So in fact for the children at the state school, whose parents, siblings or relatives worked in Russia, this was a great support covering the costs of their studies and everyday life. However, because of the fall in the demand for foreign labour in Russia, remittance inflows to Kyrgyzstan in 2010 were almost back to 2008 levels (Gassmann, 2011), which means that the families of children whose parents were in Russia were affected by the global economic crisis. But it was not only parents who worked elsewhere - some siblings did too, as mentioned in the previous chapter. For instance, one of the boys' sisters was also working in Moscow adding up to the numerous children-migrants under the age of 18 working in the Russian Federation.

In fact, labour migration has become a great source of employment for older children, who leave for Russia without full school education, proper skills, experience and knowledge (Lukashova and Makenbaeva, 2010). In fact labour migration goes from children to adult workers who voluntarily choose and exert their agency to work in involuntary conditions of life in low income. As a result of their actions, they often live in dangerous conditions and work for 14 hours a day in order to provide for their families back home (Lukashova and Makenbaeva, 2010). Although agency actions do not bring positive outcomes for the agents themselves, their families are the ones to benefit from remittances of migrants working abroad, which are the biggest source of income for the families left behind.

The rest of the parents at the state school were occupied in the service sector working as taxi drivers, shop sellers, market traders and in manual jobs such as seamstresses, market and street traders, tradesmen etc. Although in other cases amongst the state school children both parents were present, one or rarely both of them worked

long hours with no weekends and did not come home unless some sort of emergency occurred:

‘My mother works close to the house, but she still needs to change buses twice. She works every day until 11pm, but if she comes home, public transport will take all her money, that is why she does not come. But now she comes home more often, because a new bus route has been introduced from her work to our house’ (Mahabat, girl aged 16, state school).

In general, such occupations would not guarantee any pension provisions for the parents of the state school children and probably they would rely on their children when they become elderly even more than some of them did at the time of my fieldwork. This reciprocity is taken for granted and is complex, beyond cultural norms, but something done out of love for parents. A parents’ sacrifice enhanced children’s motivation, moral rationalities and agency purposiveness for emphasising their duty ‘to repay the parents for their breastfeeding’, as children often said during group discussions and interviews. Regardless of all the hard work done by both parents and children at present, it is unlikely to bring the outcome of their long term prosperity, but rather the everyday agency actions of children and their parents was directed at immediate daily survival.

In great contrast, the parents of the private school children were quite successfully occupied holding managerial or professional positions such as political jobs, bankers, judges, architects, international organisations’ officers, private business owners e.g. international trade, private plants/factories etc. Several fathers were working abroad and the majority of mothers were involved in the labour market as well. Parents of children at the private school had expanding social capital of ‘bridging and linking’ with other people holding financial/political power (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002). Such a division in the professional background of parents from the two schools and the differences in future prospects clearly reflect the segregation in their material status. This means that parents’ employment background added to children’s possible limited

actual freedom (Sen, 1990) of choosing from various alternatives for their doings and beings. The occupational differences are a further division between the two schools in addition to their neighbourhood segregation. In the country where only 20 years ago the majority of the population belonged to the working class (or people believed that their Soviet society was classless, as all were equal possessors of the means of production), now there exists stark polarisation between social strata.

6.2.4. Subjectively agentic and objectively poor

The children from the private school demonstrated more awareness of their superiority in the material ladder and made numerous comments about the businesses their parents owned, their foreign contacts both personal and business, their mothers not working at all or working for the realisation of their hobbies, etc. Children also gave additional hints of their material advantages such as having their own drivers, nannies, the size of the property they lived on, their vacation destinations etc., which led me to certain assumptions about their material situations. Although children at the private school did see themselves as rich, they did not see themselves as different from the majority of Kyrgyz children. According to the UNICEF data (2006), almost 80% of children in the country live in households with daily income of less than USD\$ 2.15. Given this estimate, one can see the extent to which the rich children were limited in their numbers. The question is how influential high income is in terms of agency as action, purpose, freedom and outcome.

By sharp contrast, the children from the state school did not talk directly about their material circumstances as problematic, nor were they asked about their material situation. From their appearance and from my interviews, I could assume that they did not have sufficient material resources by the way they talked about their housing, their daily routine at home, their favourite activities such as going to the market only when

parents' salaries arrived, their favourite memories such as rare occasions of eating sweets, drinking juices that they remembered etc. Although the evidence of financially restricted life conditions were obvious, children did not admit it was a problem. As Runciman's theory of relative deprivation suggests (1967), children in this study could also use 'a reference group' in comparison of which they did not seem to be poor. None of the children whom I interviewed were recipients of free meals at school²⁶, though there were some children receiving social allowances (for an absent breadwinner), which suggested that children were not equally poor. Having belonged to the much bigger majority, they asserted the importance of not being 'left behind' others i.e. the poorer majority.

So why don't children talk about the material reality that they had to face? Why did children who were objectively deprived claim to be satisfied with their life subjectively? Did children not talk about it because they knew they could deal with it or because they simply did not think it was something they should worry about? Or did they actually not want to talk to me about it? In the latter case, I do not anticipate that all children, all twenty of them decided not to reveal their material disadvantages. From the research on children's perceptions, it is known that this is not uncommon for children in low income families to hide their material reality or underestimate it. Similarly, children from the study on social difference in England (Sutton et al., 2007) also did not see themselves in terms of being 'poor', but instead claimed to be in the middle ground. It is somewhat typical for Kyrgyz children in their subjective views not to be worried about material troubles, as shown by two studies (UNDP, 2010; Richardson et al., 2008). Consequently, some could argue that children's own evaluations of their life are not accurate because children might adjust their desires and train themselves to take

²⁶ It should be noted that eligibility for free meals as an indicator of poverty is not totally reliable due to possible corruption in the system. It is also unclear why a child without a breadwinner would not be eligible to receive free meals.

pleasure in small mercies. In the language of Wolfgang Zapf (1984), such children would be called the 'adapted people' and such behaviour would be termed as 'satisfaction-paradox'. This type of an adaptation problem can undermine the reliability of subjective views about one's own life, because people adapt their desires and attitudes to straitened circumstances (Qizilbash, 2006). But I would not suggest that it is simply about being used to be poor but more about agency to create opportunities in limited life conditions and resisting pressure (though I do not deny that the state school children might not think it was a problem, because in their neighbourhood it was the way everybody else lived).

Children and their families demonstrated how they succeeded with the limited resources at their disposal in prioritising children's schooling and further education by choosing to send them to school, in the first instance, and giving some of them opportunities to attend extra clubs. Those children who chose to work for money did so in combination with schooling and those children who did household chores including childcare put their homework and school tasks prior to other tasks at home. This may be seen as even more agentic if we take into account that according to some research (UNICEF, 2009a), children from 'new settlements' in Bishkek city generally tended to miss schooling due to poverty and an insufficient number of accessible schools. This demonstrates how children in my study acted as agents and did so with specific purposes to achieve long term outcomes of such education-oriented agency actions (and I would not have had access to those who missed school).

Low income united families around combined actions to survive and increased agency as purpose. The fact that some family members had to leave for Russia to earn money also demonstrated their readiness to act in order to enable children to go to school and the family to have more financial resources. Such choices and prioritisations

demonstrated the children's (and parents') agentic approach to their living circumstances and that family happiness was a more valued purpose than and less dependent on material possessions. The state school families had close relationships (i.e. 'bonding social capital') with their extended families which perhaps encouraged them to believe that there would always be somebody to help them and that poverty was not something they could not deal with. Such a unity and commitment of children and parents to the family's collective wellbeing were a demonstration of power over poverty as a collective agency action. Children were less concerned about the situation than adults and that was why they did not raise this issue. In their views, they could not see themselves as being responsible for family welfare (even though some of them considerably contributed to the family survival).

Whatever the reasons were for positive subjective views towards their material life conditions, children were the best informants about their lives and they appeared not only to be affected by their life conditions in low income, but also affecting them themselves.

6.3. Housing characteristics as conditions for the construction of child agency

All the children in the sample and the family members they lived with resided in Bishkek. The private school children lived in houses/flats owned by their parents and the girls in particular were highly aware of personal space and discussed it on several occasions. They were somewhat dispersed in terms of physical location, with some of the children living very close to the school and some living at a considerable distance. None of the children in the sample mentioned sharing the housing with members of the extended family, but rather with professionals, who looked after the children, cooked and cleaned for them. As a result, these children did not need to do much for themselves

and had less agency actions about looking after their homes, which probably added to their boredom. Children from the state school did not have the same living conditions. According to the teachers²⁷ many of their pupils' parents rented houses. Moreover, the majority lived with extended families, either sharing their own house with them or living at their houses due to various circumstances.

The private school children had limited contacts with their extended families, while their counterparts in the state school engaged with them very closely, as they often looked after them at some point in their childhood or lived together with them, as relatives would naturally step in when support was needed, such as care and finance (although there was one case when parents stopped active social engagements with their better-off relatives). Families of children from the state school had a high level of 'bonding social capital' as a means 'to get by' (Dürschmidt et al., 2010), which closely fitted to their needs and purposes of collective wellbeing. In the case of the private school children, one could expect that children's limited contacts with extended families and living only with their parents would promote close relationships within the family and children could be active home agents. However, this was not the case for the private school children, but probably rather contributed to growing individualism of children as discussed in the previous chapter on relationships of children with their parents. In the case of the state school, a greater involvement of extended families may have a nuanced influence on children's agency at the state school by limiting or/and liberating it. Living with extended families meant more crowded houses, an absence of personalised spaces, a higher number of younger children and several generations living together. Although it could mean more adults present at home settings, children were still highly involved in home running. This shows that economic structure and household composition interact

²⁷ Anonymous interviews held on 16-17 December 2010.

in determining children's involvement in home running. In this situation, child agency would be limited in terms of its personal dimension of agency actions and its outcomes, but would be extended in terms of agency purposes oriented on collective wellbeing over individual one.

In fact, Kyrgyzstan is one of the countries where overcrowding is widespread. According to a study spanning 20 countries (Richardson et al., 2008), Kyrgyzstan was one of the worst performers where overcrowding²⁸ was very high - i.e. at least one in four households suffer overcrowding. Although an international approach to poverty analysis could see this overcrowding as a measure of poverty, it should take into account some historical background of the country under scrutiny. Without going far back (maybe not too far, as some people still live in such conditions in the modern period) to the times when Kyrgyz lived in small yurts²⁹, it is important to mention the Soviet era, when the majority of building designs were focused on constructing many-storeyed buildings with hundreds of small flats. Although there was a quota on a number of person/child per meter square, even in those circumstances, people used to occupy relatively small areas. Although overcrowded housing was not new to the children, these conditions might have only deteriorated with greater urbanization since independence (1991) and worsening living conditions because of a lack of public funding for renovations of residential settings. The new settlements are particularly overcrowded, with poor infrastructure.

In fact, boys and girls at the state school living under such conditions did not consider the conditions of overcrowding to be disturbing. On the contrary, they seemed to enjoy that experience and moreover expressed their views that they would not wish to

²⁸ Overcrowded housing is more than three per room/ less than six m²/person (Richardson et al. 2008).

²⁹ A yurt is a portable, wood-framed dwelling, used traditionally for housing by Turkic nomads in Central Asia.

live solely with their own families. Perhaps children in Kyrgyz houses still felt happy exactly because of the sharing of space (without undermining the basic housing standards), because the meaning of space for them was different from the conventional housing standards and may not have a stereotypical negative effect in child agency (e.g. Western assumptions that children need a certain amount of space and that overcrowding is detrimental to their development (Woodhead, 1996)). For example, one girl was living with her extended family (as her mother left for Moscow), where ten people lived in a 3-bedroom flat: two grandmothers (one of whom was disabled), an aunt with her children and a married son of hers with his children. Nevertheless, the girl expressed satisfaction with her living conditions, as it was her own informed choice to live with this particular family group after her mother's departure. This could be due to the reason that extended family-members sometimes filled the psychological gap of absent parents. But tellingly, the home setting played a different role in the lives of the children at the state school than it did for the private school-children.

6.3.1. A home and a house as a setting to construct and exert child agency

Home has been seen largely as a place for children to be - it is a supervised and safe space for them (James et al., 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). The boys and girls at the private school were heavily monitored by their parents. The majority was brought home from school by their parents or by the school bus and their parents used mobile phones to check their whereabouts. Especially younger children were often at home with their nannies or cleaners or at least monitored by the neighbours. They were not seen by their parents as capable of being on their own at home. They also spent less time at home, from around 5.30p.m. after school including Saturdays. They came home mainly to relax - i.e. to play on computers and watch television, to maintain contacts with their friends through the internet and other communication devices as well as to do

largely petty tasks such as making the table and washing up. The way children spent their time at home was largely supervised by their parents and home as a setting for activities contributed to children living under regulated freedom (as discussed in the chapter IV). In other words, home did not provide these children with a space to act independently.

For some younger children aged 12, home was something mobile which they changed when their parents changed their work positions; for some, especially girls, it functioned as a battle field where they had disputes and conflicts with their parents or siblings; for others, it was a place they wanted to escape from (e.g. post-divorce circumstances) and they strived to go and spend time outside as much as they could. However, despite the variations, home for the private school children did not represent an important field of activities and responsibilities for agency actions; therefore although they were also residents and had ownership over the home, they did not have direct relationships with their home as contributors. Such observations were based on the way children talked about their homes and what they did at home. It illuminated the way richer children were located by their parents in terms of their relationships with home and also indicated that richer children did not see themselves being an active part of home functioning. Therefore, the concept of agency within specific settings ties in with the relationships of the children and adults with regard to that setting.

Unsurprisingly, home emerged as a key environment for children at both schools. However, there was a difference between the extent to which children were close to their homes and what home meant for them. For the state school children, home was the setting where they spent most of their time after they returned from school.³⁰

³⁰ There were two shifts at the state school, when children came to school in the early morning and studied until lunch time, when another shift started early afternoon until late afternoon. Children usually had 5 or 6 classes each day (45 minutes each and 5-minute breaks in between, except one long break for 10 minutes).

Home is mainly considered as a place under the supervision of an adult and without such supervision when a young child is left alone, home is not considered safe (Calcraft, 2004). However, in these days of heightened fears in Kyrgyzstan (after two revolutions) about the wider neighbourhood and the country as a whole, home has become a relatively safe place for children to be, even without adult supervision. Children, both girls and boys aged 12 and 16 at the state school as well as their younger siblings, tended to be at home on their own more than their counterparts at the private school, while their parents were at work, or some of them even lived at home without parents or any adult e.g. a girl aged 16.

In fact, in some instances children spent even more time at home than their parents did and the homes were safe and functional thanks to the children. This was a setting for them to be independent and to be on their own for many hours, when they were solely responsible for organising their time at home. To some extent, such organisation of life was a booster of children's confidence and their parents' trust in their agentic abilities to be responsible. A feeling of ownership of home was equally great among boys and girls, as discussed below. These children were considerably less likely to experience control and regular checkups by their parents or any carer/any other adult. The arrangements which prevailed among the children at the state school were closer to unregulated control meaning that children were brought up under strict norms, but with a certain level of trust from their parents in their agentic abilities to carry out responsibilities and to act agentially.

Moreover, home for the children at the state school was more dispersed over space, as their parents were located in different places from the settings where their children spent most of their time. Those of the children whose parents worked away from home, either in other parts of Kyrgyzstan or abroad, maintained their relationships

with their parents via the telephone across the borders, as mentioned initially in chapter V about absent parents. All major decisions for the state school children, such as starting work, buying a big thing for the house, some issues at school, were agreed with parents, even though they were far away. Cultural patterns of parenthood and home did not end with political borders of countries. It was perhaps the children's cultural choice to remain under virtual parental supervision and not to exert more freedom, although they could have had more independence had they wished.

Home for the private school was a place to rest and relax – e.g. to play on their computers, to watch television etc. and to be safe (especially for girls). For the state school children it was to spend time with their families e.g. parents and siblings, but also to work e.g. household chores in and outside the home. Their counterparts at the private school were in more controlled environment and did not show active agency except being home for relaxation. On contrast, children at the state school were engaged in so many activities, so that some seemed to be running not only 'a house' as a physical setting, but also 'a home' as a social and economic entity. Both girls and boys at the state school were more agentic at home, being active domestic actors, with some of them acting as economic agents as well, though their parents held more authority in that regard. These children took more responsibilities not only for themselves and their siblings (though they did not feel to be the one responsible), but also for their parents by taking on a more adult role in helping to ensure that the home was run properly.

6.4. The main home activities and child agency

6.4.1. Household chores, expanding skills and child agency

Doing household chores was one of the common ways of engaging with the home for all the state school children. The word 'household chores' in the case of the state school children meant diverse responsibilities inside and outside of the house. It

included house cleaning, cooking, washing up, doing the laundry (usually by hand), bringing water, wood, making fire, constructing a house, repairing cars, caring for younger siblings and older parents, working in the garden, planting vegetables, keeping sheep, goats, chickens etc. These families would not necessarily possess modern technology, as they all are quite costly in Bishkek, which mean that they would be extremely time-consuming. However, children found it easy to manage their day and succeeded to find their own ways of tailoring their time in terms of work, study and fun:

‘Why would I not manage to do (household chores, clubs, homework)? I come home at 1pm, then even if I come at 2pm and have tea until 2.30pm., I still have so much time to be able to do all things’ (Aisuluu, girl aged 16, state school).

In fact, these children spent much time on their own, running the house, doing their homework, socialising with their friends and making meals before their parents came back after work. The attitude of children (both boys and girls) to household chores was predominantly positive: *‘I do not have much work and cleaning the house is easy’* (Aidana, girl aged 16, state school). In the case of the state school, household chores seemed to be invisible in the way that children did not see them as hard as one could think – rather they were an inevitable part of childhood. Still, household chores did come across as a distinctive form of labour, as children saw it as a major part of their activities within home. They had clear vision of their responsibilities and they knew how to organise their time and therefore their activities within home were arranged on their own terms.

Most of the boys and girls at the state school seemed to be highly concerned about and to pay great attention to the cleanliness of the house. Many girls as well as boys said they could not sit to do their homework unless the house was tidy. Children believed that it was shameful to live in a dirty house, which probably was also about the importance of hygiene - a necessity for people living together in overcrowded houses.

Perhaps a tidy house helped to hide poverty and attract the attention of visitors to the presence of tidiness instead of the absence of material things. This demonstrated how children valued their homes, because they knew how many sacrifices their parents made to get this house - and children themselves (especially older boys) might have put their own bricks when it was constructed. They were keen to help their parents as much as they could, in order to ease their work burden and make them happy. This was one of the agency purposes of children to express their moral attachment to their parents and to make the home ready and welcoming when their parents came after work:

'They (parents) work so hard to make ends meet with the children in their mind. They earn money for us. They try so hard and we try hard too to meet them after work with hot tea and hot meal ready for them' (Mahabat, girl aged 16, state school).

Some literature argues (e.g. see Dodson and Dickert, 2004) that children in low-income families in the US face a-so-called '*opportunity cost*' by doing domestic chores. In the author's view, 'an opportunity cost' is 'a loss of attention to their own development' e.g. education, extracurricular experiences, aspiration for the future (p. 318) which in turn contributes to an intergenerational transmission of poverty. This view was expressed by the girls who participated in that study. My findings seem to contradict this - for state school children to be able to help their parents was a life objective in itself and was carried out without undermining schooling in most of the cases, as I was told by children. They were agentic actors and adopted an approach which embraced both ends and means, in other words parental wellbeing and agency. In contrast with the girls of the US study for whom domestic chores were something they did not like or choose to do, the children whom I interviewed did so as their own voluntary choice, though some cultural pressure cannot be left out.

Although in the study Dodson and Dickert (2004) associate girls' family labour directly with the low income of families, in my study child involvement in domestic

chores was culturally expected. But it would also be wrong to claim that low income did not play any role, especially given the fact that low income turned out to represent one of the drivers of agency purposiveness for the state school children. In the case of this study, it was not doing the household chores per se, which was a manifestation of child agency, but the role that children's contribution to home had for the purposes of their family/household and collective survival. In fact, low income not only triggers child agency by promoting their agentic purposiveness of helping their parents out, but also interacts with culture to promote socially expected agency actions. If not for low income, children could have been doing household chores, but would have had negative attitudes to them, because their parents would not have needed extra help and empathy and children would have gone to a better school and would have been more occupied with studies.

What was distinctive in the context of younger children at the state school was that many boys learned from their fathers to work with different materials such as wood and iron, but also learned specific skills such as carpentry, repair of electric appliances, drawing, brick-laying etc.:

'My brother works, sometimes after school, sometimes on Sundays. Our father is an electrician and my brother learned from him and he repairs the electrical devices and cables' (Gulzat, girl aged 16, state school).

Fathers were the ones who taught and transferred their knowledge and skills to their children:

'I learn some handicraft from my father. I work with construction materials, wood, and I make chairs, tables and paint them. I help my father, he is an artist. I learn from him' (Maksat, boy aged 12, state school).

Dastan (boy aged 12, state school) also obtained his skills from his father: *'I learned from my father some carpentry skills. When I go to the village for summer vacations, I make toys for my uncle's children'.* Boys were able to work with different materials both

for leisure as well as for the needs of the house (e.g. repairing furniture, the family car, electric devices, making toys for younger siblings, construction work etc.). In addition, boys without sisters were also taught by their mothers to cook, which made them more independent from their mothers. This kind of informal apprenticeship could result from the life demands that made children ready for life at that certain point as well as agentic for the future for which children needed to be equipped with certain skills and knowledge. Child agency in this situation was operating in the way that parents were trying to ensure their children would be able to have agency in future and better results of their agentic long-term actions.

Overall, boys at both schools did not mind doing ‘female’ work within the house if there was no female sibling able to perform the domestic task. However, when there were sons and daughters present in the same household, there was a clear gender-based division of work with girls doing ‘easier’ work within the house (home-based work was regarded to be easier because no physical power was needed). A greater quantity of work and harder work was also likely to be done by the eldest siblings. The division of household chores was not so much gendered (though this was a factor), but more age-based. So the formula was simple – an older child did more work and girls did work not requiring much physical power. This echoes the findings of Punch (2002a), who presented a detailed discussion of the intergenerational division of household labour in rural households in Bolivia, which is based on age, gender, birth order and sibling composition.

This means household chores were carried out according to the children’s abilities relative to their age, gender, which order they were born in and who their siblings were. This indicates how children were agentic in dividing domestic chores and recognising gender and age-based abilities to work. Children seemed to have rather

flexible arrangements of labour division in cases of single-gender siblings or in cases when some of the siblings were away, etc. If in the case of the private school children, it was parents who located and informed relationships with and activities of children at home, in the case of the state school, children themselves seemed to have agentic ownership over their home which represented a setting for both agency actions and purposiveness. Although the agency within a specific setting such as the home tied in with the relationships of the children and adults with regard to that setting, the state school children appeared to have more direct relationships with it albeit not fully equal with their parents'.

Children at the state school were definitely more instrumental for their parents than private school children were to theirs and their agency was characterised by actions of learning and obtaining skills and not necessarily by claiming their independence from parents. They were more involved in the family maintenance, functioning and planning, while the better-off parents relied more on paid help to do so. Children's contribution and engagement in the family's daily life activities strengthened even further the differences in temporal orientations between them and children at the private school. Within the context of the differing material realities and demands on their time-use, the state school children seemed to develop such physical and practical skills which would be helpful in the future.

However, the state school children's agency actions and purposes were clearly more located in the here and now, whereas their counterparts at the private school were more oriented towards outcomes which would enhance their agency in the future. Children at the private school said they did not like being engaged in household chores, though in their case the right word to use is 'housework', as it included an easy form of petty work for children. In this context, housework played a different role and had a

different meaning for these children: they were usually doing very light and easy work, which they nonetheless saw as hard work. Housework emerged as a distinctive form of labour which children at the private school and their parents did not see as being part of childhood.

The children at the two schools had different perceptions of work: so getting a vacuum cleaner ready or, making the table seemed to be difficult for the private school children, while for the children at the state school running the whole house was considered easy. It appears that ‘newly rich’ Kyrgyz people reconsidered their cultural patterns and their new status affected their attitude to their children, so housework was no longer considered a normal expectation regarding children. Instead, these children had more formal investment in their agency i.e. education, which was costly now but was likely to give more chances for social mobility in the future. Physical skills were not of immediate demand and therefore their agency actions were less about being able to act now but more about preparing to be successful in the future. Conversely, state school children built their present agency to survive, which makes the future oriented argument of agency for these children even more important.

6.4.2. Paid work and child agency

Some children at the state school saw their contributions to the family life beyond household chores and followed their agency purposes that involved a conscious commitment to families’ financial wellbeing. For them, as mentioned earlier, they were about not only managing the home as a physical entity, but also helping their parents to run the family. So for them, time not spent in school meant domestic labour, sibling care and also earning money for the family. They shared (if not took over completely) their mothers’ hard pressured multiple responsibilities inside the home and those of their fathers’ outside the house, in addition to their own responsibilities to study, while their

parents were busy trying to make money in low-paid manual work. Zselizer (1985) suggests that with women's increasing labour market participation, the role of children in domestic chores will increase. Nevertheless, mothers did not have a choice other than to work, though they worked in an informal labour market for less money, under worse conditions and long hours at the expense of their children's wellbeing. However, such work arrangements would not have been possible for mothers without their children's help with running the home, though children did not seem to realise how much they contributed in economic terms to family members' ability to earn money.

In addition to all their responsibilities, two boys (Akyl and Almaz) and two girls (Gulzat and Aisuluu) in year 9 (out of ten children in the group) at the state school did regular paid work in their neighbourhood, which was according to them their voluntary choices as agency freedom (though it would be difficult to describe these actions as totally voluntary or totally involuntary). This is a model of economic agency which describes 'the poor as rational actors' (Jordan, 1996; p. 78). Although some argue that economic choices are influenced by social and cultural values (Taylor-Gooby, 1998), in the current study such choices were neither a pressure of cultural expectations, nor a result of cultural obedience to the older adults, (as otherwise everybody who participated in this study would have worked). Children should rightly be viewed 'more than culturally programmed agents or empty vessels through which the hydraulic push and pull of social and cultural forces flow' (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2011, p. 9). Although material disadvantage was quite an issue, given the circumstances under which children lived, boys and girls could have decided not to work or done so only occasionally and moreover, children might have decided not to study at all. Instead, children came up with creative and moral agency purposes (of being good children of their parents) in confronting the routine challenges of a lack of material resources.

Akyl and Almaz were working unofficially in coal mining, where they extracted coal from local site and sold it for money. According to the boys, this was very close to their school and several hundred people, mainly males of different ages, went there every day in late autumn, winter and early spring time. Young boys aged 8-12 working there after school hours were also not a rare sight. Coal came from the central heating centre covering the Bishkek city through the pipes, and was picked up by people later and sold off. Boys went there whenever they had time after school and household chores and were responsible themselves for arranging sacks, transportation, sale etc. – a rather adult-type work. They said people working on that site were friendly and helped one another when needed with uploading sacks of coal on to trolleys. That is an interesting agency action, as coal mining in the neighbourhood was more likely to be a coping and surviving mechanism for the poor people, where one could expect people to be competitive but not cooperative with one another. This could demonstrate how human agency purposiveness can be not only economically rational but also have moral rationalities (to help each other). Moreover, agency purpose can target not only family wellbeing, but also wellbeing of the people sharing similar conditions of economic disadvantages.

Gulzat and Aisuluu from the state school demonstrated even more proactive agency in terms of paid work. Although they were more restricted in their physical behaviour in certain times, girls were able to find paid work arrangements away from their neighbourhoods. One of the girls, Gulzat, worked as a waitress at the Chinese café where she went every Sunday. She had found this job herself through her own connections and started this job after her father gave his permission. This work not only provided her with an earning possibility and other relevant benefits, but she also used this working space to learn the Mandarin language to try for entrance exams in the

Department of Oriental Studies at the Kyrgyz State National University. Gulzat was able to earn money to cover her own petty expenses and to lend money to her classmates who did not work. Another girl, Aisuluu, was working at a sewing workshop and could earn a little money for herself. The schedule was flexible and she was able to go to work whenever she could and wanted. Aisuluu was quite keen to work and liked the flexibility. She was able to decide herself on her schedule and was managing her own money – giving some to her mother and using the rest herself. Unlike the working boys, who brought the money home and gave the whole amount to their mothers (which as they said was a voluntary arrangement), girls were quite in control of their earning arrangements and had freedom to manage money in their own way. Boys even when they earned money and contributed to the family budget, could not bargain for more freedom and power from their parents in contrast to my initial hypothesis. Girls' agency involved control of the outcomes of their own actions and of the decisions they made and gave them more options to liberate their own positions at home and school.

These four examples were not the only cases of paid work, as there were several children including girls and boys aged 12 at the state school who did occasional paid work and used their money mainly for their schooling needs. The work with coal was the most physically demanding, though it was also the most convenient as the site was situated in the neighbourhood where children lived and did not take extra time for travel. The two boys working in mining had more networking in their own area and more friends who were also working and were proud of having own money. They distinguished themselves from other children who did not earn money and called them *'those who have never held money in their hands'* (Akyl, boy aged 16, state school). They behaved as though they were older than their mates at school, though they were of the same age.

The work done by the younger children was mainly in the market, where children would help their families sell fruits and vegetables and buy schooling goods, which are quite expensive in Bishkek and which are not provided by schools. However, such occasions were rare and it was predominantly older children who were doing more regular paid work. Paid work produced multiple forms of agency outcomes. This is a form of child agency aiming largely at collective wellbeing of their families, for whom saving up family money on schooling needs was an important reason to act. It came out in the interviews with children that paid work for them was about exerting '*power within*' by enhancing self-respect, self-acceptance and also about creating their image as being financially more successful. In contrast with the state school, the private school children did not mention any paid work experience, but even considered it bad for children and shameful as discussed in chapter IV.

This is a situation that contests the global view of childhood as a work-free time as well as the view that work is necessarily harmful to children (e.g. see Feeny and Boyden, 2003a). Even the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets a legal framework which promotes children's economic dependence as being in the best interest of all children (Feeny and Boyden, 2003a). However, more research now demonstrates that work can have both negative and positive effects on children: long working hours for low pay can affect children's health and abilities at school, yet some work may promote the feeling of achievement and increased financial independence from families (Aldgate and McIntosh, 2006). My research study showed that the latter in fact depends on culturally-sanctioned relationships between children and their parents and that for Kyrgyz children, employment did not bring independence, but rather strengthened the reciprocity among them and their parents. Boys were the clear examples of such

relationships within their home, while girls were more independent with their money, though were still considerate of their family needs.

Moreover, it is argued that ‘...employment can actually be more beneficial to the child than schooling...’ (Feeny and Boyden, 2003a, p. ii), though the latter is presented as something entirely positive and good for all children (Feeny and Boyden, 2003a). I have observed that working children had higher self-esteem and confidence, with views and behaviour different from their non-working peers. Earned money can bring personal and self-oriented agency outcomes for the agent and might give him/her more freedom outside the house, but it does not necessarily result in children’s freedom within the home setting in terms of weakening age-based authority of their parents. Nevertheless, the working children in my study were the sole managers of their own working arrangements, their time and work outcomes to reconcile work with schooling and household chores that they were responsible for, which made these children even more active in the here and now. In between those activities, children had some free time to spend with friends and to do some extra learning. In general they had more complicated daily schedules than other children who did only household chores. Although their financial contributions were essential (based on my observations), children themselves and their parents attached more importance to their schooling than to work.

6.4.3. Parental divorce and child agency

Some children at the private school were agentically handling parental divorce and its repercussions. For example, one boy, Timur, aged 12 preferred to keep silence at home and did not talk at all unless he was asked something. He was not allowed to go outside and the school was the only place he liked coming to talk. In his situation, his parents lived together under one roof but did not have any other relationships (even verbal) with each other, which obviously affected their sons. Timur and his two older

brothers tried their agency action to reconcile their parents, but did not succeed and as a result they had to take this rather reactive position. Another boy, Nurlan aged 12, whose parents have separated, was left on his own for most of his time and he started smoking aged 12 i.e. he exerted his negative agency. Smoking was probably a form of reaction to the family situation, but Nurlan was agentic enough to quit smoking with the help of his classmate - agentic actions from both of the boys.

The third child, Nurbek (boy aged 12) whose parents also divorced, quarreled with his mother who did not listen to his views and did not give him enough attention. In this case, Nurbek tried to explain why she behaved as she behaved using the horoscope and he was convinced that she was selfish because she was born a Leo and this is what Leos did. Nurbek had an agentic approach to handle his mother and got her to listen to what he thought was better for him after the divorce. This boy had a clear agency purpose to sort out his own living arrangements with two divorced parents and to do so with the most benefit for himself. One of the girls, Jamal, aged 12 also experienced and dealt with the repercussions of parental divorce and managed to find some kind of comfort in her relationships with her elder brother. Another girl, Tinatin, aged 16 lived in a troublesome situation which negatively affected not only her relationships with her mother, but also reflected on all her life, in her view. Nevertheless, Tinatin acted as a real family agent by keeping optimism as far as she could and maintained a warm attitude towards her mother and often was the first to act to improve deteriorating relationships with her.

However, from time to time it was very difficult for these children to handle parental divorce. As one of the boys said, he used to become 'nervous' once or twice a week and he hit the pillow and talked to the dog, when he felt stressed. He said:

'I do not shout, I do not cry, I simply become alert, somehow. My throat starts aching, then, I do not know how to explain, I become so nervous as if everything inside me is about to come out' (Nurlan, boy aged 12, private school).

Another boy, Aibek aged 12, said that he had depressive episodes every month when he felt fed up with life and bored. When it happened, he would sit and cry, but he would not tell his parents, as he knew that this condition would pass the next day. The relationships of children at the private school with their parents were not described as similarly close as those of state school children, who often talked about drinking tea together with their parents and chatting to them when working and shopping. Instead children at the private school tended to be quite close to their nannies with whom they discussed their personal problems.

In fact, it is worth underlining that children at the private school were more likely to talk about psychological conditions which they suffered from such as stress and depression, whereas children from the state school talked about health in general (for example, the health of their mothers affected by working conditions e.g. cold weather, long hours sitting or standing etc. or their general cold or flu sicknesses when the children still came to school, unless they had to stay in bed). In general children at the private school were able to make choices, give advice, judge other people, assess the situations, appreciate somebody's help, tolerate others' behaviour etc. For some of them, their friends from the neighbourhood became a source of comfort and moral support to deal with parents' difficult relationships and they found various ways to cope with the situation as agents. For those of them who did not have access to other settings and relationships outside their school, the only contacts they had were their classmates. In this case, school proved to be an essential place for children to maintain any kind of social relationships other than their home environment. Such restrictions were largely

specific for rich families due to children's structured daily routines and parents' over-controlled supervision.

6.5. Conclusion

Home as a setting played different roles in child agency actions in the lives of the children. Boys and girls at the private school did not demonstrate that home was an arena for their agency. They spent less time at home, were more involved in leisure than domestic work and their relationships with home were circumscribed by parents, nannies and cleaners. Although there were gender and age differences in children's relationships with the home, gender and age were not as important factors as material conditions in differentiating children's activities. The relationships of children at the private school with their parents and their control did not give them agency freedom to act, whereas the arrangements of additional help with domestic chores did not leave them any agency purpose to be engaged in such activities. These children did not contribute to running the house as did the children at the state school. They did not appear to be accomplishing multiple roles and tasks at home. Instead these children were more involved in the inter-parental dynamics and psychological states whereas that did not emerge as a strong concern for poorer children. As discussed in chapter V, children at the private school reaffirmed their individual wellbeing as more valuable than the collective one. However, they did apply mutual help with their friends sharing similar family problems with them.

Children at the state school appeared to be more agentic in their home than their counterparts at the private school and exerted their agency as social and economic actors often led by moral purposes. Low income for children at the state school represented a key purposiveness of agency aimed at the collective wellbeing of their families. The children's relationships in the home and their ownership and responsibility over the

proper functioning of the setting gave them certain agency freedom to act e.g. to do paid and a variety of unpaid work. Paid work appeared more likely to speed the attainment of adulthood or moving into the adult roles than domestic chores did and indicated that it could be harmful for some aspects of agency outcomes.

However, the attainment of adult responsibilities in the case of children as economic agents did not mean attaining the same equality with adult members of the family. Cultural norms related to the gendered division of labour and children's certain behaviour and attitudes towards their family collective were more present in the types of activities in which children at the state school were engaged. The differences between the two schools representing two models of child agency within the home environment were expressed in the shapes in which agency was exercised through activities and relationships of children according to their age and gender. Home as a setting for relationships and activities of the state school children made age and gender distinct personal structures, whereas they were more comparatively neutral for the children at the private school. As mentioned earlier, boys at the state school were not in charge of their money, whereas girls were more in control of their earnings, though they would still help out the families or their classmates. Nevertheless, as productive members of the labour force, working children held the same level of contribution, but remained in the inferior level of authority.

Children at the state school demonstrated their agency actions in taking full responsibilities for their homes, their siblings, a number of other tasks and also in the way they constantly expanded their personal abilities by obtaining specific practical and independent living skills. All those forms of children's engagement in home-related activities and their direct and indirect role in contributing to the family's economic wellbeing were forms of child agency. They were both moral as well as rational agents

in the way they committed themselves to help out their families led by their moral purposes to be good sons, daughters, brothers, sisters etc. They also had rational purposes in the way they helped parents financially. Agency in their case, although individually decided upon, was not only circumscribed by their life, but reasoned by the collective wellbeing. Therefore home was not only a setting for child agency of rational and cultural purposes, but of moral commitments towards the children's families.

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter developed the argument that child agency can be viewed as being shaped by economic circumstances. The setting-based analysis of children's agency in two schools is able to effectively demonstrate various expressions of agency in terms of action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. In other words, although all children demonstrated some form of agency, its components were affected differently among the two schools. Consequently, although settings divide children as agents in terms of restricting or liberating their freedom to act, bounding their purposes to various extents and predicting their agency outcomes, the agency components still combine all the children as agents and demonstrate their abilities to act under various conditions. Setting-based analysis of child agency highlights agency in children but also accentuates structural reality where material status emerges as a main factor. Among all the factors, economic circumstances are the fundamental marker of differences between the schools. The next two chapters will move to discussing child agency within non-home environment and explore how it varies between neighbourhood and school.

CHAPTER VII CHILD AGENCY AND NON-HOME ENVIRONMENT (NEIGHBOURHOOD): SETTINGS AND ACTIVITIES

7.1. Introduction

The chapter will discuss how children exercised their agency with regard to the activities they undertook in their respective neighbourhoods, such as leisure time and playing, schooling and school clubs³¹. In this chapter, the neighbourhood is approached as the area where children lived, their schools and the places which were of particular importance to them. It will also discuss the wider neighbourhood issues such as the political situation in the country after the revolution in April 2010, which has changed their lives mainly negatively, by limiting their physical mobility and affecting younger children's psychological wellbeing and generating fears about the future.

Chapter III described the neighbourhoods where the children lived in order to give an overview, but also to highlight the differences between the non-home environment of the state and private school children. This chapter will take the discussion further to analyse the structure and the relationships between the neighbourhood and child agency. It will discuss the children's perceptions of their neighbourhoods, and the way they saw and located themselves within their spaces. It will explore how children's agency structured the way they treated their neighbourhoods and how the neighbourhood constrained their agency. Because agency for children was more associated with being older and being adults, child agency seemed to be spatially affected by the way children took up neighbourhood-specific behaviour in order to look older outside their home.

³¹ School clubs are activities organised before or after school hours. They can take place in different settings such as at school or special centres for children. Clubs can be for academic, sport or entertaining purposes.

It should be noted that children lived in diverse and complex family backgrounds and their agency was mediated by the mutual interaction between the neighbourhood, parents and children given their economic positions. Although children clearly claimed that their abilities to act were different when they were away from home, further discussions reveal that the division was not that straightforward, as parental constraints and supervision were influential outside the home environment. Therefore social relations and cultural context were also in the foreground of the analysis, as discussed in the previous chapters.

The chapter will conclude by arguing that age and gender were the key structures shaping children's access to and presence in neighbourhoods, but that the material status of the family and culture were also strong structural forces. Although material differences underscored the gap between the two models of childhood, they also created similarities by the way in which children from both schools were subject to structure in their neighbourhoods. If in the home environment children's relationships were more affective for their agency and activities, this was the followed order of chapters on the home-environment. In the non-home environment chapters, children's activities will be discussed prior to their relationships, as the latter was more affected by the former and this order will better explain the setting-based agency outside home.

7.2. Child agency and non - home neighbourhood

7.2.1. Neighbourhood as a non-home setting

Literature concerning neighbourhoods argues that the neighbourhood in which people live has an important impact on their life chances (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001), with a particularly large impact on children, who are more dependent on their local area (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Kearns and Mason, 2007). The local environment can influence children's lives in a number of ways, such as children's

use of space (e.g. Tandy, 1999), their consumer capacities (Chin, 1993), the impact of the environment on children's life chances (e.g. Young and Gately, 1988), social relations and the problems of children's presence on the streets (Winchester and Costello, 1995; Mathews et al., 1999) etc. The majority of studies on the effects of neighbourhoods focus on the negative outcomes for children living in the deprived areas (Rankin and Quane, 2002; Jencks and Mayer, 1990). They offer the insight that parents' aspirations, coping strategies and sense of efficacy are affected by neighbourhood poverty (Beyers et. al., 2003; Chung and Steinberg, 2006). Parents, their parenting patterns and upbringing can be directly influenced by the neighbourhood conditions e.g. in terms of fewer institutional resources for families to rely on such as kindergartens, children's centres etc. (Jencks and Mayer, 1990). Such analyses based on one-way effects of neighbourhoods are more typical of sociological theories of social capital which, with a few exceptions (e.g. Morrow, 1999a), have not looked at how the inhabitant (children) engage directly in communities and neighbourhoods, but instead pathologised the neighbourhoods as risky for people living there (Moses, 2006).

More recently studies into children's use of space have distinguished between the 'geography of children' and 'children's geography' (Philo, 2000). The former looks at what children actually do in their external environments, acting as social agents in the world of other people and power relations at the micro- and macro-levels. This view highlights the structural determinants of action (Philo, 2000). Research on 'children's geographies' looks at how children experience, perceive and represent their surrounding environments, highlighting issues of child agency in 'creative insights and responses to what is around them' (Philo, 2000, p. 254).

More recent studies started suggesting that children themselves are the ones who affect neighbourhoods and create their own networks and spaces through their

interaction with places, adults and other children (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). Moreover, studies argue that neighbourhood effects also depend on individual and household characteristics (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Jencks and Mayer, 1990) and should not be limited to economic disadvantage-related effects only. In this chapter, child agency in the non-home environment should be conceptualised by understanding how various actors, including children themselves, and factors create multiple relationships between children and neighbourhood.

7.2.2. Neighbourhood scopes and their impact on child agency

The meaning and influence of neighbourhood for the children were also the themes discussed both by children themselves as well as by their parents in this study. Here my discussions are built around agency and structure and look at the interplay of both based on children's own views about their abilities to act in the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood in itself is a difficult concept to define. According to Kearns and Parkinson (2001), it consists of three spatial levels. The smallest of the three is the home area, i.e. an area of 5–10 minutes' walk from one's home. The middle level is a larger local area that would include some service provision functions and the largest is an urban district or region (this would include employment, leisure interests and social networks). As Burton and Price-Spratlen (1999) point out, children have their own definitions of neighbourhood boundaries and meanings related to living and playing within them. The non-home environment (the neighbourhood) in this chapter means the country, the city centre, the area where children lived (children at the state school often use the word '*street*') and the school they attended.

In the case of the children at the state school, neighbourhood was about the local area where they lived with their families. It represented a spatial context of interaction, but was more than just a physical setting. Van Eijik (2010) proposes that the

neighbourhood can be a 'meaningful place' for its residents, so for the state school children it was a continuation of their families, their home, a place where their houses were built, their school situated and their friends lived. As outlined in chapter III, the state school neighbourhood is a relatively deprived area of Bishkek with poor local infrastructure. Inhabitants of that area are more likely to be living at a similar economic level of low income, which was one of the reasons why children did not subjectively identify themselves and their families as poor (see chapter VI). All the children of that neighbourhood went to the same school, used the same transport routes to the city centre, and did their shopping at the same local shop and the same market nearby. These effects of low income made children more reliant on the locality in terms of leisure, work, care, shopping and socialising etc. as they found it more difficult to access the wider city. These factors generated a collective sense of belonging to the neighbourhood among the inhabitants and therefore children at the state school talked about the neighbourhood as a whole and about themselves being part of it.

In addition to their local areas, children in both age groups (12 and 16) at the state school, mentioned their neighbourhood as also being in the villages where their grandparents or other relatives lived and where they travelled from time to time. They appreciated the contacts with those places, where some of them spent their childhood while their parents were at work. Rural life was interpreted as a hard life of labour, but it was also seen as a place of friends they could not find elsewhere and childhood memories full of play which would never come back. The boys and girls felt that they were able to exercise their physical agency more in these villages than in their urban neighbourhood. This was not the case for the private school children, who actually appeared to have limited contacts with their extended families.

By contrast, children from the private school did not specify a particular neighbourhood, but talked about the city and country as a whole. The majority of these children lived near their school (although some of them lived at a distance from it), but did not see themselves connected with a particular area. The reasons for this could be the circumstances that other children in that area did not share the same school, and did not use the same services. This means that the children with whom I worked at the private school did not mix with other children living in the same place. Moreover, children and the school itself were separate from the local neighbourhood, as it was not affordable for most. People living in more affluent neighbourhoods are believed to have better access to more beneficial educational, employment and information networks (Waquant and Wilson, 1989). The activities of the families of children at the private school such as shopping, entertaining, working, etc., were geographically more dispersed. So overall, their outlook in terms of the neighbourhood was wider in relation to its scope and the place within which they located themselves.

7.2.3. Neighbourhood and its effects on younger children's agency

Ecological literature indicates that neighbourhoods with structural characteristics such as poverty (Brooks-Gunn, et al., 1993) can expose children to a number of related risk factors and offer them a limited availability of resources and positive opportunities for education and their later employment (Brook et al. 1999). The poor neighbourhood where the state school was situated had basic services such as a local medical surgery, a school and a mosque. The main agency action for children aged 12 within the neighbourhood setting was playing (in addition to paid work). However, the immediate neighbourhood of children did not have designated areas for children's activities as such, e.g. playgrounds, child-friendly equipment, pitches for ball games, parks, libraries etc. Such circumstances were particularly troublesome for (the younger) children aged

12, especially girls (as boys could use any field to play football). They were upset about playgrounds which were destroyed and about afterschool clubs which were either limited in number or very poor in quality.

Nevertheless, there were also no signs to prevent children from playing and using the area in any other way. So, on the one hand, the area did not have visible facilities intended solely for children's use i.e. 'places for children' but, on the other hand, it did not prohibit or discourage children from using it for their own purposes. Although there was some discouragement on the side of parents towards their older children's play, children were still flexibly able to overcome this limitation imposed on their freedom to act. In fact, they were using the area alongside adults but with gender and age variations, although all young children aged 12 at the state school could go outside and play after they finished their household work and when their parents were away from home. They managed agentically to do so without telling their parents, using extra time in between tasks, networking with friends accordingly and managing their own time.

As the children were isolated within a neighbourhood with few resources, the nearby market appeared to be important for all the children, but especially for the younger girls:

'Sometimes I ask my mother to take me to the market with her. We buy products and workbooks for our school. I like going there, as I can see different things. But we go there very rarely, only when my parents receive their salaries'
(Sabina, girl aged 12, state school).

This market was important for the children, because it was not only a source of income for some of the parents but also a source of food and clothes. It was associated with some positive memories - children felt pampered and valued as parents would sometimes buy something for them if they had money. In addition to its instrumental meaning, the market was also socially important for the girls – it was an acceptable destination outside the home where they could have some sort of entertainment beyond

their immediate neighbourhood. In fact the school and the immediate neighbourhood stayed at the centre of their social relationships and agency, given the absence of opportunities to be exposed to a wider environment. This was further reinforced by the fact that girls at this age were increasingly discouraged from accompanying their parents when visiting relatives, as discussed in chapter V.

For the children aged 12 at the private school, neighbourhood almost did not exist as a setting: *'I socialise at school only, that is why when I am at home, not at school, I get bored'* (Aibek, boy aged 12, private school). They did not have contacts in their home areas. School remained the main setting for children's actions: *'I do not have friends anywhere else, except at school. I meet up with my friends only at school'* (Ainura, girl aged 12, private school). They did not go outside, as their families refused to allow them to do so. That could be one of the reasons for them to be more occupied with various computer games and internet social networking and be bored when there was nothing else left to do. Their family contacts were also limited, as they did not have many relatives visiting them. So younger children at the private school had fewer settings to act in in comparison with state school children. It is remarkable that children growing up in deprived neighbourhoods and those coming from affluent families can share the same marginal position when it comes to the freedom of movement in public spaces. What they did not share in exercising this freedom was that children at the state school did not have a relevant space and resources, whereas those at the private school were denied access to the neighbourhood by their parents. But while the latter group of children was compensated in other ways, the former had more freedom and spontaneity to act.

7.2.4. Neighbourhood and its effect on older children's agency

Girls

An individual variation in experiencing the neighbourhood influences was present for various age groups. As Valentine (1997) suggests, parental regulations are gender, age and context based and indeed they have an important effect on the activities and social contacts of young people. As older girls at the state school were freer in terms of physical mobility than their younger counterparts, they had a greater involvement in extra activities away from their local area. However, what they faced in terms of their mobility within the neighbourhood was slightly different, as I have already discussed in chapter V about girls' relationships with their parents and brothers. Whereas younger girls were more likely to stay within the immediate neighbourhood, older girls aged 16 might have more mobility beyond it. In fact, it was the cultural gendering of the relationships of girls with the neighbourhood which seemed to be more prevalent among the state school girls (aged 16) than among the private school girls. This made neighbourhood agency and freedom of girls more restricted than their abilities to act within the home.

The older girls at the state school were not allowed to go out to hang around (or 'walk idly'), and in particular the older they were the less they were allowed to go out at night times. Girls from the state school in particular mentioned that as they got older, their parents became stricter towards their physical freedom, whereas at a younger age they were allowed to play until late. This is an example of what Philo (2000) calls 'external senses of neighbourhood': girls at the state school were more influenced by socio-cultural discourses of what they were supposed to do and to be:

'My parents are quite strict; we are not allowed to entertain. For example, one of our relatives' daughters goes out too much, does not help her mum, does not look after her younger siblings. I think it is so unpleasant to witness – especially given that she is a girl. Sometimes she runs away from home to attend parties.'

My sister and I look at each other with great surprise' (Mahabat, aged 16, state school).

This approach to bringing up a girl-child complies with the norms originating in the Kyrgyz culture discussed in previous chapters. Girls in general were not prohibited from having boyfriends, but they were not supposed to have sexual relationships before getting married. Girls and their parents contrasted their daughters as good girls from bad boys who walked in the streets at nights and who, they assumed, could represent a danger to their girls. So in this meaning, the neighbourhood is perceived as threat to girls' reputation and therefore, it contributed to the gendering of childhood as well as child agency. This is part of moral agency where the purpose of girls' ability to act was aimed at being 'proper daughters'.

Morality (as well as other social norms such as shame and honour) in the case of children at the state school was relevant to the children individually as social agents who were expected to have these characteristics and act accordingly, but morality was also relevant to the wider culture of the family, school and neighbourhood, which triggered and maintained their influence. Having lived in a more cohesive community, where people in the poor neighbourhood were more or less equal and shared similar socio-economic characteristics, children were also more likely to share the same cultural norms and values. Thus families living in this neighbourhood reproduced and maintained similar norms of behaviour, which were reinforced by their socio-economic position. Therefore, as children interacted with other children and parents who supported the same norms, they developed what was recognised as appropriate behaviour for their local area:

'I personally think it is a shame to look loose and disorganised. Just the opposite, it is so good if you present yourself as a decent looking and well behaved girl' (Jarkyn, aged 16, state school).

The study into children's mobility in some parts of the United Kingdom discovered (O'Brien et al., 2000) that older Asian girls were predominantly absent from public spaces due to their Islamic religious norms to protect the honour of girls by removing them from 'dishonourable places and spaces' (p. 4). Although there is a commonality between this cultural concern and the Kyrgyz custom followed by the parents and children at the state school, there are evident differences: Kyrgyz girls (aged 16) are not completely sheltered and excluded from public life, as they were much more mobile than one could expect. They were not totally restricted from going out and travelling long distances, but they would take precautionary measures for the night times. Many girls would go to the city centre and attend their dancing and music clubs. This means that girls and their parents were reflective agents and gave their own meanings to the cultural demands and the neighbourhood's limitations as well as opportunities.

Since neighbourhood and neighbourhood behaviour were issues for the state school, girls and boys did not passively react to the neighbourhood structuration of their agency. Cultural gendering of the discourse of childhood and its implications for child agency, which create certain social expectations of girls' behaviour in the Kyrgyz society, required from the girls agentic decisions and actions: *'I do not feel myself decisive at home, but outside and at school, I present myself decisive and confident'* (Aidana, aged 16, state school). The majority of the state school girls mentioned that they presented themselves as confident and old when they were outside as a way of ensuring their own safety: *'When you show yourself confident outside the home, then no one can tease you, no one can talk to you'* (Jarkyn, aged 16, state school). Girls' agency generated different adaptive actions to resist the neighbourhood effect, which demonstrated oppositional approaches in dealing with not only poor areas, but also

pervasive cultural frames of behaviour. *'I feel myself little at home, but older when I am outside'* (Aisuluu, aged 16, state school). Girls demonstrated that they were cultural agents who preserved their cultural script. However, they did so not as culturally programmed objects, but rather as the ones who filtered the influences of modernity and accommodated and reconciled the norms of the past which could be combined and result in the most culturally accepted and modernity-relevant behaviour.

The perceptions of neighbourhood for the girls' abilities to act at the private school were more about safety than honour and reputation: *'They (parents) always want to protect me. They think I am naïve, still little, a small child'* (Kyial, aged 16, private school). However, these girls spent more time at home anyway either because they were not allowed to go out by their parents or because they were busy with studying. Their parents seemed to be over-protective of their children and did not trust them to be social agents able to be themselves in the neighbourhood:

'My mother does not allow me to go anywhere. She empathises me, cares a lot, nurtures me and sets a high value on me'. 'I think children who work, they meet more people, their lives are more interesting, they make their own decisions and these make me think that they are older than me' (Meerim, aged 16, private school).

As a result, similarly to their younger counterparts at the private school, school was the main setting for their actions: *'School is where all my childhood has passed and is still going on'* (Erkin, aged 16, private school). Girls at the private school seemed to lack direct relationships with the neighbourhood and their agency actions were considerably restricted by their parents. At the same time girls at the state school were concerned with presenting themselves to others in the way that would portray them as not only capable and agentic, but as the ones who behave in the socially acceptable way. Although it can seem to be restrictive of girls to some degree, it also encourages girls' agency actions.

Boys

Neighbourhood played a defining role in the lives of the boys at the state school as well. They talked about drunk people wandering in the area, criminality, and also other boys who might engage in fighting with them. Boys as young as 12 years old mentioned that sometimes they had to fight with other boys over some disputes, and so did the boys aged 16. This experience was a mechanism to reinforce boys' social networking with one another and attachment to the locality:

'We, boys, sometimes we cannot deal with situations and get angry if we think something is hurting our pride, then we fight with one another', 'We fight with boys from school, some local boys or sometimes with the boys from another area' (Adyl, aged 16, state school).

The older boys of the state school spent more time outside their homes, when they had time after domestic chores. It was entirely up to them to organise their own time and the outcomes. Although they already had less parental control within the home (when fathers were not present), out of doors they had even more freedom to act and exercise their membership of social networks.

Some scholars argue that children contest 'adult space' (Emmerkamp, 2004) by spending time on their own on the street, as they set up their own rules independent of those imposed by adults. This would be the case if streets are seen primarily as places for adults. However, for the boys at the state school, being in the streets was about existing and sharing the same place with adults rather than contesting it. In general, boys at the state school appeared more dominant in their unlimited appropriation of the neighbourhood's space dimensions than girls did. The same was also true of the older children in general (though older girls were restricted at certain times). They were freer to go out once domestic work was done and parents normally did not monitor older boys, as they were 'licensed' by their parents, which according to Hillman et al. (1990) involves 'parental judgments about the degree of maturity and competence required by

their children to cope safely with the perceived dangers that lie outside the home' (p. 6). The state school boys spent their time outside every day hanging around locally with their friends (as in my view, there was little available in the area for them to do, though some children did not agree with me) and had more physical freedom than their counterparts at the private school:

'I have a particular time when I go outside, which means that at some particular time I do household chores, at another particular time I go outside. This is what I agreed with my parents, but I can go outside any time if I want to, no problem' (Aidar, aged 16, state school).

The neighbourhood meant more freedom to act for the boys than the home setting, and the opposite was true in the case of girls at the state school. The boys had more chances to acquire 'street literacy', as Cahill (2000) suggests that 'the street' is important for learning, where 'street literacy' takes place when children obtain and use knowledge in constructing the self through experiences of the local environment. In contrast with the girls, the street was an acceptable setting for boys to learn from, as it promoted their masculinity, networking and bonding.

This kind of experience did not seem relevant for the boys at the private school. They were more mobile physically because they lived closer to the city centre and had access to better infrastructure, but also because their parents had the ability of driving their children around. Nevertheless, children of both age groups at the private school were not allowed to go outside as often as they wished to and had restricted freedom similar to girls. Boys seemed to have their parents in control of their movements and they appeared to be more likely to contest 'adult space' than their counterparts at the state school. So, in contrast with the boys from the state school, the neighbourhood for the boys at the private school was a place where older boys could experience some behavioural challenges by being more exposed to the possibilities of drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes during social gatherings with their friends. Whilst this is a form

of negative agency actions in terms of their health, it is still agentic in terms of challenging parental control.

Several boys at the private school mentioned that they needed to be told when to stop either having too much fun and forgetting about studies or pushing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. This is as if children needed to be reminded of their agency purposes, because they did not fully hold personal ownership of such purposiveness which was rather imposed by their parents:

‘I know I am not serious. If there is some kind of excuse, I keep thinking that I am allowed to do everything. If the resting time has started, then it will continue for a long time’; or: ‘If I know I will be able to get away with fewer efforts, I will not stretch myself’ (Duishon, aged 16, private school).

Marat had a similar view:

‘If they (parents) let me go all four directions, they will not find me, so better if there is a control over me, but with some limits’ ‘It was summer, and I was on vacation not thinking about studies. If mum had not stopped me, the vacation time would have gone on until September’ (aged 16, private school).

This was despite the fact that the parents of the private school children exerted more control over their sons by often not allowing them to go somewhere, by phoning them to check their whereabouts, keeping them busy at school clubs etc. In the case of these boys, the neighbourhood seemed to be giving them more agency freedom than they were allowed to enjoy by their parents. In general the neighbourhood was not a setting for the girls and boys at the private school to act and their freedom to do so seemed to be even smaller than their freedom at home. These children did not have an agentic sense of locality and belonging to the local neighbourhood.

7.2.5. Kyrgyzstan as a setting

What was a common concern for all the children in both schools was the overall safety and criminality debate in the wider non-home environment. They were concerned with the rising levels of crime in the country and the growing number of drug addicts

who were often featured in reports on national TV. According to them, after the second revolution in April 2010, Bishkek city was transformed from a place which was safe for children to play in to the one where children needed to be supervised for their own safety. Children in my study felt the repercussions of the last revolution in April 2010, which particularly affected their physical mobility in a negative way:

'There are no after school-clubs at our school and I cannot travel anywhere. I mean I can travel, but my mother is scared. Nowadays there is a danger, because since 7th April 2010, my mother has not allowed me to go anywhere. The TV showed people with pistols and even now a man was caught with a pistol. Otherwise I would have gone to the clubs' (Janyl, girl aged 12, state school).

The parents of the private school children appeared to be stricter in controlling their physical freedom in general due to the social unrest that had taken place after the political turmoil in spring 2010. The children expressed their concerns about the unrest as well:

'I think we all did not like the revolutions. I do not remember the first revolution, but my mum told me about it. When the second one happened, our mum was afraid for us and we shut all the doors and windows and all slept in one bedroom... We saw all on the TV: there were many police officers walking around. Then one opened a sack with human bodies. They were all filmed with mobile phones and sent to the television without comments. It had been like this for a long time. I remember all the parents came to school to pick up their children and there were many policemen here as well' (Asel, girl aged 12, private school).

Some girls were not allowed to go outside far from their homes after the revolutionary events, as their parents would never allow them to do so until they grow older.

But the revolution was an event which also created emotional memories:

'I was very upset. Innocent people died, fathers died and children were left orphans. I was really upset, because women and mothers died' (Aida, girl aged 16, state school).

Some of the children were more worried about their future:

'I am worried about the future from time to time. For example, the event on 7th April 2010 – I am afraid of such events. Even now there are some little events here and there. I am scared that we would not survive until year 11, when we

finish school. That is all that I am scared of, nothing else' (Nurzat, girl aged 12, state school).

It is essential to acknowledge that structural constraints on children were felt beyond their families and neighbourhoods. Although children are away from the political arena and high level decision making, this has a direct effect on children, as it does on adults. Such an acknowledgement of the role played by broader economic and socio-political factors calls for a more progressive conceptualisation of place or settings that links the global and local for a better understanding of children's agency experiences. This reinforces the argument that children exist in the here and now and that their lives are not out of touch with reality, but are very much located in the present.

Interestingly, the revolution created sad and frightening memories particularly among younger girls, while older children at the private school felt more ashamed of being associated with their own country and wished not to belong to their motherland. So if the children at the state school felt quite positive about their country (though they accepted that there were things in need of improvement) and they wanted to help the people, their older counterparts at the private school were embarrassed about living in Kyrgyzstan, while the younger girls were frightened. Children at the state school were not particularly positive about the revolution, but they were not negative in comparison with the children at the private school, whose ambitions and plans were predominantly more associated with going abroad. So a country as a setting generated different agency purposes for children at the state and private school, the future outcomes of which are also more likely to vary between them.

7.3. Neighbourhood activities and child agency

7.3.1. Leisure time

Within existing research relating to children's use of outdoors spaces and geographies, contemporary children are argued to spend less time outside playing in the streets and have lost their childhood and freedom 'to be children'. Some argue that this is a 'new type of childhood' (Karsten, 2005), which is about the Western world. While in the past children tended to play outside more and their experience was characterised as 'outdoor childhood', nowadays childhood can be classified into at least three different groups: as outdoor children (who play outside almost every day), indoor children (who rarely play outside and if so only for short periods) and children of the 'backseat' generation or 'escorted children' (Karsten, 2005, pp. 284-285). In this study, children at the private school (especially young ones from both genders) were more similar to the third group, who, according to Karsten, are those '...whose time-space behaviour is characterised primarily by adult-organised children's activities' (p. 286). Backseat and indoor children at the private school were examples of a stark change from the time when their parents were children themselves, who spent their childhood mainly outside or in other public places.

A number of the children from the private school played only at school and were occupied with different after school clubs. Their abilities to act were escorted by their parents similar to their time-space behaviour, which left them little freedom for agency. Children had a more structured way of living outside the school, attending more formal after-school activities and even having predetermined leisure activities. Furthermore, even the school closely monitored every child's learning achievements and provided largely supervised time and space to learn, to do their homework at school and to have consultations with teachers if required. In fact they were handed from school to home, from home to school. These children had the characteristics of indoor children who played outside very seldom and instead spent more time with home-based leisure

technology such as computer games, consoles, etc. Children at the private school seemed to have little freedom within home and neighbourhood settings, but were likely to have more freedom in the virtual space where they could build networks, 'bridge' and 'link' with other children.

According to Valentine and Holloway (1999), children's use of information and communication technologies at home increases their use of their own spaces within the home separate from their parents. As discussed previously, children at the private school did not use their home as a setting to make their own contributions as the children at the state school did, but instead their agency was directed at an individualised activity, which was entertainment. Such a suggestion can make one think about the possible increase of individualisation of children's spaces at home (Philo, 2000) for those at the private school, whereas the state school children by contrast shared highly compressed spaces with their families. This seems to add to the argument that the family's material status is responsible for the construction and re-construction of divergent spatial relationships among parents and children.

In general, the majority of children at the private school had a more consumerist attitude to their local area and the city in general. Firstly, they were the consumers of a good quality education. But although none of these children worked for money (in contrast to the state school children), they seemed to be the consumers of lifestyles, fashions, sports and music, all associated with different brands and prices. In addition, another area of consumerist behaviour emerged with regard to entertainment activities. The city centre was the focal point of entertainment activities to which the private school children sometimes went together. Children aged 12 at the private school tended to have more collective gatherings in the city's entertainment centres e.g. cinema, bowling, café etc., though they were not allowed to go outside their homes on their own.

Only one boy among all the children of the same age group was able to play outside his home and even travel by bus to other parts of the city, while the majority were usually escorted from one place to another by parents or the school bus. In fact, children at the private school did not use public transport for various reasons: *'Now there are so many microbes in public buses; all people sit and touch these handles, then all get sick, cough'* (Salkyn, girl aged 16, private school). Children's common place of socialising was their school setting.

For the 'backseat generation' children at the private school, their own neighbourhood was only a small space and so was their country. Some of them mentioned that they got bored in Bishkek, as there were not enough things to entertain them, although in practice they had more opportunities to be entertained than the state school children. This boredom was probably a result of their broader contacts with foreign countries such as Turkey, Kazakhstan, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, China etc. These were the countries where they either had been or had specific plans to visit (i.e. to move to live there, to study, to visit close relatives, medical or business reasons etc.). In contrast, children at the state school did not always have a chance of going somewhere within the country: *'I wish I could go somewhere with my friends...to the mountains just outside Bishkek'* (Aidin, boy aged 12, state school).

Although these children were actively engaged in the local neighbourhood, their freedom and actions only remained within the scope of the locality of home, the street, school and the city centre. Children at the private school had very little engagement with the home, even less with the street, but the scope of their actions was wider, further and more diverse including virtual and actual space. Although they were "backseat generation", whose time-space behaviour was primarily organised by their parents/adults, they had the virtual environment for their agency actions and freedom.

However, despite all the indoor and outdoor entertainment and learning activities, half the boys and girls at the private school mentioned that they had to deal with boredom at home and laziness. Children seemed to be troubled with being bored, which meant *'having nothing to do, walking idly, wanting to go to sleep earlier'* (Saadat, girl aged 12, private school). Nazgul talked about her life as boredom in the way that it was always the same:

'I like it when life is interesting, when you have friends, like your school, go to many after school clubs and have fun and entertainments' (girl aged 12, private school);

Older girls had the same problem:

'Sometimes there is a problem of the monotony of life and I would like some kind of diversity. Once I talked to my mum about it and she said some people have an even more boring life. She said I am young and will understand the full life when I get older' (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school).

This could be due to the fact that children at the private school did not have regular chances of *'being in touch with the real world'*, as one of them (Erkin, girl aged 16) formulated it. In particular, Erkin said: *'At the state school, children are more in touch with real life. We are under constant control'*. It seems that parental control, activities organised and monitored by parents, a lack of freedom to act at the home and non-home environment, limited social contacts, etc. put children in a vacuum, which could not be compensated with their virtual freedom:

'I haven't got any new experiences, I have always been studying at this school, I do not know what it is like to be at a different place and what a different place is' (Tinatin, girl aged 16, private school).

Girls at the private school agreed that they would like new experiences in their lives in addition to their home and school: *'I have never studied at another school, only at this place, so I would like to gain some new experience'* (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school). Consequently, they lacked opportunities to demonstrate their own agency and

autonomy given their highly adult structured and controlled lives (Francis and Lorenzo, 2006).

The concept of leisure time was interpreted and experienced in different ways by the children of the two schools. At the state school, leisure time did not seem to be an entertaining activity and did not stand out as something separate from what children did. In general, leisure time was more available to the private school children and meant some kind of entertainment. In the case of the state children, the issue of leisure time was about structural obstacles in terms of absence of physical tools, material resources and time. Free time in the case of the state school was approached and tackled in a different way. The children seemed to be in control of what they wanted to do when they were free. Although children did not possess freedom of resources for active leisure, they had more agency freedom of using their time and engaging themselves in various activities.

Despite having less or no organised leisure centres in the poor neighbourhood, children living there seemed to have an informal array of places to explore, which Hart suggests (1979), are settings for ‘autonomous explorations’:

‘When there is no coal to collect, then I hang around with my friends, we just walk, chat and wander around...simply everywhere we want. This is our area and we know it very well’ (Almaz, boy aged 16, state school).

Many of them had sufficient activities as well as strong commitment to filling their time with something useful. Some girls and boys alike were talking about their dislike of being lazy and idle and said that watching TV made them bored:

‘If I had more time, I would have spent more time cooking, chopping firewood and preparing fire at home. I do not waste time in vain. I sometimes watch television... One hour, I do not watch more than that, as I am not interested. I am more interested in household work. I will need these skills’ (Adyl, boy aged 12, state school).

Many children at the private school often mentioned the words ‘*lazy*’, ‘*my laziness*’, ‘*I am lazy*’ and etc. Instead of being lazy and idle, children at the state school regularly did many domestic chores of different kinds:

‘I get bored from doing nothing. Sometimes I watch television, but it can be boring and then I do homework all the time after school, clean the house and do some extra household work’ (Maksat, boy aged 12, state school).

This was agency purposiveness to fill their time with home-based activities, which were quite structured and rigid, but they were at the children’s own discretion.

Younger children had to be more creative to be able to enjoy playing, whereas older ones were freer. Older boys aged 16 at the state school were free to go out whenever they had time and they were more likely to wander outside with their friends, investigate the area and maintain their social networks of friends. The boys aged 12 at the state school were very enthusiastic about playing football on the pitch behind the school as well as close to their homes. A couple of boys wanted to be international football players and earn money to help their parents, relatives, but also the country and especially disabled children. In fact, for the younger boys the neighbourhood was a place to exert their agency by finding time and place to play while having increased responsibilities at home. Here spatial structure was winning out over the cultural norms (e.g. not playing as children got older) thanks to the boys’ agentic manoeuvres to find their own space in the wider area. It allowed them an additional parallel process of peer socialising initiated by children outside adult supervision and control.

Football was the boys’ arena to reveal their collective agency, to unite as a team and to compete with other teams. The growing collective agency of the boys put a premium on the team’s collective ability to succeed as football players. In the language of Bandura (2000), these are the children’s shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired agency outcomes ‘which are a key ingredient of collective agency’ (p.

75). Boys said that they did not imagine they could beat the strongest team not only at their school but the one which has beaten several other teams outside the school. The boys reported learning how to play as a team - i.e. tackle and pass the ball to one another as trustworthy players.

Moreover, children engaged in collective learning through television, DVDs, their brothers who also played football and in practical training outside school. As their collective agency unfolded, boys set up a local tournament among the school teams and played for awards in the form of lemonade: *'We always used to lose in football. We lost 14 bottles of lemonade in the past.'* (Dastan, boy aged 12, state school). Boys negotiated with the local shop to get bottles of lemonade in credit and they paid their debt when they had money: *'We would take lemonade on credit, and pay later when we would all collect money'* (Murat, boy aged 12, state school). Although the poor neighbourhood did not provide children with resources for leisure and entertainment of the same scope and form as in the case of children at the private school, the former group of children still had more freedom to wander and explore the setting, to combine their leisure and work and be active agents of their small locality. The latter group had more resources in actual and virtual terms, but still did not possess freedom to agentially engage with the setting and found themselves isolated in the big locality.

7.4. School as a setting and child agency

The following section takes the institution of school as one of the key everyday settings where children spent most of their time and explores possible implications of children's experience of school as agency actions. School has an obvious effect on 'children's self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the extent to which they feel they have some control over their lives' (Morrow, 1999a, pp. 758-759). As Morrow suggests, school enhances children's 'institutional cultural capital' and may have various effects on

emotional wellbeing, including a negative one if they are not doing well academically or have problems with their peers. Schooling can be deeply influential in children's formation of their own identities as well as those of their friends (Walker, 2005). It is also argued that schooling should equip people with the capabilities to pursue opportunities they value and 'be good' (Levinson and Holland, 1996).

The relationship between children and their school environment is not straightforward. For the last several decades, the sociology of education has been dominated by two main approaches: 'structuralist' and 'interpretive'. As the names hint, the former acknowledges the structural constraints without recognising agency sufficiently, whereas the latter exaggerates the role of agency without enough acknowledgement of structural constraints. There have been attempts to reconcile the structure-agency dualism and integrate macro and micro levels (Hargreaves, 1984; 1985). In fact, looking at children within the school environment is interesting. School is mainly considered to be a place created by adults for children, where children are more or less dictated by school curricular and behavioural rules, though it is predominantly meant to be a place for them. Children can meet and interact with other children at school, but at the same time they stay under the supervision of adults (other than their parents). Although school enables children to explore being agents in their own environment, it is also a context for structural forces to intervene in children's spaces.

All the children in this study went to school and lived with their families. Therefore the main activities that they engaged in were focused at school and at home. Schools played a key role for all children at both schools not only in their educational capacity but also as facilities of their social networking. The schools had certain differences in the way they acted as a setting for child agency. Attending school was more of an effort for children from the poor neighbourhood. As discussed in chapter

III, children in poor areas of Bishkek were more likely to miss school or not to attend regularly:

'My best friends, who are 15, 16 and 17 years old, stopped coming to school some time ago. They were in year 7 and 8, when they started working and could not study due to their family circumstances, but it was their own decision to quit school' (Akyl, boy aged 16, state school).

Although education at state schools is officially free in Kyrgyzstan, parents still have to pay some form of contribution towards school renovations, school materials including stationery and text books etc. Therefore, deteriorating access to education in Kyrgyzstan is income related (Yarkova et al., 2004) and many parents report that the cost of schooling is a barrier, as well as a lack of financial means to buy their children decent clothing for school, which generates humiliation and shame (Falkingham and Ibragimova, 2005). In parents' evenings at the state school, money was the main issue for parents to discuss, which generated hot debates and arguments, as some parents were very unhappy with the extra financial costs:

'My salary is 3000 Som (i.e. GBP40). Then I give money for school for three children, then I buy a sack of flour and food oil. How are we supposed to survive? I wish the government could exempt us from paying for schooling' (Burulkan, mother 35, state school).

Another major difference between the schools and their role as settings for child agency was the quality of education they provided. Although education is argued to expand one's capabilities and give one more freedoms in future (Saito, 2003), the issues of what kind of educational conditions are available to certain children (e.g. teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment) and to what extent these conditions promote successful and confident learner identities should be taken into account.

As discussed in chapter IV on the socio-economic background on Kyrgyzstan, the two schools were situated at opposite ends of the scale in terms of the quality of education provided. Children living in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to study in

poor schools (Wacquant, 1996), as poor neighbourhood and poor schools reinforce each other's quality. For example, as discussed further, children in the poor neighbourhood had poor quality after school clubs with drunken teachers. As Jencks and Mayer (1990) claim, poor neighbourhoods negatively affect the ability of the school to recruit good teachers, whereas less educated parents constrained with financial problems are not well positioned enough to claim a better education for their children. During my visits to the private school, I never saw any teacher absent or children spending time doing nothing or playing outside.

At the state school, the picture was different. On many occasions children were in the classroom with no teacher and this would happen several times a day. According to children, their teacher often called in sick and would not come to school, and during some of the lessons they did not learn but collected garbage outside the school. This was the reason for parents to compensate for the gap in their children's schooling with school clubs.

Poor quality schooling appears even less cost-effective when one considers that in Bishkek's case it still involved major financial sacrifices on behalf of the families and the few classes children ended up regularly attending did not relate to the local labour market. Such a system of widely divergent qualities of education exacerbates social and economic disparities between the two groups of children (Boyden et al., 2003). The state school children seemed to be attending school rather than learning, while private school children benefited academically from their schooling. The agency actions of children at the state school did not seem to be solely focused on learning purposes, as they were exerting their agency at the setting of school as students in general, who could study, clean the area, play, socialise etc. The actions of children at the private school were primarily directed at learning/studying, and their actions at the school as a setting in

general were limited. In other words, given the primary purpose of school, it was more important as a *setting* for the state school children, whereas for the private school children the more important was the *action* of learning within the same setting. Consequently, this seemed to generate various agency outcomes for children and for their future.

7.4.1. School activities and child agency

Extra clubs

Extra school clubs were one of the activities for children as agentic learners. Parents of the state school children did their best to send their children to extra clubs, although cost was an issue:

‘I wanted to do figure-skating, but first my parents said we did not have money. I said I really wanted to go, then my mother said I could go, because I had a strong desire, then we found money’ (Aisuluu, girl aged 16, state school).

Parents tended to tailor some money for their children’s extra-curricular interest and used it at good financial times. For example, Aisuluu added that her parents sent her to the dancing club, although she did not want to, because her family had money that time and her parents wanted to use the opportunity. In some cases, children reported that the tutors in the clubs would come to school drunk and conduct lessons. But at the time of the study there was only one class running for children, which none of the children interviewed attended.

Due to the absence of extra-curricular activities in general and their poor quality in particular, parents and children at the state school had to look for activities in other areas, which children found difficult:

‘I used to attend an extra-curriculum club until our teacher left. It was my own desire to go and my parents supported me. But it was located far from here, very far. I used to travel there by bus in early morning hours. Winters were especially bad and made me suffer’ (Janyl, girl aged 12, state school).

This is an example of how parents and children made choices and took decisions despite the constraints they faced (Furstenberg et al., 1999). One of the girls reported that she could not travel at all and therefore was completely excluded from any clubs outside their neighbourhood: *'I like dancing and would love to attend a class, but I cannot travel because of travel sickness. But my friends also do not go anywhere'* (Aida, girl aged 16, state school). The majority of families did not have own transport and therefore had to rely on public transport. Partially for these reasons, the younger girls seemed to be locked up in their neighbourhood without much access to the city centre and other social activities. Similarly, younger boys aged 12 at the state school also complained about a lack of clubs for them locally, but the issue for them was not travelling per se, but more about managing time for clubs apart from doing chores.

Children at the private school in contrast had only very positive reflections on their extra activities, which were numerous per child, but also represented a wide range of interests e.g. sports, dancing, languages, academic subjects, drawing, music etc. The school also provided separate specialised music classes, for example, guitar, piano, choir etc. However, children I interviewed only attended a guitar class locally at school, as they thought that other clubs were not specialised and professional enough, so they chose better ones outside their school. For some, these outside clubs were a way to meet more people away from their ordinary school and family circle:

'These clubs and languages centres make my life interesting. I meet new people; every club, every centre is about new people. I have completed all the courses in one language centre, then moved to another one' (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school).

Although children's agency actions in high income families were more circumscribed by their parents, financial resources gave them the ability to choose in contrast with the children at the state school who did not have much choice, but tried to choose, though

financial constraints clearly bounded children's agency actions and freedom of extra learning.

What is agency in schooling?

Being educated is well recognised as an intrinsic capability for children. It helps to ensure that children can leave school with the prospect of being employed or earning sufficient income and therefore be a part of society and go about without shame. Dreze and Sen (1995) recognise the intrinsic and instrumental importance of being educated - i.e. it is an important functioning in itself, with a direct impact on children's capabilities as well as on wider society. Education enhances the efficacy of other capabilities such as to be healthy, to meet sanitation requirements, to earn more money, to enjoy better life chances, to develop critical intelligence, social awareness, citizenship, etc. and therefore have impact on popular opinions.

At first sight, children at the private school seemed to be more agentic in learning as they spent more time at school, had better quality education, enjoyed higher learning achievements and studying was their main life activity and agency purposiveness:

'I study, study, study, as I cannot help studying. And I want to do everything well and to be the best in everything. I cannot do something bad, and that is why I spend so much time studying, so that it even harmed my health' (Salkyn, girl aged 16, private school)

But sometimes children found it stressful

'I try, I study a lot, but sometimes I just wish to quit everything and go for a walk with friends who do not go to any clubs, have no more learning except school and no more homework except school work. Then I simply wish to relax and have fun as I want' (Kyial, girl aged 16, private school):.

According to Li (2006), an agentic person in learning '...is one who plans for future learning activities, anticipates consequences (e.g., setbacks), adjusts his or her course of action (e.g., using strategies to overcome difficulties), in order to achieve his or her

learning goals' (p. 484): *'I am a perfectionist at studies. I need everything to be perfect. And if I set a goal for myself, then I will definitely achieve it'* (Salkyn, girl aged 16, private school). In other words, learning is considered the main action and the central focus for agency. However, although children at the private school were more agentic in what Bandura (2000) calls 'personal agency' (cited in Li, 2006), and directly in schooling, they still lagged behind on other aspects of agency. In particular, these children lacked 'social agency', which means learning through interdependence and cooperation or working with peers (Wentzel, 2004; Bandura, 2000). This is evident in the way older girls competed with one another and in the purposes they set for themselves aimed at individual academic success and superiority above other classmates. This type of personal agency excludes providing support to other students as a purpose, because its actions are aimed primarily towards the agent becoming the best among all.

In contrast, children in both year groups at the state school were more socially agentic in helping and supporting one another: *'We have agreed to support one another and unite all together to improve our image at school. We decided not to quarrel and to have solidarity'* (Aisha, girl aged 12, state school). More of this agency action will be discussed in the next chapter, about the relationships of children within the non-home environment. However, this is not to say that state school children lacked personal agency in studying. In the words of one of the girls, to study properly is about not being shamed for low academic achievements:

'It is very important for me to study well. For example, there are girls who have 'C' marks in some subjects, but for me it is shameful. It is a shame to study badly. Then you hear bad comments from the teacher. If I cannot understand when she is explaining a new topic, I feel bad as if I am not clever enough' (Janyl, girl aged 12, state school).

Kyrgyz children's agency in schooling was both personal and social, with varied expressions between the schools. What was common for both schools, but more predominant in the state school, was that school performance was seen by children as a way to please their parents, as well as to be rewarded (or punished in case of bad performances): *'Education is important to make my parents happy if I study well'* (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school). Therefore the boys as well as girls aged 12 and 16 had selective approaches to sharing any news of bad marks with their parents, so that they did not get angry with them. Not only did they not tell their parents about lower marks, but they also took pains to improve them and followed up their own actions:

'I had all 'A' in every subject last term, but this term I have one 'B'. I have tried hard to improve it, but could not, though I spent more time doing homework. However, I will continue making efforts and I will finally get 'A' again in all subjects' (Murat, boy aged 12, state school).

In the case of the private school, studying well for children of both ages was about meeting expectations:

'Very hard to study, lots of academic burden, lots of problems. I try not to disappoint my parents, not let them down, so sometimes I get emotionally exhausted' (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school).

At the same time, girls aged 16 at the private school, who tended to compete with one another and lacked the social agency of cooperation, expressed more extrinsic reasoning for being more motivated by their own images:

'I know I am not the best. I am not the best at school, in my class, I am not as joyful like others, I am not sociable like others, I am not beautiful like other girls in my class' (Kyial, girl aged 16, private school).

In comparison with them, girls at the state school were similarly concerned about their images as girls and daughters, but their extrinsic motives were about maintaining family honour instead of being concerned with competition among their schoolmates. For them schooling was not only about them, their image, their performance, but an activity whose negative outcomes would reflect on the image of the entire family.

What was in common between all the children was that all parents and children attached high importance to school and university education. They believed that good education would be more likely to give their children better outcomes. Parents often sermonised about the vital importance of education. One of the boys mentioned what his carer regularly said: *'Study well to be able to look after your soul'* (Adyl, boy aged 16, state school). The entire family, including elder siblings who were not at school any more, supported their younger siblings who were still studying at school and created space and time for them:

'My brother and elder sister often release me from household work and even lock me in a room to study. Then I study all the time. I would have studied myself without being locked in, as I like reading' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

All the children said that their parents (as well as themselves) got very upset when they had bad marks at school and how they lose the desire to study as a result: *'One of my marks was 'C' last term, but I did not tell my parents...just did not want to upset them'* (Aisha, girl aged 12, state school).

Children also cherished their schooling possibilities and realised their importance:

'When I grow up, I would like to be Minister of Health, I want to be in charge, I am interested in this subject. But I know I should study to achieve it and I will do so.' And he also said: *'It is useful to study well. You will end up in good positions'* (Murat, boy aged 12, state school).

Parents at the state school tried to provide children with everything they needed for schooling, though some of them, who were growing up in a household where there was no or limited space for doing their homework, no books or other learning materials, might have made slower progress:

'I keep all my books in boxes, so they do not get mixed up. I usually put them up high so my younger siblings cannot reach them. I try to be well-organised and study well' (Nurzat, girl aged 12, state school).

However, these negative effects of family disadvantages were to some extent counteracted by children's positive and agentic attitude to education (and their belief in the role of education for future outcomes for them and for the wider family). Schooling was an element of agency purposiveness for all the children at both schools and they expressed their agency actions by determining their objectives for learning, not upsetting parents with bad marks and supporting one another (state school), competing and becoming the best (private school). However, children at the state school had limited resources and poorer quality schooling to ensure their full active learning agency in comparison with their rich counterparts. Therefore school as a setting promoted different types of agency purposes and freedom and moreover is likely to produce contrasting agency outcomes for the children from the two schools.

Schooling as future oriented agency

As Sen argues, 'the main argument for compulsory education is that it will give the child when grown up much more freedom and, therefore, the educational argument is a very future oriented argument' (Sen's response in the interview with Saito on 2 March, 2001, cited in Saito, 2003, p. 27). Kyrgyz children demonstrated their extrinsic motivations for good careers and personal achievements through learning. For them (and for their parents), education was recognised as a means to ensure better job prospects and an increased earning capacity which was vital for providing for their parents and their own families in the future. Children at the state school had more social agency in the form of intrinsic agency goals. In particular, as Deci and Ryan (1985) determine, these are an agency purposiveness based on people's inherent values such as personal growth, interest, social connection and community contribution:

'I believe if I study well and get a good education, then I will achieve what I want. I would like to buy a house and bring my mother and grandmother to live there' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

Aida's ambition was also similarly intrinsic: *'I want to enter University and serve people as a doctor or a teacher'* (Aida, girl aged 12, state school). The relevant literature acknowledges the role of the family and parental aspirations as key to the academic success of their children and their choice of higher education (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). For some children at the state school, obtaining a University degree was about filling a gap that parents could not fill, and fulfilling aspirations they could not reach:

'I would like to study medicine. This is my plan. My mother went to the medical college, but had to stay at home to take care of her elder sisters when they became pregnant. So I want to continue and complete what my mother could not do' (Aisha, girl aged 12, state school).

In contrast with the state school, children at the private school, being more agentic at learning, demonstrated such agency aimed at long-term change, otherwise known as 'strategies' (e.g. Jeffrey, 2011; Honwana, 2005): *'I want to get education to become educated, as I may need it in future'* (Ulan, boy aged 12, private school). They shared their long-term planning for the future in terms of education, employment, career and family and had more personal purposiveness targeted at their own success:

'I know girls, even ordinary girls succeed abroad, they realise themselves. So I have the same kind of determination to get such a good life and to improve my life. I think in Kyrgyzstan I do not have enough perspectives, so I need to leave.' (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school).

They clearly and confidently saw themselves as continuing their education and succeeding in the future thanks to their higher educational background. This whole ambition largely relates to material consideration, as it may well be that this confidence stems from the fact that their parents were wealthy enough to support them in living and studying abroad.

As they said, they did not see themselves not studying at the University.

Children at the private school, in general being more agentic at learning and schooling, were seen by their parents as more 'becoming' in the future than 'being' now. Children often mentioned how they want 'to be successful' (as opposed to evidence for other research studies in which children only want 'to be something'): *'I want to finish school earlier to leave more time for career development and becoming successful'* (Erkin, girl aged 16, private school). This is a demonstration of children's individual agency for their own purposiveness, which is in compliance with their competitiveness and their extrinsic reasons, as discussed earlier. Therefore, they are probably more likely to progress to higher education as they invest now more in their future.

However, whether such educational choices and ambitions as well as career pathways are achievable for certain children from the state school is an issue. Girls and boys aged 16 at the state school, almost all of them, wanted to leave school after year 9, which is the last year of compulsory schooling. They were motivated to leave school earlier to be able to start college and go for higher education and cut their time at school in order to start working earlier. Given their financial constraints, some children were likely to start working as soon as they could, when the level of their education permits this.

Nevertheless, children from the state school often mentioned that their parents were working to be able to send them to the university and even those spending years outside of Kyrgyzstan were ready to spend the money they made through such hard work on their children's higher education. When it comes to education, it clearly becomes more future-oriented and is more likely to benefit the children from the private school. This is because material circumstances are key in thickening or thinning agency freedom and outcomes. The question is to what extent young people's ambitions could

be mediated by their agentic commitment and restricted by the (limited) opportunities available for them.

7.5. Conclusion

The previous empirical chapters concluded that children's everyday life and child agency were shaped directly by parents and their attitude to their children based on their age, gender and birth order. In this chapter, it has emerged that child agency was also constructed spatially, but settings weighed differently in children's routines. The analysis goes beyond an assumption that individual children are only influenced by family structure and school, and gives an account of the broader social context, such as friends, social networks, and out-of-school activities such as paid work and children's activities in their communities. It also demonstrates the influence of parents on children's lives beyond the home environment.

Although some academic debates on the importance of neighbourhood effects (Bauder, 2002) argue that the inhabitants themselves are also the ones who affect the neighbourhood (Martin, 2003), the situation seemed to vary among the children. Children, especially the boys at the state school, were part of social interactions within the neighbourhood, including interactions among the groups of children and with other adults. Children at the state school, particularly older ones aged 16 and boys, had a stronger sense of community within their neighbourhood. Parental control over children's mobility can be assumed to get relaxed as children get older, but in the situation of boys at the private school, parental supervision seems to remain strict. Boys and girls aged 12 and 16 in general at the private school were not allowed to go outside as often as they would wish and their parents had active involvement in supervising their activities out of home. This caused children to feel boredom and isolation, desire to learn new skills, to get new experiences i.e. to be more agentic. Although these children

had more freedom of agency in terms of financial and physical resources (games, computers, etc.), their freedom from parents was very limited and negatively affected their agency actions and freedom in their neighbourhood. The only setting where children could have more freedom to act was school and schooling/learning/studying was their main agency action. Although they shared the importance of education with their counterparts at the state school, the purpose of agency at the private school as a setting was to compete and an action of learning was rather individual. School in their case served its primary function and children were not seen as able to take actions at school other than studying.

Gender and age differences in terms of neighbourhood agency were more visible in the case of the state school. If older boys enjoyed increased freedom and multiple forms of interactions with the neighbourhood and even younger children were engaged in outdoor play, girls had less interaction with the neighbourhood as they were constrained by time and needed to apply a different agency identity to safeguard themselves and maintain their image for those outside their home. Girls' actions in the neighbourhood were subject to public eye and so was their studying. The physical mobility of all the girls, especially older ones, was circumscribed by issues of personal responsibility for collective honour. The younger girls at the state school were affected by a lack of facilities and quality educational centres, which made children retreat to their homes, and/or immediate neighbourhood. Here age and gender, as well as the economic status of the neighbourhood appeared to be strong variables in explaining how child agency was structured by neighbourhood. However, it would be fitting to observe that influences went both ways, especially in the case of the state school children: children appeared to be affecting the places and places affecting children by presenting them with challenges as well as opportunities to be agents.

The size of neighbourhood in use by the children at the private school was wider than that of the state school children, but they did not situate themselves with their home (as already discussed in chapter VI), the neighbourhood and sometimes not even with the country. Children at the private school were more agentic in seeking ways to entertain themselves. Their leisure time and schooling as well as extra-curricular learning were markedly more adult-structured in comparison with those of the state school children, who seemed to be more active agents in their own spaces than the children at the private school. Understanding how the state school children constructed their space was crucial to understanding their positive attitude to their relatively disadvantaged neighbourhood, which they liked and where they made friends and lived. There are good reasons to emphasise the spatial variations in the quality of schools and activities available for children in two neighbourhoods.

It has also emerged that private school children seem to be more agentic in the future than now (meaning that what they are doing now will enhance their future agency), whereas the state school children, though being more able to act now, will be likely to be less agentic in the future. This qualitative enquiry has generated further academic interest about the temporal aspect of human agency and more research is needed into how to maximise meaningful choices available to children and young people regardless of their material background. This only adds to the argument that child agency and childhood are not only social and cultural construct, but is also shaped by economic circumstances. The next chapter will discuss how children from the two schools built their social relationships within the non-home environment and how they affected their ability to act.

CHAPTER VIII CHILD AGENCY AND NON-HOME ENVIRONMENT (NEIGHBOURHOOD): RELATIONSHIPS

8.1. Introduction

In earlier empirical chapters, I have dealt with child agency in the home environment with regard to children's relationships and activities within the home. I have put forward the argument that child agency is experienced in relation to multiple settings and is not expressed in a single form. In particular, children claimed that their abilities to act were different at home and school, as well as outside those two. This chapter will continue to discuss children's experiences of child agency at the two schools from the perspective of a non-home environment. The non-home environment has been selected as a separate collection of settings (school and neighbourhood) for the formation of child agency, as they emerged during the initial group discussions with children as being important settings in their lives (alongside home).

The previous chapters demonstrated that children were agents in terms of taking action in their homes depending on their age, gender and material circumstances. Children's ability to act within the home environment was largely influenced by the relationships that they developed with their parents and other family members - a common theme for both schools. The previous chapter discussed the scope and meanings of non-home settings for child agency actions such as schooling and school clubs, leisure activities and playing. This chapter will build on the previous one in the way that the argument of child agency being shaped by material circumstances will be further expanded by exploring the differences and similarities of agency expression through children's relationships at school and in the neighbourhood.

Children in this study had multiple relationships in different settings and multiple ways in which to exercise their abilities to act. Their interactions with others

affected their agency, while their agency affected their multiple relationships. Although the freedom of agency that children enjoyed depended on their structural location in terms of settings, and settings condition the agentic actions, their agency purposes were still determined by the children themselves. The material status of the families that the children were from affected their abilities to act and therefore children's experience of their agency constituted several aspects of differentiation among the two schools. Substantially different patterns of child agency components were constructed at schools and in the wider neighbourhood among the families of different socio-economic statuses.

Child agency possesses a problematic in the way it is conceptualised as being specific to different settings. Consequently child agency cannot be considered in isolation in its conceptual autonomy, but instead should be the direct focus of the analysis through the perspective of settings. This is not to say that children's agency is totally circumscribed by settings, but to acknowledge that child agency needs to be given a meaning which is embedded in specific settings and also in the agent's own role in determining its content, but most importantly is shaped by economic circumstances.

8.2. Child agency and non-home environment

In the previous chapter on the specificity of children's activities in the non-home environment, children demonstrated their neighbourhood-related agency by engaging in a variety of scope and space-appropriating activities and networking and contributing to the development of 'social capital' among themselves and others (Weller and Bruegel, 2009; Morrow, 1999a). Settings are important for children's agency, but one could also talk about child agency's effects on settings, here the neighbourhood in particular. An involvement with the neighbourhood tended to support the collective and was focused on maintaining networks of friends, classmates, neighbours, siblings, boys, girls, etc.

Consequently, children acted individually, but their ability to act was determined by collective agency purposiveness and outcomes. Such neighborhood interactions were more evident among the children at the state school, whereas children at the private school had to deal with aftermath of parents' excessive control. As it is sometimes argued, agency is always bounded (Shanahan, 2000), children from the private school experienced rigid control of their freedom to act within both home and non-home environments.

Consequently, children at the private school were missing out as a result and therefore they were not active at what Edwards (2006) calls 'co-agency', or 'relational agency', when agents' relationships with other people, especially their peer groups, represent an important social context (Magnusson and Stattin, 1998). Despite their limited and fragmented contacts with the neighbourhood, the private school children perceived themselves as belonging to the neighbourhood larger than the area they lived in (according to them it was not 'big' enough). However, their lived experience of neighbourhood was in practice much smaller than that of the state school children (except the virtual dimension). There was a feeling of being in a big neighbourhood such as the school, but situated in a small space such as the capital city – Bishkek. In other words, they were 'big' agents of 'a small' space living under the restricted freedom allowed by their parents.

Conversely, children at the state school were more active and freer in terms of the more unrestricted control of their parents, and their agency in the non-home environment was more complex, with multiple relationships. Children from the state school seemed to have a greater attachment to the neighbourhood they lived in, as that was the place in which their school was situated, their friends lived and their own houses were located. Although the agency of the children in the state school mainly resided in

acts of survival, they still acquired new skills, social connections, links and experiences through paid work, play, friendship and schooling. Boys in particular seemed to have social and community networks as young members of the neighbourhood.

Children were adept at negotiating their own neighbourhood spaces and images, and their gender was an important factor in their chosen strategies. Children's capacity to establish themselves in the local neighbourhood was linked to their sense of spatial security and honour (for the girls at the state school) and learning (for the girls at the private school). In general, the neighbourhood with regard to the boys and girls aged 16 seems to be influential for child agency in terms of hindering to some extent girls' socialising and physical freedom, but at the same time promoting social agency among the boys. Cultural norms and demands of girls remained important outside the home, and cultural structuration went beyond the micro-site of the family households. It is this non-home environment, where children developed the relationships which affected their agency, which is discussed below.

8.3. Child agency and relationships in non-home neighbourhood

8.3.1. Friends and peers in the neighbourhood

Although the area where the state school was situated was poor in terms of services on offer for the local people, including children, it provided them with a sense of connection to the neighbourhood and of collective unity among the children themselves, their families and the school. Children developed relationships based on reciprocity and trust among themselves, but also among other inhabitants of the neighbourhood and had capacities to collectively achieve outcomes of mutual benefit (Lochner et al., 1999). Some of the examples were when children cooperated with other people when gathering coal, when they rendered financial help to one another, sold

lemonade on credit, supported their own tutor group etc. Their relationships were a resource for agency action, which may lead to a broad range of outcomes. Therefore these children were more likely to have bonding social relationships ‘to get by’ (Dürschmidt et al., 2010).

As one study shows schools in poor neighbourhoods are more likely to provide low quality education (i.e. quality of teaching - see Lupton, 2005), but these schools tend to do better on certain aspects of children’s lives than schools in better-off neighbourhoods, such as their welfare and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (Lupton, 2004). Similarly children at the state school could be argued to have a higher level of ‘social capital’ (meaning civic engagement, a local identity and a sense of belonging and solidarity with other community members, norms of trust, reciprocal help and support, etc.) (Putnam, 1993). Boys in particular appeared to be attached to the area through their paid work, interactions with local people, their friendships, games etc., and for them neighbourhood was a source of multiple social support. This process was bilateral, as children were not only receivers of help and users of networks, but the ones who made their help available to others and created networking themselves.

Boys and girls at the state school were close to their classmates and other friends from their neighbourhood and their relationships went far beyond the school-based environment. So children’s agency in creating relationships and networks was exerted across all the settings. Boys especially cherished their friendships, which went beyond moral, emotional and psychological attachment and were also seen as a mechanism for reciprocal support, cooperation and assistance:

‘I have a friend, a very good friend of mine, since year 1, when we were 7 years old. He works now, he quit school some time ago, as he did not want to study, but needed to work. He always helps me. He comes to my home, eats, then helps

me, or even when I am not at home, he comes to help my family. I do the same at his home and help him as well' (Akyl, boy aged 16, state school).

Children acquired confidence and experience through such simple acts of friendship in their areas. For boys, friendship represented an essential source of social support which contributed to their overall wellbeing by being understood, valued, wanted and able to obtain and give help and advice when needed. Although children's friendships with other children went beyond the school setting, they were not more peer-oriented than family-oriented and their peer relationships did not replace their relationships with parents, but instead complemented them. These children did not mention that they would prefer spending time with their friends to spending it with their parents.

In contrast, those children at the private school who reported having friends preferred spending time with peers to spending it with parents, though they were not allowed to do so very often:

'This school teaches English, which is good as I want to enter the Turkish lyceum³² next year. Simply, I would not need to be at home, just visit it for the weekends. I will sleep there; it will always be superb. My home is boring, there is no one there' (Nurlan, boy aged 12, private school).

The fact that parents often were not home and were strict with their children's leisure time probably were the reason why these children were more peer-oriented, another reason being that they tended to have a limited circle of friends, predominantly from their school:

'I do not even imagine how I would have lived without friends. They are everything for me, they are the ones who witness the major events happening in my life, the most important things. I spend all my time with my friends, with my parents too...but they are always not at home' (Erkin, girl aged 16, private school).

Friends of the private school children aged 12 and 16 were considered closer than parents:

³² Turkish lyceums have good reputations in Bishkek, as students can benefit from learning the English and Turkish languages and have better chances to find good jobs. They are costly, but children with high marks can get different bursary arrangements.

'After I come from school, I sit in front of the computer, then television, then talk over the phone with my friends and then go to bed. Not much time to talk to my parents' (Asel, girl aged 12, private school).

For children aged 12 at the private school, there was a lack of social interaction and their only friends were those with whom they studied at school. If girls at the state school were isolated due to a lack of infrastructure, as discussed in the earlier chapter, some children at the private school who were without friends experienced isolation stemming from limited relationships: *'I do not have friends in my home neighbourhood. I meet my friends at school and then meet them very rarely during school breaks'* (Meerim, girl aged 16, private school). So although girls at the state school did not have friendly spaces, their multiple sources of relationships filled this lack of space to some extent. The situation with the private school girls was due to the fact that their main activities were all focused and held at school, which meant that the school setting was the only setting for potential friendships:

'I have some friends with whom I walk together, but this is not a "wow" friendship. I do not know whether true friends truly exist. May be I have simply not met any. I cannot say I have true friends, loyal to me. This is because my classmates always compete with one another' (Tinatin, girl aged 16, private school).

But social relationships, when available, were a source of important support, and were able to lessen the negative effects of stressful events on their general levels of functioning (Cohen and Wills, 1985):

My friends and I walk in the street, talk about different things...about life. We share with each other when there is something which makes us worried. Last time I shared with my friends the event when my parents fell out seriously and my father has left us. My friends advised me to stay strong' (Nurlan, boy aged 12, private school).

This was especially evident in cases in which children had little attention from their parents (though this did not mean a lack of control):

'I feel happy because of my friends. They always help me and everywhere. I help them, they help me. I have this feeling of happiness because of my friends'
(Nurbek, boy aged 12, private school).

In general, in comparison with private school children, the state school children had multiple sources of support such as home, school and the immediate neighbourhood. The supportive qualities of interpersonal relationships with parents, extended family members, peers, and teachers tended to play a significant and positive role in children's lives and support their motivational and academic outcomes (Wentzel, 1998). Social and emotional support from peers has been associated with the pursuit of academic and pro-social goals, intrinsic value, and self-concept (DuBois et al., 1992). Although children lived in a poor neighbourhood, with poor quality education, their agency actions were expressed by the way they developed an active set of relationships in their non-home environments, which were also shaping their agency purposes and freedom.

8.3.2. Religion and neighbourhood relationships

Amongst the settings available in the local neighbourhood of the state school was a mosque (whereas the neighbourhood of the private school did not have one), and one might expect that religion could affect the relationships and lives of parents and consequently their children, especially the older ones, aged 16. Having mosques in small neighbourhoods was not a common practice during the Soviet Union (when there was one central mosque for the whole country) and is a distinctive mark of the rapid changes going on in Kyrgyz society. Similarly, Anderson (1999) suggests that Kyrgyzstan is experiencing re-islamisation, which is highly supported through opening increasing numbers of religious educational institutions. However, the role of religion in the lives of Kyrgyz people, including children, is contested. Kyrgyz people came to Islam relatively late, and it is believed to have a weaker role in the lives of the Kyrgyz population than in neighbouring Central Asian states (Gunn, 2003). Although the Soviet

Union was largely successful in tabooing religion among the people in the region, it is argued that the Soviet regime did not manage to destroy the self-identification of people as Muslims on a personal level. Olcott (1995, p. 21) argues that

‘the consciousness of having an Islamic heritage was one of the elements which for the Central Asians continued to define their identities - even if a particular individual knew almost nothing about religion and observed none of its tenets’.

The majority of the Kyrgyz population consider themselves Muslims, but such religious identity would be mostly used to identify themselves as different from Orthodox Christians (Gunn, 2003).

Although there was a mosque in the poor neighbourhood, the relationships of children with other children and adults as well as their parents at the state school did not seem to have a religious influence. It could mean that social relationships of bonding and agency purposes of helping one another were not circumscribed by religious reasons. Moreover, during the group discussions in this research, one parent of a state school child commented:

‘Now there are too many religions. The Kyrgyz joined different religions and lost their unity – 90% disunited. We should not be disunited. People believe in religion and more girls are wearing hijab. They say religious people are good, innocent, but theft and murder start from those people’ (Uulbolsun, mother aged 45, state school).

In contrast with their parents who, having been brought up during the Soviet era, had considerably little contact with religion, their children seemed to be subject to this revival of religion:

‘When I was younger, I wanted to go to the mosque, but my father and mother did not allow me to do so. My brother tried to go to Friday prayers, but then he stopped doing it’ (Aidar, boy aged 16, state school).

Although state school children and their families seemed to be more traditional, their relationships within the home and non-home environments were not necessarily religious. The Soviet background of the parents played a key role in restricting

children's religious agency and therefore their worship activities. This would indicate that cultural norms relevant to children such as respecting older people, valuing the family's collective wellbeing above one's own, respecting parents' authority etc. are not the results of religion, but are traditional Kyrgyz norms. However, this does demonstrate how children are affected by the broad national context, although they are still predetermined by the immediate family factors.

8.4. Child agency and relationships in school

As discussed in the previous chapter, school played a significant role in the lives of children at both schools. School was essential not only for educational purposes, but also for children's social relationships. According to Deci (1992), interpersonal relationships which provide children with a sense of belonging are powerful motivators of children's interest in school. In turn, interest in school has been identified as a strong motivation for the formation and regulation of goal-directed behaviour of children (Renninger et al., 1992). The social aspect of schooling was equally appreciated by children from both schools. However, school, being the same setting for all the children, provided children in the poor area with different forms of engagement with it, while the studying aspect of schooling was more characteristic for the purposes of agency actions among the private school children.

As James (1990) suggests, 'certain activities and spaces come to symbolise childhood' (p. 282), and school is a good example of such a 'space'. Although teachers were the ones to control the school setting, children were generally able to exert some ownership of part of the setting within their own space. Boys and girls challenged the adult-controlled setting in different ways: boys generally gained control of the outdoor space by playing football, whereas girls tried to control indoor settings by having private conversations and standing in front of the mirror. Whereas at the state school, school

was more likely to offer ‘both its oppressive and liberating aspects’ (Sibley, 1995), the private school was more inclined to be oppressive towards children’s agency (except their agency in learning/studying). Both schools were restrictive in one way or another and liberal in one way or another. The state school was stricter with the physical appearance of pupils in comparison with their counterparts at the private school. The latter’s control was expressed in a different way. Children were free in terms of uniform, which did not exist, but were quite supervised in terms of the learning process and their behaviour at school:

‘It is simply strange here at this school, as teachers look after each of us just like mothers. Have you done this? Or that? Oi, Oi, Oi! That is bad of you! This does not work! If I get a low mark, they say I must improve it. They say go there, do this and that’ (Nurlan, boy aged 12, private school).

James et al. (1998) claim with regard to school curricula that they represent ‘social and political structures, containing assumptions about how people (children) ought best to be’ (p. 42). School is often a place where children reproduce social and cultural norms from their home setting and therefore continue their agency identity. School possesses some moral and spatial forces in the way in which it regulates and promotes appropriate social behaviour. This argument suggests that educational establishments such as school represent the places through which society expects children to conform to adults’ norms, which ultimately affects children’s relationships with teachers and their peers. Through discourses and interactions within the school environment, school has its own norms which can be negotiated to a varying degree by children, parents and school teachers; such negotiation ability was higher among the parents at the private school, which will be discussed further on.

8.4.1. Relationships with classmates

Age- and gender-related effects on child agency at school

Age emerged as a dividing factor among the boys at the private school in terms of the exclusion or inclusion of children into the school collective. One of the boys in the sample, who was not quite 12 years old, was hiding his real age from his mates on purpose:

'I do not want to look younger than others. Some children behave(d) like little children, lax behaviour. I do not want to look weak, when everybody is making fun of you and you cry' (Nurlan, boy aged 12, private school).

According to Nurlan, being younger among older children was not good for him and even risky, because he could have been excluded or teased. But it was not only about being old chronologically, as a certain type of behaviour was also expected to match an older chronological age. So some boys at the private school expressed their negative attitude to the children who were not the same age as others (i.e. 12 years old) or if someone did not behave appropriately for their age and often acted childishly:

'...My mother used to say I should go to the Turkish lyceum, but I would not listen to her. Now I realise myself that I need to gradually become a man' (Nurbek, boy aged 12, private school).

To my question about whether his current school was not an appropriate place for men, Nurbek answered:

'Let me give you a small example. We have a classmate who has been studying with us since year 1. He is like a small child, a cry-baby. I do not want to be like him at all! He cries or moans all the time. He always hides himself behind an adult, never decides anything himself and does not ever take any initiative. He is always behind the back of his grandmother and tortures the teacher' (boy aged 12, private school).

According to the private school norms, boys' agency could only be associated with getting older. That was why it was also important for them not to be younger than others and to imitate adult-like behaviour, as age gave children the freedom to be agentic. A previous chapter (VI) on agency in home and home activities also discussed how children took adult-like roles, but at the state school, when they looked after their siblings and fulfilled all the tasks that their parents would do. If in their case adult-like

actions were about contributing and being responsible, in the case of the private school, they were about certain types of discipline-related behaviour which mainly characterised young children such as crying, being naughty etc. For the children at the private school, who were more under the control of their parents with minimum freedom to act, their behaviour at school because of age discrimination was more about attempting to compensate for their regulated freedom at home.

In the case of the state school children, gender played an important role in terms of relationships between girls and boys at the state school: *'Our boys are physically very active and other teachers think they do not behave well. But they study well and protect us, girls, if needed'* (Aisha, girl aged 12, state school). Like at home, boys and girls at the state school had a gendered approach to tasks at school:

'Our boys are respectful to us and caring. They empathise us. When we are on duty, it means one girl and a boy should clean the classroom. But the water is cold, so a boy would mop the floor himself. He would say "Give me the cloth, I will mop the floor, you leave it". The same applies when we are on duty to clean the sports hall. Girls only sweep the floor and boys mop it' (Jarkyn, girl aged 16, state school).

Although gender was an issue at the state school at the level of children themselves and their relationships with one another, gender in this particular respect was not important for the private school.

Boys at the state school similarly to their female counterparts exerted their agency to protect their dignity and honour:

'Sometimes, we boys fight with each other. This happens when we tease each other and someone touches someone else's dignity. Sometimes it is difficult to tolerate these things' (Adyl, boy aged 16, state school).

To 'snitch' and "be a tattle-tale" was considered bad form by the boys and they knew the consequences of actions directed against the collective:

'We used to fight with one another before and broke the discipline. We did not have a common interest, but now we are better. We used to snitch, which is very

bad. The one who does it even does not get beaten by others, as this is really bad' (Dastan, boy aged 12, state school).

This was the way in which boys took action to defend their own place and image among the group and fight against peer pressure. Similarly to many agency expressions in home-based settings, children's relationships with their mates at school were again oriented more towards collective prosperity than individual. Actions against the collective at the state school such as snitching excluded boys from interaction with others, since it was not considered even deserving a good beating. To be part of the collective, children needed to gain a membership even through such actions as fighting with other boys, as this was one of the ways of participating and belonging.

Relationships through learning achievement

It has been suggested that peer groups play an important role in terms of children's educational goals and trajectories (Magnusson and Stattin, 1998). Peer group members not only resemble one another in academic achievement (Chen et al., 2003; Ryan, 2001), but also in their educational aspirations (Cohen, 1977). The boys at the state school aged 16 in particular considered their friends and classmates as an important source of information for planning their future education, as suggested in other literature (Malmberg, 1996). They were also seen to one another as valuable advisors, competent opinion-makers and reflexive agents able to affect the purposes for their agency. Consequently, older children at the state school shared the same goal-setting context and agency purposes which affected their plans for further education.

Moreover, children at the state school evaluated one another and chose their friends by their academic performance at school and they built their relationships with one another based on behaviour and learning achievements. This is different from what was found in studies e.g. in England (Hewitt, 2005) and the USA (Moulten et al., 1998),

where children being labeled as academic high achievers are subjected to negative attitudes from others. In contrast, in this study not only did teachers promote a certain pattern of behaviour among children, but children themselves also expected and accepted particular behavioural and learning performances from one another. Good academic achievements were a particular agency outcome and a social mark through which to make friends. This proves that children and parents in Kyrgyzstan highly valued child agency in schooling, which turned out to be one of the main purposes of child agency regardless of material dis/advantages. The parents' Soviet background played a key role in maintaining and encouraging the value of education for their children.

Consequently school was a filter for making friends, as academic agency was a socially acceptable, responsible and encouraging way of behaving at school:

'I like children who study well. For example, there are girls who do not study well, but I feel ashamed to be like them. I do not make friends with girls like them' (Janyl, girl aged 12, state school).

High grades were recognised as an achievement linked with a particular agency outcome - i.e. a good career and a good life in future. In the absence of other socially desirable markers available, state school children seem to form inspirational value on the basis of personal qualities such as studiousness and intelligence. Poorer children, in other words, need success more urgently than rich ones, who can use the system, since they have other resource to fall back on including greater 'bridging' and 'linking' possibilities of their parents (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002). So pursuit of high learning agency had a link with peer acceptance at the state school: *'Bad boys are those who do not study well. I do not get involved with them'* (Murat, boy aged 12, state school). This boy had a good reputation among his classmates as one of the high achievers in his tutor group. Other children respected him for his studies and other boys could not contradict or bully him.

A socially supportive environment at school promoted children's preference and motivation to succeed academically and to behave appropriately at school. In addition such high purposiveness attached to the agency in studying was also promoted by the shame of being labeled as an unsuccessful pupil, as being a good or bad pupil is not only about a personal image but a family reputation. This was a yardstick for children when they made friends and developed relationships with other children. These children tended to be more traditional than the private school children in the way they respected particular social norms which are culturally recognised and constructed as important characteristics of 'good' children and families. So being friends with classmates who studied well was about their reputation. The role and impact of such social conventions as shame among the families and children at the state school was triggered by their collective memberships.

Relationship through competition at school

Socially supportive relationships are important to generate a sense of belonging, which can directly promote motivation and engagement in classroom activities, according to some studies (Deci, 1992). If children do not have socially supportive relationships, but deal with a competitive environment, then the situation can be quite negative for children's self-esteem and their performance at school, which in turn undermine the quality of education provided. This was what the girls at the private school often reported experiencing in their interactions with one another. If, in the case of state school children, they shared their sources of information and made common decisions with regard to their future (e.g. the majority of boys wanted to be police officers and enter the same education establishment), girls at the private school were competitive with one another, and they had their own personal choice for their individual advantage:

'I always want to be the best, the first, I make things the best. I cannot be the second best and that is why I never do things to be the second best, as I should be the first' (Salkyn, girl aged 16, private school).

In particular, private school girls were not only more ambitious but also very competitive with one another, which created the systems of 'losers and winners' in the class: *I do not feel proud of myself, very rarely, only if somebody praises me or cheers me up*' (Kyial, girl aged 16, private school). Not all the girls were able to compete equally with others and a number of them found this difficult and suffered from low self-esteem:

'I am not good enough, I am not smart enough. My friends advise me to be more self-confident and I try to follow their advice. I think this is the right way to take, but I cannot' (Tinatin, girl aged 16, private school);

Half the girls mentioned during the interviews that they were not happy with their classmates:

'I am quite sociable and communicative if I like the company. I do not like my class; I feel some kind of pressure from it. When I feel pressured, I become closed, curl myself into a ball. Then people think I am boring. I have a few friends, but we are not close' (Erkin, girl aged 16, private school).

In addition, girls also felt not only competition, but jealousy towards one another: *'It is so unpleasant when my best friend's marks are all 'A' and I have one 'B', so I want to make all 'A' marks'* (Saadat, girl aged 12, private school). Competition was a common agency action for all the girls at the private school with the agency purpose being to beat others and achieve individual success. This competition was also encouraged by the girls' parents who ascribed much importance to their children's being successful in life. As their schooling was more choice-oriented than the state school children's, competition was part of actions to achieve that future that parents could easily imagine for their children.

The state school children did not like competition: *'I do not like competing, being jealous and falling out with my classmates, but our class is ok, we have good*

relationships' (Janyl, girl aged 12, state school). There were more collectively positive attitudes prevalent among those children: *'If we are on duty, then we help one another to mop the classroom. If we struggle to do our homework, then we help one another'* (Sabina, girl aged 12, state school). Sabina's and Janyl views were shared by Aisha: *'We started protecting one another. This is what we have agreed among ourselves that we would not fall out and stand out if needed'* (girl aged 12, state school).

The relationships between the children also involved financial help from those who earned their own financial means to the ones who struggled with some pocket money: *'My classmates ask me if I need money, or if I want a lollipop and if I need something they share with me'* (Sabina, girl aged 12, state school). Older girls also supported one another financially: *'Sometimes if I have money, I help my friends out, when they need some help'* (Gulzat, girl aged 16, state school).

Children at the state school were particularly important for one another as they were less likely to be in contact with people with higher education, or steady and well-paid jobs. Therefore they could be assumed not to develop behaviours and aspiration contributing to their success in future. However, children had high aspirations and their bonding and close relationships were helpful to 'get ahead'. These children used their own classmates as networking and a source of information:

'I wanted to play 'komuz'³³ and will go to the club this coming Monday for the first time. My friend told me about this club and then I told my parents about it and asked their permission. My friend and I also found a wrestling club and go there together. We want to fight and get a medal' (Aidar, boy aged 16, state school).

In general, the children's perceptions of their classmates individually and their class as a group played an important role in the way they cooperated or did not cooperate with one another. The perception of children about their tutor group as a collective united the

³³ Komuz is a national musical instrument.

class and activities such as football, cleaning the school, planning their future etc. made these personal and group agency actions more of a collective experience than an individual one. The children's collective agency (Bandura, 2000), for example expressed in playing football, resulted in the desired agency outcomes for children, which were achieved with the help of the collective members' skills and their relationships of interaction, coordination, and synergy (Bandura, 2000). This was not merely a set of actions, but involved well maintained relationships conducted in the given setting such as school with its own restrictions and freedoms. At the other end, for children at the private school studying was not only personal but individualised agency action for whom the 'self' was the main purpose.

Relationships through bullying

Although children at the state school tended to be more collectively cooperative and supportive, they were also able to demonstrate their negative collective agency. One of the boys at the state school children admitted that other boys upset him because he was shyer, more serious and quieter than other boys in his class. According to him, involving the school administration would not have an effect, as there would not be any positive change in the boys' behaviour as a result. As he could not rely on the school's intervention in this situation, his father and he found a solution through engaging older boys to talk to the boys bullying him.

In fact, according to one of the teachers at the state school interviewed by me, the most vulnerable children in their catchment area were the children of comparatively better-off families who took special arrangements and care to safeguard their children who stood out as different from the rest. Such children were particularly subject to bullying and exclusion from the children's groups. This example shows that the tendency of singling out specific groups of children such as poor children, street

children, children living in single parent families, children who belong to national minorities etc. as especially vulnerable is not always adequate, as vulnerability could also be constructed and specific to the locality and material conditions were another factor in shaping children's presence in the neighbourhood. The state school in which the collective is very important is likely to be worse in this regard, as children isolated in this context would be left out from the whole collective and therefore their agency would be undermined. Moreover, people who lived in the poor neighbourhood of the state school were not easily able to move their children to another school, as they wanted, as their ways of life were circumscribed by more practical issues of surviving, which did not allow them to choose as they wished. This is such a type of life organisation, when poor people arrange their routine around the 'practical order' of getting by (Bourdieu, 1984).

8.4.2. School relationships with teachers

Teachers as knowledge- and power-holders

Meaningful relationships with teachers and the support they can give have been linked to children's pursuit of goals to behave responsibly, which may influence their educational aspirations/values, intrinsic values, and self-concept (Felner et al., 1985; Wentzel, 1994). Particularly at the state school, part of the motivation of children to learn was teacher-driven. In particular, teachers' abilities to handle the class and their general characteristics affirmed the significance of teacher-student relationships and child agency. Children attached a high reputation to the status of their teachers, not only as the ones who knew more and transferred their own knowledge to them, but also as social actors who had more power. For them their teachers seemed to be the most agentic actors at the school setting: *'Some children debate with teachers, although they*

do not know the matter themselves and question the ones who teach us – the teachers. I do not like it' (Nurzat, girl aged 12, state school).

Such patterns of agency in schooling reflect Kyrgyz cultural norms - children are expected to be obedient and receptive of adult authority in any setting including schools which are still teacher-dominated. In fact schools were still practising the rigid Soviet authoritative teaching system, though it was more obvious at the state school. Moreover, given this status of teachers as power-holders and knowledge-bearers, some children accepted the way in which some teachers used physical actions against them (only boys) to instil discipline:

'Our current teacher says she does not beat somebody else's child. Our previous teacher would hit us if somebody was misbehaving, whereas this teacher does not hit even if a child is misbehaving. She is kind. Our old teacher would hit with a ruler. Sometimes she would pull the ear if a child does not listen to her. This teacher does not do any of these things. She says she would not raise her hand against somebody else's child. She, in fact, does not have any right to do this' (Aisha, girl aged 12, state school).

This physical agency of a teacher demonstrates that he not only actively 'teaches' but also 'disciplines', 'controls' and 'punishes'. If agency in learning is seen as one of the fundamental principles at work in teaching (Elmore, 2005), then agency requires a student's active consent and engagement in 'learning' and 'be taught' (Elmore, 2005). In the collective environment with strong age-based hierarchy, some tutors were using their physical abilities towards their male students (aged 12), when their behaviour was unsatisfactory. Although teaching/learning at the state school was collective-based (no individual approach), this was the way to single out students who did not behave properly at school. As it was the boys who were hit by their teachers, then school was already a second setting where boys' relationships involved physical punishment (as discussed in the previous chapter, younger boys were likely to be beaten by their parents within their home environment). If girls (mainly at the state school) were controlled

through safeguarding their bodily freedom, as discussed in chapters V, VII, then boys were disciplined with physical interventions. These are some of the cultural tools, which endorse collective belonging and identity of children with regard to their families as well as school.

Although older boys were not subject to physical intervention by teachers, they were controlled by the school in terms of following a certain dress code and behaviour at school. There was no particular uniform at school, as there used to be in Soviet times, but children were obliged to wear a black and white outfit and be neat, so boys must have a very short hair cut. Some boys found this very intrusive, which negatively affected their desire to study and stay at school after the compulsory years. As one of the boys said: *'The school gets under my skin with their rules of uniforms and haircut'* (Akyl, boy aged 16, state school). The relationships between the school and students did not allow children not to obey the rules, so boys had to obey, but wished to leave school after the last year of compulsory schooling (year 9) and go to college. This is a curbing of individual agency that state school boys seemed to be rebelling against.

Relationships between children and 'paid' teachers

At the private school teachers were the ones who were paid a much higher salary to teach and to transfer their knowledge. The relationships of children with their teachers at this school allowed them to express their right to study as they 'bought' this right. For the private schools to prosper, especially in cases similar to Kyrgyzstan where there is a small wealthy population, such schools have to please their consumers - parents and their children, who have a more central role (Chubb and Terry, 1997). According to the Hawkins' model of relationships at school (cited in Elmore, 2005), there is 'I' a teacher, 'Thou' a student and 'it' content, which gets an additional dimension. In fact, this triangular model turns into a quadrangular model with the additional 'it' representing the

cost of education. Hawkins argues that his relationships model is disciplined by the present of ‘content’ without which the relationships at school cannot be distinguishable from any other relationships. However, at the school, where children (via parents) pay a high fee, then it cannot happen without a cost involved - an absence of which would not distinguish this learning and teaching relationships from any other school where students do not pay. As discussed in previous chapters (III, IV), private schools in Bishkek are very expensive and unaffordable for the majority of the Kyrgyz population. Such schools, although they do not have a large clientele, had a well established pool of potential consumers, thanks to their prestige.

Consequently parents at the private school were consumers of schooling who were financially able to buy relatively good quality education and make the school accountable for teaching their children. An involvement of payment promoted a policy of equal outcomes for all children, as they were supposed to study well and even if they did not, the school would have taken actions to make sure the expected grades were achieved by all. However, not all children were likely to be equally agentic in learning, but they were supposed to have equal outcomes across the year groups, which could mean that low achievers were burdened not only by their parents, their competitive classmates but also by their teachers. In this case where children were unlikely to possess equally high learning potential, this school’s intervention did not leave them freedom to be agentic in their own way and did not permit a discovery of children’s individual talents.

Nevertheless, the private school children were taught and approached individually where each one’s own educational needs were tackled separately, and they had some autonomous space to learn. Their interactive dynamics with other individuals within the educational setting constructed specific agency freedom and purposiveness

and ultimately an agency identity. Children and their interactions with settings raised an issue of belonging to school. Those at the private school seemed to be identified as belonging to the school, although their actions at school were only about studying. Their counterparts' identity at school was only limited, although they not only studied there but also did other forms of activities. The private school had more ownership of their students than their home, while home had more ownership of children than the school did in the case of the state school children.

Apart from teacher-student relationships, the parents at the private school were better positioned to claim their rights and demands for education and therefore served as a catalyst of social change in favour of capability wellbeing (Sen, 1995) of their children. The private school was more accountable to the parents of their students than was the state school, which had rather tense relationships with parents due to the financial contributions parents had to make. In particular, having had a greater influence on their children's schooling than their children themselves, parents at the private school were '...the direct reference point for the provision and organization of education' (Wyness, 1999, p. 359) for their children. Parents had closer relationships with teachers, year tutors and the headteacher. If in the case of the state school schooling was about certain economic sacrifices, including informal and formal payments as well as the loss of potential work-related earnings (Feeny and Boyden, 2003b), the quality of their education lagged behind that of their wealthy counterparts. Overall, families at the state school did not choose the school their children were at, as they came here because of the catchment area, whereas those at the private school made an informed choice of the school based on its facilities, staff and, most importantly, the quality of education, which in this case, had a particular focus on English and mathematics. Better educated children at the private school would be better positioned to transfer their educational advantages

into better job opportunities, therefore their higher agency in learning will be transformed into better future outcomes and higher agency in future.

So good quality schooling was associated with rich Kyrgyz parents whose children attended a particular school, but did not represent the wider population. This is how Brown (1997) classifies 'parentocracy' of education, 'where a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils' (p. 393). This yet again demonstrates the highly materialistic nature of agency, which is not only the construct of the present, but also the intended product of the future.

Generally, the relationships of children at school with their peers and teachers represented a similar division of regulated freedom (more control of outcomes but freedom to study for the private school children) and unregulated control (spontaneity and some child-driven space within school for the state school children despite control of appearance) that were characteristic of children's relationships at home. Children at the private school were under continuous control within the school and did not demonstrate creativity in overcoming this structure, whereas state school children were able to find their own way to freedom. Moreover, parents of the children at the private school were more agentic in the way that they acted as primary gatekeepers of their children's education. At the same time, children at the state school were the main recipients and were responsible for their own education, as their parents were not involved with the school to the similar extent as rich parents.

Nevertheless, children at both schools were under the control of the school administration, where children were treated as passive recipients of knowledge. School is one of those settings ruled over by adults, although it is the place intended for children to spend much of their time. Such authoritarian arrangements are the legacy of the

Soviet Union, but also a result of traditional Kyrgyz age-related practice dictating the eldest to be power-holders. This applied to the relationships between students and teachers, as well as among teachers and among children themselves. Similarly to the home environment, child agency operates at two levels: among the children themselves in their own context and with the adults representing social structure. School demarcated children as separate from adults and the ones whose main activity was to learn, while in the home environment children at the state school could equate themselves with adults through their contributions to running the home. Children at the private school felt this separation in both settings more explicitly than children at the state school by experiencing more control, less freedom and limited agency actions.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relationships of children within the non-home environment and the effect of these relationships on children's agency. It has emerged once again that while neither entirely culturally-determined, nor completely individual, child agency is exercised as a setting-based ability to act and is significantly circumscribed by children's material conditions. The cultural norms of gender and age are not stable across the schools, and although subject to reinterpretation in any given setting, they are still maintained in a prescriptive way at the state school. However, there remains some agency freedom for the individual agent to act outside of the script. Probably agency and child agency in particular, would represent a raw material in itself as a universal ability to act, but which is signified as agency by the locality, the cultural construction of age and gender and even more by economic circumstances. Such a transformation of agency as an ability to act universally to become something specific locally is expressed in the ways how components of agency interplay with different structures and produce various agency outcomes. Agency as a capacity to act can be

described as enabling someone to act and child agency becomes meaningful when enacted through the restrictions of different structures. Therefore this is not something static, something that someone has, but what makes one viable and qualified to act within the domain of cultural and economic structures.

Boys and girls at both schools were not equal agents at school in comparison with teachers. Children's agency is partly the product of settings, cultures, personal circumstance and overarching social structures; but by creating, reacting to and transforming their circumstances, children are agentic producers of their settings as well. In fact, settings weigh differently in children's routines, with school being the most important for both groups, but occupying more of the time of the boys and girls at the private school. Although school represented a purposiveness of social agency too, it was still an individualised action for the private school and a collective for the state school. As a setting for studying, the state school did not differentiate gender of their students, but it did so as a setting for teaching by using gender specific methods of discipline. The gender differences were more encouraged by children themselves at the state school, while age was more of an issue for those at the private school. Boys at the state school needed to gain their place in the group by physical acts of masculinity, whereas girls at the private school did so through competing with one another.

Friendship for children at the state school was a critical resource and they were generally engaged in vibrant forms of action at the local level that allowed them and their families to cope with difficult conditions. The findings with regard to the state school children have challenged accounts of the nature of child agency which is commonly individualised, as it has tended to be viewed in classic Western social science. Within its paradigm, children and young people are portrayed as the ones who create their space independent of adults' worlds. The four empirical chapters contribute

to the recent studies of children which emphasise the social nature of children's agency (Jeffrey, 2011). As Jeffrey writes: 'Young people in many contexts equate agency with the cultivation of interdependencies rather than individual action and autonomy'. (2011, p. 250).

School was again an example of a setting where the manifestation of agency is expressed through its components. Agency action, freedom and purposiveness are again largely circumscribed by the economic circumstances, and especially agency outcome in learning underlines the temporal aspect, the future-oriented argument of agency for children from rich and poor background. The relationships of children, their parents and teachers were different in the two schools where the 'consumerist' element of the private school emerged as important. It affected class relations, quality of learning/teaching, children's own involvement, school control over children and its accountability to parents, where the latter had a negotiating power over the school. This made children at the private school secondary agents, but allowed them certain autonomous space to study, whereas children at the state school were less individualised students, but more independent learning agents.

What has emerged from the four empirical chapters is the heuristic value of the setting-based approach to the analysis of children's agency practices. Settings acted as a divider of children's experiences of agency, whereas analyses of agency components had a combining effect by underlying children's agency as relevant for all the children regardless of their economic circumstances. But the effects on these components were diverse across economic groups in terms of children's freedom to act, purposes they had and outcomes it brought to them. Focusing attention on children's agency and the specificity of locality enables the identification of child - and context-specific features of agency, for which a setting is not a static container, but a space with different meanings,

restrictions and possibilities. Indeed child agency is likely to be a function of not only settings but culture and material circumstances as well as interaction between the children's individual personality and the situation.

Chapter IX CONCLUSION

9.1. Introduction

Throughout the thesis, the main focal point of the analysis has been child agency in Kyrgyzstan (which makes this study unique in terms of context, but nevertheless widely applicable in terms of re-conceptualising the driving factors behind child agency). The literature review (chapter II) sought to give an overview of the literature on agency in general and child agency in particular and outlined the theoretical framework used to conceptualise child agency by dividing the concept into different components - action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. Gaps in the literature were identified as including the lack of nuanced insight into the lived experiences of children at times of economic transition and social, cultural and political change. A particular interest emerged in exploring the interplay of material circumstances and culture on child agency. Material circumstances did not appear in the new sociology of childhood (1997) as being one of the fundamental factors in constructing child agency and contributing to the plurality of childhoods. Chapter III focused on the methodology and justified the choices made in terms of research methods, approaches to analyses and puzzles, selections of neighbourhoods and the choice of the country.

An overview was then given of the country background of Kyrgyzstan and the relevant cultural perceptions of children and childhood, as well as the ways in which they have changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union (chapter IV). This was important, since children's current experiences of child agency have been affected significantly by the Soviet background of their parents (though this trend has been changing among wealthier groups). That chapter developed the focus on child agency further and justified the choice of the country context. Then four empirical chapters

made use of a theoretical framework based on child agency to discuss the research findings across the home (chapters V and VI) and non-home environment (chapters VII and VIII). This concluding chapter (IX) will revisit the main findings and put them in perspective and present the limitations and contributions of the study as well as suggestions for future research emerging from the data. The conclusion will also include reflections on the relevance and value of the child agency concept for Kyrgyz society.

9.2. Aim, proposition and scope of research

The thesis has sought to explore how economic circumstances and culture interact to shape child agency in Kyrgyzstan and the ways in which children use their agency to mediate the effects of these factors as well as those of gender, age and setting. This has been done by exploring the following question: How does family economic status affect child agency in Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet culture of transition? In answering this question, the study has involved 40 children from contrasting economic backgrounds aged 12 and 16 attending one state and one private school in Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan's heritage of nomadic culture, Islamic customs and Soviet legacy - all shaken by the modern developments of globalization and westernization - represents a country context informed by 21 years of rapid changes. The consequences of social, economic, political and cultural turbulence have effects on the daily lives of children in Kyrgyzstan, for whom traditional and modern, new and old, local and global are not simply dichotomies or abstract concepts, but real experiences infused in their lives. This is the generation of children who know about the Soviet Union from books, movies and stories their parents tell them, for whom the Soviet era is nothing else than the past, although they would be accustomed to mosques and Western movies and fashion existing alongside this. Conversely, for their parents the Soviet Union is still something real, traces of which and associations with which they still observe in their routines, but

for whom religion and westernization would still be new, brought into their lives when they were adults. In the background, there is Kyrgyz traditional culture, which is something uniting these generations of parents and children, though this once fairly homogenised society is now experiencing sharp economic divisions.

Although the location of the study is very specific and identifying another country with similar characteristics stemming from similar circumstances of the past would be unlikely, this study is still capable of theoretical/analytical contribution. The interaction of cultural norms and economic circumstances can generate forms of child agency which contrast with the classic Western concept of individualistic agency and bring about the idea of agency affected by economic circumstances. The thesis discussed, compared and drew out similarities and differences in the ways in which children used their agency within their home and non-home environment and analysed to what extent the material circumstances of the families could account for differences in how child agency was exercised. Material circumstances include both material disadvantages and advantages. In the following discussion, I try to tie together the main arguments and findings and offer some concluding thoughts.

The current study has taken several conceptual views in undertaking this research. At a broader level, I do not intend to take sides in the conceptual debates about the plurality versus the singularity of childhood/childhoods (Qvortrup, 1994). Qvortrup argues for the singularity of childhood as a social category and its structural significance in terms of generational relationships that all children share. The argument for the plurality of childhoods claims that childhoods are plural because of various lived experiences children have. It is important to shed light on this issue, as this informed the entire analysis and the way the children from the two schools were perceived. It is important to recognise that neither child agency nor culture is static and that although

there are differences in the life experiences and abilities to act of these children, there are also certain similarities between the schools and some aspects of child agency which would continue or change for both sides. So to see the schools as two completely different worlds would be overly simplistic. The choice has been made to show the nuances in the interplay of different structures and their impact on the two groups. However, this is not to downplay the role of agency as a construct of economic circumstances with its dividing power between the schools.

Moreover, this study offers a theoretical and methodological approach which reconciles the two views about children in research (James et al., 1998) and mediates different perspectives in the field of childhood studies. In particular, it does not see children either only as social actors with competences or childhood only as ‘a structured social space’ (James et al., 1998) as both appear applicable. Agency should not be divorced from structure, as emerged in this study; it is the interaction of these two which transforms simple actions into meaningful agentic acts. It is the effects of social, institutional, economic and cultural structures that create individual circumstances shaping child agency, which nevertheless is always determined by the agent him/herself. As Marx (1852/2007) wrote ‘people make themselves but not in circumstances of their own choosing’.

9.3. Ability to act: agency components and settings

Child agency is not only about the ability to act. In this study it is conceptualised through its four components: action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome. This is used as a conceptual tool to reveal various aspects of these abilities under varying circumstances. These agency components illuminate children’s abilities to act across the settings in relation to their freedom to do so, the purposes they attach to their actions and the outcomes these actions bring about for them. Looking at agency through these

components generates multidimensional analysis of children's agency instead of looking at it merely from the point of view of taking actions without exploring the detailed background behind these acts. Therefore it gives insights into how children's purposes and abilities to act vary across the settings between girls and boys, the younger and the older children; how much and/or how little freedom they have to act and why; and what kind of outcomes are generated by children's agency across settings, age and gender groups. The underlying framework behind this theoretical tool is the interplay of culture and economic circumstances and its effect on the agency components. The structure of the thesis is based on the vision that the settings had a more divisive function in the agency of children in the two schools, whereas agency components were uniting children within the common framework of children's abilities to act. Although the economic circumstances carry the most essential explanatory weight in this analysis, they are not used as a dividing line between the schools as such but as a tool to encourage comparisons and discussions among them. That is why the thesis was structured around settings for child agency combined into the two big categories of the home and the non-home environments and with agency components threaded through them where economic status of families is both dependent and independent subject/object of analysis.

Child agency cannot be considered in isolation in its conceptual autonomy and needs to be conceptualised within a setting-based context. Such an approach broadens the range of meanings of agency and determines it as a locally constructed ability to act depending on particular settings, as well as on the material circumstances, gender and age of the agent. So the local construction of agency means not only local culture and society, but also locally at home, locally at school, and locally in the neighbourhood. Within each of these settings, experiences of child agency are expressed in the way

children undertake certain activities and develop relationships. The aspects of the settings that affected child agency were the social, cultural and economic relationships and networks that children built, as well as the activities they undertook. Therefore setting-based agency can be described as a pattern of behaviour and relationships that children adopt in attempting to realise their personal interests as well as the interests that are important for them within cultural requirements and structural opportunities. Empirical evidence from this research in Kyrgyzstan has shown that settings had different effects on child agency and that agency is affected in different ways by economic circumstances varying across gender and age.

9.3.1. Home environment

Home is understood as a source of selfhood, a place to create and sustain one's own self-identity in which people can be 'themselves' (Lowe, 2004, p. 67). In reality, it is usually taken for granted due to the 'natural' role it plays in the lives of people. In fact home has several meanings and functions (e.g. a home as a locale for the reproduction of social life (Giddens, 1984), but also, as revealed in the preceding chapters, home is a setting for agentic actions as well as purposiveness for child agency (as seen in the case of the state school children). It was important in both ways as a setting where children could undertake actions, but also as a space for building and developing relationships. Home environment in this study is understood as a physical entity where children lived with their parents, siblings, relatives and their families. However, settings themselves were not simply a shell or a stage, but rather a means of and a purpose for realising child agency.

Although the functions of the home sound similar for all actors in it, women, men and children are argued to experience home differently (Munro and Madigan, 1993). Similarly in this study, older girls felt that home was a shelter to retreat to from

the broader external world for the sake of their bodily security and honour. If the home's functioning for safety was particularly important for the private school girls, for the poor families home was associated with such social norms as shame and honour affecting children's freedom and purposiveness of agency in their daily lives. These norms were more influential at the state school for the agency of younger children and girls in particular. For girls at the state school, it (honour) was seen as part of the moral obligations towards their parents – as they tried to be good daughters and sisters, and to protect the family reputation. Home also restricted their abilities to act due to their gender and age, so that older girls were not allowed to walk in certain places at certain times. Nevertheless, home was a setting for all the girls at both schools, where older and younger girls had more freedom to act on their own behalf in relation to their parents, which was expressed in the way in which girls had more support from their parents than boys. Here gender and settings mattered in a sense that both were shaping agency in a certain way, but their importance was triggered by the economic circumstance of low income.

As Munro and Madigan (1993) suggest, home is largely a negotiated context; children negotiated their actions with their parents (and siblings and other adults) within the cultural and social framework. For some at the private school such negotiation was not straightforward, but rather built through several layers of authority (e.g. especially older boys had to use their mothers as messengers to enhance their negotiating power with their fathers). Boys' agency actions towards their fathers (aged 16) at both schools were more characteristic of tactical agency. They had little freedom to act independently due to their relationships with their fathers, who acted particularly restrictively towards older boys. These boys were unable to express their own decisions and their own views, or to make their own choices when their fathers were present at home. They were

expected to act in certain masculine and adult-like ways and had little freedom not to obey their fathers. Although the positions of fathers and their attitudes to their sons across all the families at the state and private school were similar, the expectations from the sons were different. In particular, the boys at the state school were expected to act agentically, which meant carrying out responsibilities within the home, whereas boys at the private school were mainly expected to be agentic in their studies. Younger boys aged 12 at the state school developed their relationships with their fathers through learning from them to work with specific materials such as wood and iron to contribute to the household's physical capital. Some younger boys at the private school were in post-divorce situations in which their agency was focused on self-help to deal with their parents. Although some cultural aspects of relationships between fathers and sons survive economic change, the expectations of parents from their children and their roles in the family cannot avoid the impact of high income giving children more freedom from household responsibilities.

Age was a main social norm which regulated not only home (and non-home) relationships, but also individual actions, by giving children more agency freedom to act on the one hand and also restricting it on the other. Children at the state school were encouraged to take up more agentic behaviour and to not act childishly, which was associated with shame and which became more relevant after a certain age. Parents encouraged children's mature conduct and a change of their agency acts from playing to performing actions associated with being older due to the strong social and cultural force of shame. For instance, older children were discouraged from accompanying their parents when visiting relatives, as this was associated with young children; children were discouraged from playing at the age of 12. Nothing similar was found in the case of the private school children, who were allowed to remain children, with fewer

responsibilities and little freedom to act. What was common for children at both schools was that the youngest children in the family were always at the receiving end of control and authority, they had to follow and listen to the older siblings and parents. This is an example of (lack of) freedom being common to both schools, though the reasons for this were different. Age as a cultural norm common for both economic groups, nevertheless, acts differently for the children's freedom of their agency in contrasting economic circumstances.

The home environment as a setting also had different effects on child agency in terms of its components of purposiveness (and actions correspondingly). Poor children had more collective-based home arrangements where children lived in overcrowded spaces. They had more actors to negotiate with and too little to negotiate for in terms of space. Home as a setting for both relationships and activities generated more purposes and possibilities for children at the state school to be agentic. This was relevant for boys and girls equally, for old and young alike, who had direct relationships with their homes and made their own contributions to the running of the home and family. Older boys saw their roles as brothers responsible for their sisters and their agency had a purpose of protecting them from 'wrong' places, the 'wrong' company and 'wrong' activities. Children (including those aged 12) were also agentic in relation to their younger siblings, and directed their agency purposively towards care and responsibility for the wellbeing of their younger siblings, with whom they exercised their agency and power as adult carers. Home for children at the state school was more closely connected with agency actions of children involving differing types of paid and unpaid work. This connection was established in the way in which they did more tasks at home than their counterparts at the private school, and even more than their parents. They were at school

for half a day, then at home, and some of the children were also engaged in paid work outside their homes.

Overall children's activities at home (from the state school) were largely aimed at and had a purpose of contributing to their families' collective wellbeing. Children in Kyrgyzstan perform numerous household chores, as they did in the past. It was culturally accepted for children to help with domestic chores as their social responsibility to contribute to the wellbeing of their families and to ensure the continuity of certain (culturally gendered) skills. However, as families and cultural norms towards children undergo rearrangement in response to economic changes, after the collapse of the Soviet Union children's participation in household chores has extended to paid work. With new economic challenges and insecurity, children's contribution is about acting as part of the survival strategies of the households or a structural necessity for the maintenance of their families. Children have become earners for their families and took over almost all responsibility from their mothers and fathers regarding the house as a physical setting and the home as a social and economic entity. These children had more reasons and purposes to be responsible as equal contributors to the home, with a strong sense of identity and belonging to them. It was the main setting that children at the state school, regardless of their age, used to realise their morality towards their parents – one of the main purposes of their agency, which they fulfilled in various ways. Low income triggers the agency actions and purposiveness and reinforces the cultural expectations of children as able to act.

Home weighed differently for rich and poor. The private school children spent the majority of their time at school and even after school they were mainly busy with additional studying/learning activities. One of the many differences between the children from the two schools was the presence of nannies and cleaners at home for children

from the private school. To have someone to help with domestic work was influential for children's relationships with home, as well as for their abilities and purposes to act. They were not involved in looking after older family members or in caring for their younger siblings. These children did not have agency purposes to be directly involved in running the house and looking after the home and family. At this end of the spectrum, home was more a material comfort zone for children at the private school, with special facilities and resources. They had computers with access to the internet and hence were able to maintain interests and networks inaccessible to the children at the state school and their parents. These children may enjoy different type of freedom offered by the virtual world in the way they were bridging and creating their networks globally.

There was a division between the schools in terms of the children's access to information and the global world, which can be crucial for children's overall wellbeing and development. In this sense, the home setting played a key role for children at the two schools not only in demarcating a distinction in their material and social distance from each other but also in determining the deepening of the gulf between them in terms of future potential and agency outcomes. Economic circumstances are influential in terms of future outcomes of child agency and high income is crucial in creating spaces for children and not necessarily restricting them to certain settings.

Children at the state school were more agentic within the home environment, but with various effects on the components of agency. These children were freer than their counterparts to act independently and individually within the home. However this was a different meaning of freedom, which was imposing on the children from the state school a certain dimension of non-freedom as a necessity and a purpose to act for the common good. Children's contributions to their families through undertaking a wide range of time-consuming unpaid and for some of them paid work were essential for families'

wellbeing, without which it would be difficult for them to survive. This means that children had to act for the collective wellbeing, which might not necessarily coincide with their individual interest and agency outcome e.g. children might want to spend their time doing something else than working at home. The outcome of agency for the collective good supersedes the personal interest.

Conversely, children at the private school exercised little agency in the home environment due to a lack of freedom for doing so, as their time and activities were extremely monitored and managed by their parents. Their agency purposes were more self-oriented than collective-based and they did not need to act for the wellbeing of their families and households. However, children at the state school were more individualistic in their actions, as they acted and made decisions themselves for the collective wellbeing of their families. In contrast their counterparts were less individual free agents in their agency actions, though their purposes were more oriented at personal individual wellbeing and not bounded around collective one. What was similar for both schools was some cultural patterns of relationships between children and parents such as father and son relationships, the position of the younger child and the control of the girls' bodies and behaviour. The differences were seen in the purposiveness behind these practices which were clearly shaped by different economic circumstances.

9.3.2. Non-home environment

Neighbourhood is believed to be one of the most significant settings for children and their development (Engwicht, 1999; Schnur, 2005). This is partly because children spend considerable time in their neighbourhoods and develop their social networks and relationships there as social agents. Neighbourhoods are an important source of social contact (Perren et al., 2004) and are essential for developing local identities and networks (Forrest and Kearns, 2001).

The non-home environment (the neighbourhood) in this thesis means the country, the city centre, the area where children lived and the school they attended. It is essential to note that settings in both home and non-home environments did not affect child agency in isolation, but interacted, as they mediate the effect of one on the other and consequently on child agency. Parental influence was also effective outside the immediate home environment, which affected children's activities and relationships in their neighbourhood and their agency. This means that parental attitudes to children within the non-home environment had almost a similar effect on their abilities to act, their freedom and purposes as they did within the home environment, albeit with some differences. Parental engagement in children's presence and place in the neighbourhood and their neighbourhood-related agency was more influential in the case of the private school children, whose parents limited their children's exposure to neighbourhood effects by restricting children to their home. Not only were their home activities strictly structured by their parents, but their activities outside home were also mainly organised by them. This was the case for both children aged 12 and 16, and for girls and boys alike. Children from rich families had more structured routines and less freedom to act within both home and non-home environments, which resulted in children having little chance of realising their agency within their neighbourhoods and homes. However, it is conceivable that internet and computers gave children at private school more freedom from their parents in a way which may be less visible than for the state school children.

In contrast, children at the state school emerged as more spatially mobile, socially active and agentially dynamic in terms of making friends, studying, using the neighbourhood space, doing paid work etc. In fact when it comes to the state school, older boys were benefitting more from the neighbourhood and the benefit they drew from it was more positive for their agency outcomes. The children at the state school in

general had more active and engaging relationships with their settings, their peers, friends, teachers and other adults. Their agency actions were expressed in their direct contacts with others and their social networking was the main way of compensating for poor infrastructure with fewer resources to be outside and either poor quality or no educational activities at all for them to be engaged locally. Thus their friends, classmates and neighbours were the main sources for their sociability, networking, support, trust, social engagement etc. These children had a greater level of belonging, sharing, interacting and bonding at their local level, which positively affected their agency freedom.

This study demonstrates that children at the state school did not have the type of ‘independent’ agency that classic Western scholars predict. Rather, they often exercised agency through building and nurturing social relationships, responding and initiating contacts, interacting individually and collectively using their agency freedom and purposes. Moreover, one of the main purposes for agency actions was aimed at collective wellbeing of their families, which defines agency as not only being taken in the context of collective actions, but also for the collective reasons.

In this sense, children at the private school were missing out – they did not have multiple sources of relationships and the ones they had tended to be more markedly top-down and to lack freedom of action due to the parenting practices they experienced. Children at the private school generally had rigid, pre-planned daily routines and probably that was the reason for their boredom in their home and non-home environments. Boys and girls expressed views that they lived under conditions which did not give them space for new experiences and limited their agency freedom. However, these children were better organised financially and logistically to use the neighbourhood for their leisure and entertainment. On rare occasions these children

could get together and visit the city's expensive entertaining sites and therefore had more consumer choice for leisure than their poor counterparts. However, despite this advantage, Bishkek was still small and boring for these children and did not offer them enough choices in comparison with their holidays abroad. The limited contacts with the neighbourhoods, their structured routines and parental control strengthened children's spatial isolation and limited agency freedom. As a result, school remained the main setting for children's social contacts at the private school and such a limited spatial exposure of these children presented a risk of leaving them in social loneliness, especially due to the competition at school.

School not only presented the main setting for their agency actions, but was the single space where children at the private school could demonstrate freedom to act and their purposes to do so. In other words, their agency action within the non-home environment was only expressed towards their studies, as these children spent the majority of their time at school and doing other learning/studying activities outside home. Compared to home, school offered children at the private school more reasons to be agentic, while the opposite was true for the state school children, which shows the marked role of material circumstances for child agency. Nevertheless, children at the private school were more secondary agents in their learning (as a result of their parents involvement), whereas children at the state school were less individualised students, but more independent learning agents.

To a large extent the way children perceived themselves with regard to their home, school and neighbourhood and were seen by parents and other adults informed children's engagement with these settings. School was a good example of this in the case of the private school children. Their parents and teachers, who had market-based relationships with one another, perceived the children as learners-consumers in the first

place. Parental encouragement to study was also enhanced by school-based competition, more salient among girls, which had a noticeably negative impact on girls' wellbeing and self-esteem. The purposiveness of children's agency at the private school was self-oriented to succeed personally and compete academically with others to be the best. For children at the state school the purposiveness of their studying was to study collectively well and to perform as a collective. In addition, children at the state school tended to be more cooperative and supportive of one another at school than their wealthier counterparts. The state school children and their parents shared an equal sense of the importance of schooling but for them attending school was simply another activity to undertake together with others, not the only one.

At the personal level, both rich and poor children demonstrated strong commitment to study and girls in particular were agentic learners. As neighbourhood in general was rather a gendered agency setting, where poor boys had more freedom to act, both schools were also gendered agency spaces for all the girls regardless of their age. It is one of the examples of how children not only used their agency to mediate the effects of gender, but also how such a structural factor as gender can mediate children's agency (e.g. girls are more encouraged to study well than boys). Although children were agentic students and followed their agency purposes to become high achievers, it emerged as more of a moral issue for the poor children, whereas achievement for the rich children was considered desirable more in terms of their practical chances of individual success in future. Children at the state school used high academic achievements as a way of making friends, as this was part of building honour and avoiding shame - two concepts which were important in their lives across all settings and with relation to all the activities they undertook. This contributes to locating children at the state school in the

here and now, whereas children at the private school and especially what they did now was about enhancing their agency when they will become older.

The four components of agency - action, freedom, purposiveness and outcome - were affected by the settings differently for children at the state and private school. Similar to the home environment, within the non-home environment children at the state school had more freedom to act but less individual reasoning for their agency. These purposes for acts were more aimed at family wellbeing (e.g. paid work for the wellbeing of their families, shame and honour for the family reputation, household work instead of leisure etc.), and the outcomes of their agency were more located in the here and now. Their agency within their neighbourhood and school was expressed in multiple sources of relationships and activities, which were mainly the outcomes of the children's own actions rather than those of their parents. Although they had limited freedom to make use of the neighbourhood in different capacities (as customers) in comparison with their rich counterparts, they were still more active and spontaneous agents in their neighbourhood and school.

In contrast, children at the private school were limited and had little freedom except in the school setting - their single focus of agency, which almost overrode all other agency actions. In fact children from the private school represented themselves as important agents, though such agency was only in the space of school and their lived experiences of neighbourhood were much more limited and narrower than those of the state school children. If in the case of the home environment there were some similarities between the children from the two schools and continuity of traditional cultural patterns was observed across both schools, experiences of child agency within the non-home environment demonstrated more differences in these two models of childhood with the underlying and dividing factor of economic dis/advantage.

Children's agency is partly the product of settings, culture, personal circumstance and overall structures; but by creating, reacting to and transforming their circumstances children are agentic producers of their settings. What has emerged from the four empirical chapters on the home and non-home environment is the importance of incorporating settings for children's activities and relationships and economic circumstances into analysis of child agency. Moreover, setting-based analysis has discovered two theoretical approaches to seeing children as agents such as identifying agency of children by positioning them firstly in their own context i.e. among other children of corresponding age and secondly within the wider society of adults. Paying attention to children's agency and the specificity of a locality enables the identification of child- and context-specific features of agency, for which a setting is not a static container, but a space with different meanings, purposes, restrictions and possibilities. Child agency is of course likely to be a function of not only settings but also culture, gender and age as well as interaction between individual personality and the situation. However the importance and peculiarity of these factors for child agency only emerge when they come to interaction with economic circumstances. Thus, economic circumstances do not only affect the dynamics of agency but affect the very fabric, its core idea of being individualistic ability to act.

9.4. Culture, economic background and child agency

Whether culture or material dis/advantage is more influential in shaping child agency is not under scrutiny here - instead, the main focus is their interplay as a major influence on child agency. Nevertheless, the research evidence gives enough empirical grounding to advocate the nature of child agency as being shaped by economic circumstances. It is not to dichotomise the poor and rich as such, but to show how these economic conditions have various effects on child agency, which allows the

development of the argument that child agency is a construct of economic circumstances. Low income as a structure stood out as a distinct context and affected all components of child agency and its interaction with culture and parenting was important to determine the place of economic circumstances within the cultural politics of childhood. Low income seems to promote child agency, to give children more purposes to be agentic and freedom for manoeuvre within home and non-home environments. Their purposes for agency stem from their moral rationalities of what they think they should do and/or be as 'good' sons, daughters, sisters, brothers etc. In the case of the rich families, wealth seems to give less purposiveness for children's agency in terms of their overall sense of responsibility and contribution to the family wellbeing, as they become more self-oriented to succeed in the future, instead of being agentic in the present. Consequently one could argue that material circumstances generate different forms of agency and agency expressions.

Children at the two schools had different economic backgrounds which offered them various options for and limitations on child agency. But it was not only the structures which were different between the rich and poor groups, but the nature of agency itself. The study highlighted the individual motivation of self-interest that guides human agency, which was realised differently in the two schools. This challenges the accounts of the nature of child agency which describe it commonly as individualised, as in the Western tradition of social science. The empirical chapters contribute to the recent studies of children which emphasise the social nature of children's agency (Jeffrey, 2011). As Jeffrey writes: 'Young people in many contexts equate agency with the cultivation of interdependencies rather than individual action and autonomy' (2011, p. 250). The state school children demonstrated their focus on the collective wellbeing of the immediate and/or wider family and the same was the case at school and in the

neighbourhood in which they lived with more solidarity, cooperation and mutual help. Their moral agency was expressed in their actions and purposiveness within the context of their relationships, obligations, duties and the prevailing sense of being 'good' sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, students etc. However, despite being more collectively oriented and culturally constrained, children from the state school were in fact more individual in the sense of being more responsible for their own though socially shaped choices. They were individualistic in acting, but collective in terms of purposiveness. Their individualism seemed to be nested in the collective and the collective was an inseparable part of the individual. In comparison, the children from the private school who seemed to be more individually oriented and less constrained by tradition and income were in practice less individualised in terms of having less responsibility for their own choices. This is not to develop a one-sided vision of the interaction of culture and material circumstances but to appreciate its more complex intertwined influences which create multidimensional outcomes.

At the private school children expressed their moral agency in a similar framework, but had more individualistic notions aimed at personal success and development. For instance, children at both schools showed a high level of willingness to study well at school, as they knew that schooling was crucial for further education, but also for their image of being good children of their parents. If in the state school children saw this as a way of repaying their parents' hard work and a chance of having a better future life to expand possibilities for the entire family, the private school children wanted to study well because they wanted to succeed in life personally (and possibly outside the control of the family). So although agency was expressed in a similar form, the purposiveness of agency was different, as well as the rationalities behind it. This was especially true in that the private school children had the capability to act with a more

future-oriented focus, whereas the state school children lived in conditions that required them to be agentic in the here and now.

The interaction between material conditions and agency can become even more complicated. Although one could expect that the material construction of agency is more pronounced for the poor children, as they would be less able to act, the evidence indicates that the opposite may also be true. It is the private school children whose ability to act turned out to be more limited by their material wealth and therefore materially constructed, as their economic advantage had some markedly thinning effects on their agency. Overall, in this study material circumstances emerged as more influential in determining child agency than culture, which means that culture is not inflexible on a national level, but has rapidly become modified by economic status. Children from high income families experienced regulated freedom, being bounded not by financial hardship but by their parents' far-reaching and detailed control.

In turn, material disadvantage must be rightly seen as a signifier of children's agency, as it seemed to give more freedom, but also purposefulness for child agency and create unregulated control for children in the state school. Low income united families around combined actions to survive and gave children increased and urgent agency purpose. These kinds of choices and prioritisations demonstrated the children's (and parents') agentic approach to their circumstances and such unity was a demonstration of power over poverty as a collective agency action. Again, this was more obvious also because agency among the state school children was more (traditionally) culturally determined and represents a common and socially shared meaning of the role of children in Kyrgyz society. However, children's high engagement in household running, taking more responsibilities to share the burden of their parents and learning extra skills resulted partly from the pressure of cultural expectations and partly a result of cultural

obedience to the older adults, but was still determined by children themselves. Children obeyed the adults and took responsibilities not because of some explicitly manifested control and demand, but because they themselves thought they should. Children should rightly be viewed as ‘more than culturally programmed agents or empty vessels through which the hydraulic push and pull of social and cultural forces flow’ (Mizen and Ofose-Kusi, 2011, p. 9).

Of course, this is not to claim that cultural rationalisations do not influence the private school children and their families, but rather to demonstrate how culture changes during the time of transition, with different pace and direction among the two groups. This confirms that culture is ‘a practice that produces meaning’ (Lister, 2010, p. 17), which is reproduced and modified over time. Rapid economic stratification seems to be able to swiftly, within the same generation, produce significant deviations in what Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’ (i.e. a set of values which enables people to understand what it is wrong and right to do). The meaning of culture for the families at the state school became more focused on bonding relationships within the locality, while their rich counterparts found themselves as having more bridging and linking abilities, all of which would affect child agency components.

This thesis aimed to steer child agency from mainly a social and cultural category towards a perspective that allowed due consideration of the materialist reading of this concept. The effects of culture on the one hand and material dis/advantage on the other create certain contexts for child agency, where agency and structure are interconnected in the way that children are obedient and free at the same time, as well as agentic and dependent. Overall, this creates an understanding of child agency as a complex phenomenon, interrelated with and, affected by different factors. Agency as a capacity to act can be amended to the definition of making one able to act ‘despite’ and

child agency becomes meaningful when enacted through the restrictions of different structures. Therefore, this is not something static, something that someone has, but what makes one able and qualified to act within the domain of cultural and economic structures. Agency seems to be not only a status or an ability to act, but also a socially shared process of acting whose nature depends on the material circumstances.

9.5. Kyrgyz society and child agency

Children's lives would be expected to respond to the rapidly changing environment in the country, affected by westernization and the transition to a market economy – arguably the most dramatic changes in Kyrgyzstan's history. Historical changes, political upheaval and economic decline had a huge impact on children. The norms of schooling and children being seen as active social and academic agents - once very important Soviet ways of treating children - have now been significantly challenged by rapid economic stratification. To perceive children as a singular group is not only insufficient, but also misleading in terms of recognising agency in them.

The focus of this thesis's exploratory effort is the culturally and socially embedded perception of children as able to act given the contrasting economic conditions. It is culturally believed that children in Kyrgyzstan are contributors to home, neighbourhood and school activities and networking, though such abilities develop as children get older. Agency seems not to exist in Kyrgyz society as a concept, but to be a culturally accepted practice. From the classic liberal point of view, some of the main elements of freedom are 'freedom from coercion or the imposition of someone else's will without consent' and 'maximum freedom of choice' (Lister, 2010, p. 224). A chance of having more choices is often connected to the availability or especially to the unavailability of material resources; and freedom from coercion and someone's will when taking agentic actions is subject to cultural norms. The way children at the state

school were often guided by the notion of being good daughters, sons, sisters, students etc. is one of the examples of the extent to which children's agency freedom was subject to such cultural norms. In a society where the self is perceived as more of a collective rather than an individual concept, it is likely that individual agency actions will be made without the acknowledgment of overt coercion, yet nevertheless for the sake of collective wellbeing. Although agency as an ability to act is relevant for the Kyrgyz culture, its component of freedom (or voluntarism-based dimension) is what is contested, as it makes an awkward fit in a universal definition of agency as the independent ability to act.

This research indicates that studies on child agency in cultures similar to the Kyrgyz need to be adjusted to account for the strong collectivist tendency in local purposiveness (though this is changing for some economic groups and moreover material circumstances and culture seem to be intertwined in terms of impact of changes). In particular, Kyrgyz children do not conform to the notion of independent autonomous beings as this is expressed in the new sociology of childhood (Prout and James, 1997). Thus this is a challenge to the classic theory of child agency as an individualistic phenomenon. As seen, this is traditionally a Kyrgyz cultural perception of children in society, which was also promoted by the Soviet legacy of child rearing practices, but which was challenged by the economic transition.

The freedom component in agency is not about being able to choose to act or not, but about being able to act independently from, and despite, structures. The degree of freedom that children enjoy depends on their structural location. This resembles more negative freedom - 'freedom from' - than positive freedom - 'freedom to'. A greater importance comes from the purposiveness component of agency, which is the ultimate reason for taking action. Agency actions and purposiveness are the means, where the

end is agency outcomes. The agency inequality between the children with different economic backgrounds would not have been so problematic if these differences were not also likely to considerably affect their agency wellbeing in the future. It is likely that children from the private school would have greater chances of being more agentic in the future due to their accumulated agency potential stemming from better education, job prospects etc. If agency is only a means for achieving wellbeing, then agency is critically important for children in general and for poorer ones in particular. Having had unequal economic starting points, the gap between them widens as time goes on. Thus, understanding child agency is essential in any efforts to reduce inequalities in outcomes for the agents despite their material constraints.

9.6. Conclusion

I have come to the argument that child agency is experienced in relation to multiple settings and is not expressed in a single form. The setting-based picture of child agency did not draw one or two models of agency, but produced a rather mixed reality. Although the cultural norms of age are similarly powerful for all the families and the relationships within them, and gender is a mainly stable predictor of relationships and activities, material background appeals for special attention. The poor families demonstrated an image of being more traditional and more affected by social norms such as honour and shame, and being driven by an imperative to achieve collective wellbeing. The differences between the schools and the variations of income caused by transitional economic structures emerged as more obviously influential than the traditional cultural determinants - or alternatively were influencing the development of a post-transition culture.

The theory of 'agency' was used as a tool to explore the perceptions of children and their roles in society, their views of childhood, their daily actions and relationships,

and the ways in which children use their agency to deal with certain structures. It also helped understand and explore certain societal phenomena and concepts such as poverty, wellbeing and childhood specific to the modern Kyrgyz culture, and to the current political, social and economic situation in the country. But agency has been an object of this enquiry itself as a lived experience of Kyrgyz boys and girls. Another focus of the study was to understand what agency means for Kyrgyz children and how it relates to their experiences of childhood. This study sheds light on individual motivation and behaviour.

The main contribution of this thesis is an attempt to bring the interpretation of child agency as shaped by economic circumstances to the foreground. This study disaggregates different layers and dimensions of agency through settings and the domains of children's relationships. Such unwrapping is useful in order to analyse the cultural, economic, social and personal insights and meanings attached to the concept of child agency and childhood in general. Through proposing the setting-based concept of locally constructed child agency, the thesis fills a gap in the literature in terms of its special focus on neighbourhood and children. Studies of neighbourhood are mostly limited to researching neighbourhood characteristics and child outcomes. What is consequently overlooked is a focus on child agency in relation to culture, parental relationships and material advantage/disadvantage. Not only does this study include evidence about the routine practice of agency, but it reflects on the complex manifestations of children's agency as it responds to parenting and cultural ideological norms given certain material circumstance. The analysis goes beyond the assumption that individual children are only influenced by family structure and school, and gives an account of the broader social context, such as friends, social networks, and out-of-school

activities such as paid work and children's activities in their neighbourhoods. It also demonstrates the influence of parents on children's lives beyond the home environment.

The main limitation of the research is the limited representation of children in terms of age, ethnicity and the population of poor children in the country. The main limitations of the research stem from the limited representation of children in terms of age, ethnicity and the overall population of poor children in the country. The sample size and gender split impose some limitations on the data and therefore some caution needs to be exercised in the claims made. Moreover, some aspects of the experience of Kyrgyz children in exercising their agency are unique to these particular participants' backgrounds. As Guba and Lincoln suggest, this is because 'phenomena are neither time- nor context-free' (1982, p. 238). However, although the study sample does not represent the entire population of children in Kyrgyzstan and the study is too context specific, some areas of empirical findings may not be unique only to these particular participants and settings within this society. Some aspects of the analysis have a common argumentative basis with other studies which is reflected in the engagement of the study findings with other scholarly discussions. The study sheds light on how child agency operates and therefore '... it enables one to move beyond the findings of any single research study' (Johnson and Christensen 2004; p. 19). Nevertheless, the arguments and the conclusion of this study can be further strengthened by future empirical inquiries. Hence, they should be seen as signposts for the directions further explorations of child agency in Kyrgyzstan could take to increase their potential for analytic generalisation (Yin, 1989).

More discussions of the operation of child agency at home among children at the private school are needed. Additional data would be required in terms of children's relationships with nannies, chauffeurs etc, which in some cases were said to be quite

close and complex and therefore need more investigation. It would be also interesting to explore other forms of social interactions of these children mainly through internet and social media. These children seemed to be more active agents in virtual space than their poor counterparts. Overall more time would preferably be spent in the field to gather more in depth data, which was not possible in my case. Moreover, future research to significantly enhance the understanding of child agency would be longitudinal, which would enable the researchers to follow up on children's lives and explore not only the setting-based characteristics of agency but also its temporal effects.

A special contribution of the study is its focus on how to understand the ways in which agency is realised in contrasting economic situations of rich and poor. This enables an analysis of the nuanced effects of material circumstances on child agency and its repercussions for cultural ideology within these groups. The study does not dichotomise structure and agency, but demonstrates how the former enables the latter and how the latter becomes what it is through structures. Both structure and agency play an important role in children's agency practice. Apart from the rising knowledge of agency and structure, this study is important for advancing the theory of childhood and broadening the heuristic scope of the new sociology of childhood (James and Prout, 1990/1997).

References

- Ahearn, L. M. (2001) 'Language and agency', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30: 109-37.
- Alderson, P. (2000) *Young children's rights: exploring beliefs, principles and practices*, London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Alderson, P. et al. (2005) 'Are premature babies citizens with rights? Provision rights and the edges of citizenship', *Journal of Social Sciences*, 9: 71-81.
- Alderson, P. and J. Montgomery (1996) 'What about me? Are children competent to decide on their own treatment, regardless of what parents think?', *Health Service Journal*, 11: 23-27.
- Aldgate, J. and M. McIntosh (2006) *Time well spent: a study of well-being and children's daily activities*, Edinburgh: Social Work Inspection Agency.
- Alexander, J. C. (1992) 'Some remarks on 'agency' in recent sociological theory', *Perspectives*, 15(1): 1-4.
- Alkire, S. (2008) *Concepts and measures of agency*, OPHI Working Paper 9. Available from: http://www.ophi.org.uk/pubs/OPHI_WP9.pdf (accessed 10 January 2009).
- Alsop, R. and N. Heinsohn (2005) *Measuring empowerment in practice: structuring analysis and framing indicators*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510. Available from: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/41307_wps3510.pdf (accessed 13 June 2011).
- Amin, S. (2001) 'Imperialism and globalization', *Monthly Review*, 53(2): 19-27.
- Anderson, J. B (1999) 'Religion, state, and society in the new Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Church and State*, 41(1): 99-116.
- Aries, P. (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press.
- Atkinson, R. and K. Kintrea (2001) 'Disentangling area effects: evidence from deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies*, 38(12): 2277-2298.
- Azarov, П. P. (1983) *A book about bringing up children*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Bach, G. (1946) 'Father-fantasies and father-typing in father-separated children', *Child Development*, 17: 63-79.
- Backett-Milburn, K. and L. McKie (1999) 'A critical appraisal of the draw and write technique', *Health Education Research*, 14: 387-98.

- Baldock, J. (1999) 'Culture: the missing variable in understanding social policy?', *Social Policy and Administration*, 33(4): 458-473.
- Bandura, A. (2000) 'Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3): 75-78.
- Bandura, A. (1989) 'Human agency in social cognitive theory', *American Psychologist*, 44(9): 1175-1184.
- Banks, M. et al. (1992) *Careers and identities*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Bauder, H. (2002) 'Neighbourhood effects and cultural exclusion', *Urban Studies*, 39(1): 85-93.
- Bekbolotov, K. (2006) *Protesting Kyrgyzstan: "Devaluation" of meaning, or increasing effectiveness?*, Institute for Public Policy. Available from: <http://www.ipp.kg/en/analysis/191/> (accessed 12 July 2010).
- Bell, R.Q. (1974) 'Contributions of human infants to caregiving and social interaction' in Lewis, M. and Rosenblum, L.A. (eds.) *The Effect of the Infant and its Caregiver*, New York: Wiley, pp. 1-20.
- Bell, R.Q. (1968) 'A reintegration of the direction of effects in studies of socialization', *Psychological Review*, 75: 81-95.
- Bell, S. (2007) 'The child drums and the elder dances? Girlfriends and boyfriends negotiating power relations in rural Uganda' in Panelli R. et al. (eds.) *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: youth rural lives*, London: Routledge, pp. 179-191.
- Berardo, F. M. and C. L. Shehan (1999) *Contemporary perspectives on family research*, Stamford, Conn: JAI Press.
- Berger, P. and T. Luckman (1967) *The social construction of reality*, Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Beyers, J.M. et al. (2003) 'Neighbourhood structure, parenting processes, and the development of youths' externalizing behaviours: a multilevel analysis', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 31: 35-53.
- Bingol, Y. (2006) 'The colorful revolution of Kyrgyzstan: democratic transition or global competition?', *Alternative: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 5(1&2): 73-81.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press.
- Boyden, J. and J. Ennew (1997) *Children in focus: a manual for participatory research with children*, Stockholm: Radda Barnen.

- Boyden, J. et al. (2003) *Children and poverty: experiences and perceptions from Belarus, Bolivia, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone*, Richmond, Virginia: Christian Children's Fund.
- Boyden, J. et al. (1998) *What works for working children*, Stockholm: Radda Barnen and UNICEF.
- Boyden, J. and G. Mann (2005) *Children's risk, resilience, and coping in extreme situations. Handbook for working with children and youth: pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts*, M. Ungar. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Brannen, J. and M. O'Brien (eds.) (1996) *Children in families: research and policy*, Brighton: Falmer Press.
- Bratton, M. (2004) *State building and democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa: forwards, backwards, or together?*, Afro Barometer Working Paper 43. Available from: <http://hawk.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/92104> (accessed 29 November 2011).
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1971) *Two worlds of childhood: US and USSR*, London: George Allan and Unwin Ltd.
- Brook, J. S. et al. (1999) 'The onset of marijuana use from preadolescence and early adolescence to young adulthood', *Development and Psychopathology*, 1(4): 901-914.
- Brooks-Gunn, J. et al. (1993) 'Do neighbourhoods influence child and adolescent development?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 99: 353-395.
- Brown, P. (1997) 'The third wave: education and the ideology of parentocracy' in Halsey, A.H. et al. (eds.) *Education, Culture, Economy and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 393-408.
- Bryman, A. (2004) *Social research methods*, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012) 'How many qualitative interviews is enough?' in Baker, S.E. and R. Edwards (eds.) *Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research*, National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper. Available from: http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf (30May 2013)
- Budlender, D. et al. (2001) *A survey of time use: how South African women and men spend their time*, Statistics South Africa: Pretoria.
- Bundy, C. (1987) 'Street sociology and pavement politics: Aspects of youth and student resistance in Cape Town 1985', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13: 303-330.
- Burchardt, T. (2003) 'Identifying adaptive preferences using panel data: subjective and objective income trajectories' in proceedings of the 3rd conference on the capabilities approach, 7-9 September, Pavia, Italy.

Burton, L. and T. Price-Spratlen (1999) 'Through the eyes of children: An ethnographic perspective on neighborhoods and child development' in Masten, A. S. (ed.) *Cultural processes in child development*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 77-96.

Cahill, C. (2000) 'Street literacy: urban teenagers' strategies for negotiating their neighbourhood', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 3(3): 251-277.

Calcraft, R. (2004) *Children left at home alone: the construction of a social problem*, PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

Chapman, M. (1984) 'Intentional action as a paradigm for developmental psychology: a symposium', *Human Development*, 27(3-4): 113-144.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chen, X. et al. (2003) 'The peer group as a context: mediating and moderating effects on relations between academic achievement and social functioning in Chinese children', *Child Development*, 74: 710-727.

Chin, E. (1993) 'Not of whole cloth made: the consumer environment of children', *Children's Environments*, 10 (1): 72-84.

Christensen, P. (2004) 'Children's participation in ethnographic research: issues of power and representation', *Children & Society* 18: 165-176.

Christensen, P. and A. James (2008) *Research with children: perspectives and practices*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Chubb, J. and T. Moe (1997) 'Politics, markets and organization of schools' in Halsey, A.H. et al. (eds.) *Education, Culture, Economy and Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 363-381.

Chung, H.L. and L. Steinberg (2006) 'Relations between neighbourhood factors, parenting behaviours, peer deviance, and delinquency among serious juvenile offenders', *Developmental Psychology*, 42(2): 319-331.

Chzhen, Y. (2010) *Child poverty in Kyrgyzstan: analysis of the 2008 Household Budget Survey*, UNICEF Working Paper No. EC 2410, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, Heslington, UK. Available from: <http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/profiles/jrbUnicef.php> (accessed 30 January 2011).

Clark, A. (2005) 'Listening to and involving young children: a review of research and practice', *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6): 489-506.

Clark, J. (2004) *Changing welfare, changing states*, London: Sage.

Coe, N. and D. Jordhus-Lier (2010) 'Constrained agency: re-evaluating the geographies of labour', *Progress in Human Geography*, 35(2): 211-233.

- Cohen, J. M. (1977) 'Sources of peer group homogeneity', *Sociology of Education*, 50: 227-241.
- Cohen, S. and T. A. Wills (1985) 'Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis', *Psychological Bulletin*, 98: 310-357.
- Creswell, J. (1998) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christensen, P. H. (2004) 'Children's Participation in Ethnographic Research: Issues of Power and Representation' *Children & Society*, 18: 165-176
- Davie, R. (1996) 'Partnership with children: the advancing trend' in Davie, R. et al. (eds.) *The voice of the child: a handbook for professionals*, London: Falmer Press, pp. 1-11.
- Deci, E. L. (1992) 'The relation of interest to the motivation of behaviour: a self-determination theory perspective' in Renninger, K. A. et al. (eds.) *The role of interest in learning and development*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 43-70.
- Deci, E. L. and R. M. Ryan (1985) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*, New York: Academic Press.
- De La Cruz, M.T. et al. (2002) *Small steps, great strides: doing participatory action research with children*, Philippines: Psychosocial Trauma and Human Rights Program UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies.
- Dodson, L. and J. Dickert (2004) 'Girls' family labor in low-income households: a decade of qualitative research', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66: 318-332.
- Dreze, J. and A. Sen (1995) *India: economic development and social opportunity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DuBois, D. L. et al. (1992) 'A prospective study of life stress, social support, and adaptation in early adolescence', *Child Development*, 63: 542-557.
- Dürschmidt, J. et al. (2010) *Families, social capital and migration in time and space: An exploration of strategies of getting by and getting ahead in comparative context – Germany and Britain*, Families & Social Capital Research Group, Working paper No. 28, London South Bank University. Available from: <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/ahs/downloads/families/familieswp28.pdf> (accessed 27 October 2012).
- Edmonds, E. V. (2003) *Does child labor decline with improving economic status?* NBER Working Paper Series 10134, National Bureau of Economic Research. Available from: www.nber.org/papers/w10134.pdf (accessed 30 October 2012).
- Edwards, A. (2006) 'Relational agency: learning to be a resourceful practitioner', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 43: 168-182.

- Elliot, R. et al. (1999) 'Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields', *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 38: 215-229.
- Elmore, R. F. (2005) 'Agency, reciprocity, and accountability in democratic education' in Fuhrman S. H. and Lazerson, M. (eds.) *The public schools*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 277-301.
- Emmelkamp, R. (2004) *Een veilig avontuur. alledaagse plaatsen en vrijetijdsbesteding in De Verhalen Van Jongeren en Ouders*, Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Engwicht, D. (1999) *Reclaiming the street: creating livable streets and vibrant communities*, Annandale: Pluto Press.
- Ennew, J. (1999) 'How can we define citizenship in childhood?' in Rajani, R. (ed.) *The political participation of children*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Centre for Population and Development Studies.
- Ennew, J. and V. Morrow (1994) 'Out of the mouths of babes' in Verhellen, E. and Spiesschaert, F. (eds.) *Children's Rights: Monitoring Issues*, Gent: Mys & Breesch, pp. 61-84.
- Evans, K. and W. Heinz (2007) 'Flexibility, learning and risk: work, training and early careers in England and Germany', *International Journal of Psychology*, 42(2): 85-93.
- Falkingham, J. and S. Ibragimova (2005) *The dynamics of child poverty in the Kyrgyz Republic*, CHIP Report 11. Available from: <http://www.childhoodpoverty.org/index.php?action=publicationdetails&id=92> (accessed 6 December 2007).
- Feeny, T. and J. Boyden (2003a) *Children and poverty. A review of contemporary literature and thought on children and poverty: rethinking the causes, experiences and effects*, Christian Children's Fund, Children And Poverty Series, Part II, Christian Children's Fund, Richmond. Available from: http://www.christianchildrensfund.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/7659_Poverty%20Pt%201.pdf (accessed 21 March 2011).
- Feeny, T. and J. Boyden (2003b) *Children and poverty. Shaping a response to poverty: a conceptual overview and implications for responding to children living in poverty*, Christian Children's Fund, Children and Poverty Series, Part III, Christian Children's Fund, Richmond. Available from: http://www.christianchildrensfund.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/7658_Poverty%20Pt%203.pdf (accessed 21 March 2011).
- Felner, R. D. et al. (1985) 'Adaptation and vulnerability in high-risk adolescents: an examination of environmental mediators', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 13: 365-379.
- Fine, G.A. and K.L. Sandstrom (1988) *Knowing children: participant observation with minors*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 15, London: Sage.

- Forrest, R. and A. Kearns (2001) 'Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood', *Urban Studies*, 38(12): 2125-2143.
- France, A. et al. (2000) 'A "risky" business: researching the health beliefs of children and young people' in Lewis, A. and Lindsay, G. (eds.) *Researching Children's Perspectives*, Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 150-62.
- Francis, M. and R. Lorenzo (2006) 'Children and city design: proactive process and the 'renewal' of childhood' in Spenser, C. and Blades, M. (eds.) *Children and Their Environments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 217-235.
- Freedom House (2006) *Freedom in the world*, Freedom House annual report series. Available from: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/Charts2006.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2011).
- Furstenberg, F.F. et al. (1999) *Managing to make it: urban families and adolescent success*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gambetta, D. (1996) *Were they pushed or did they jump? Individual decision mechanisms in education*, Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, UK: Westview Press.
- Gardaz, M. (1999) 'In search of Islam in Kyrgyzstan', *Religion*, 29(3): 275-286.
- Gassmann, F. (2011) *Protecting vulnerable families in Central Asia: poverty, vulnerability and the impact of the economic crisis*, UNICEF Innocenti Working Paper, inwopa639. Available from: http://europeandcis.undp.org/uploads/public1/files/vulnerability/Senior%20Economist%20Web%20site/iwp_2011_5.pdf (accessed 11 April 2012).
- Gerson, K., and R. Horowitz (2002) *Observation and Interviewing: Options and Choices* in May, T. (ed.) *Qualitative Research in Action*, London: Sage.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The constitution of society: introduction of the theory of structuration*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1979) *Central problems in social theory*, London: Macmillan.
- Glaser, B. G and A. L. Strauss (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Gollwitzer, P. M. and V. Brandstätter (1997) 'Implementation intentions and effective goal pursuit', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73: 186-199.
- Green, J. and Thorogood, N. (2009 [2004]) *Qualitative methods for health research*, 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Grix, J. (2004) *The foundations of research*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1982) 'Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Enquiry', *Education Communication and Technology Journal*, 30: 233-52.
- Gubrium, J. and J. Holstein (1997) *The new language of qualitative methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gunn, T. J. (2003) 'Shaping an Islamic identity: religion, Islamism, and the state in Central Asia', *Sociology of Religion*, 64(3): 389-410.
- Hardman, C. (1973) 'Can there be an anthropology of childhood?', *JASO*, 4(1): 85-99.
- Hargreaves, A. (1985) 'The micro-macro problem in the sociology of education' in Burgess, R. (ed.) *Issues in educational research: qualitative methods*, Lewes: Falmer, pp. 21-47.
- Hargreaves, A. (1984) *Marxism and relative autonomy. Conflict and change in education series*, Milton Keynes: The Open University.
- Hart, R. (1979) *Children's experience of place*, New York: Irvington.
- Hawthorne, S. (1997) *Theories of power and the culture of the powerful. Feminist theory, knowledge and power: Study guide and reader*, Geelong: Deakin University.
- Hecht, T. (1998) *At Home in the street: street children of Northeast Brazil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heron, T. (2008) 'Globalization, neoliberalism and the exercise of human agency', *The International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society*, 20(1-4): 85-101.
- Hewitt, D. (2005) *Gifted and talented mathematics*, Proceedings of the British Society for Research into Learning Mathematics, 25(3). Available from: <http://www.bsrml.org.uk> (accessed 24 January 2010).
- Hill, M. (1997) 'Participatory research with children: research review', *Child and Family Social Work*, 2: 171-83.
- Hillman, M. et al. (1990) *One false move: a study of children's independent mobility*, London, Policy Studies Institute.
- Hirschfeld, L. A. (2002) 'Why don't anthropologists like children?', *American Anthropologist*, 104(2): 611-627.
- Hofstede, G. (1980) *Culture's consequences*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hollos, M. (2002) 'The cultural construction of childhood: changing conceptions among the pare of Northern Tanzania', *Childhood*, 9: 167-189.
- Holloway, S. and G. Valentine (2000a) 'Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood', *Sociology*, 34(4): 763-783.

- Holloway, S. and G. Valentine (2000b) 'Children's geographies and the new social studies' in Holloway, S. and Valentine, G. (eds.) *Children's geographies. playing, living, learning*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-26.
- Holmes, B. et al. (1995) *Russian education: tradition and transition*, New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Holstein, J. A. and J. F. Gubrium (2000) *The self we live by narrative identity in a postmodern world*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Honderich, T. (2002) 'Determinism as true, compatibilism and incompatibilism as false, and the real problem' in Kane, R. (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of free will*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 461-476.
- Honwana, A. (2005) 'Innocent and guilty: child-soldiers as interstitial and tactical agents' in Honwana, A. and de Boeck, F. (eds.) *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, pp. 31-52.
- Honwana, A and F. de Boeck (eds.) (2005) *Makers and breakers: children and youth in postcolonial Africa*, Oxford: James Currey.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V. and H.M. Sandler (1995) 'Parental involvement in children's education: why does it make a difference?', *Teachers College Record*, 97: 310-331.
- Ibrahim, S. and S. Alkire (2007) *Agency and empowerment: a proposal for internationally comparable indicators*, OPHI Working Paper 4. Available from: http://www.ophi.org.uk/pubs/Ibrahim_Alkire_Empowerment_FINAL.pdf (accessed 10 January 2009).
- ILO (2001) *Child labour in Kyrgyzstan. An initial study*, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO Draft Working Paper. Available from: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/moscow/areas/ipecl/clkyrgyz.pdf> (accessed 7 September 2008).
- IMF (2011) *Kyrgyz Republic - ex post assessment of longer-term program engagement*, IMF Policy Paper. Available from: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2011/030911a.pdf> (accessed 6 September 2011).
- International Crisis Group (2003) *Radical Islam in Central Asia: responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, ICG Asia Report N°58. Available from: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id%41441&l%41> (accessed 9 November 2011).
- James, A. (2010) 'Competition or integration? The next step in childhood studies?', *Childhood*, 17: 485-499.
- James, S. (1990) 'Is there a "place" for children in geography?', *Area*, 22(3): 278-283.
- James, A. and A.L. James (2008) *Key concepts in childhood studies*, London: Sage.

- James, A. and A.L. James (2004) *Constructing childhood: theory, policy and social practice*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James, A. and A.L. James (2001) 'Childhood: toward a theory of continuity and change', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575: 25-37.
- James, A. et al. (1998) *Theorising childhood*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- James, A. and A. Prout (1990/1997) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, London: Falmer.
- Jeffrey, C. (2011) 'Geographies of children and youth ii: global youth agency', *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(2): 245-253.
- Jenks, C. (1996) *Childhood*, London: Routledge.
- Jencks, C. and S.E. Mayer (1990) 'The social consequences of growing up in a poor neighbourhood' in Lynn, L.E. and McGeary, M.G. (eds.) *Inner-city poverty in the United States*, Washington DC: National Academy Press, pp. 111-186.
- Johnson, B. and L. Christensen (2004) *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches, Research Edition, Second Edition*, Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Johnson, M. H. (1999) *Archaeological theory: an introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jones, N. et al. (2010) *Gendered risks, poverty and vulnerability in Ethiopia: to what extent is the productive safety net programme making a difference?*, ODI Research Reports and Studies, London: ODI. Available from: <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6250.pdf> (accessed 22 September 2012).
- Jordan, B. (1996) *A theory of poverty and social exclusion*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Kane, R. (2002) 'Introduction: the contours of contemporary free will debates' in Kane, R. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-41.
- Kardiner, A. (1945) *The psychological frontier of society*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Karsten, L. (2005) 'It all used to be better? Different generations on continuity and change in urban children's daily use of space', *Children's Geographies*, 3(3): 275-290.
- Katz, C. (2004) *Growing up global: economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*, Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press.
- Kearns, A. and P. Mason (2007) 'Mixed tenure communities and neighbourhood quality', *Housing Studies*, 22(5): 661-691.

- Kearns, A. and M. Parkinson (2001) 'The significance of neighbourhood', *Urban Studies*, 38(12): 2103-2110.
- Kesby, M. (2005) 'Re-theorising empowerment-through-participation as a performance in space: Beyond tyranny to transformation', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4): 2037–2065
- Kitzinger, J. (1994) 'The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 16(1): 103-20.
- Klocker, N. (2007) 'An example of 'thin' agency: child domestic workers in Tanzania' in Panelli, R. et al. (eds.) *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: young rural lives*, New York, Routledge, pp. 83-94.
- Korth, B. (2001a) *Analyzing language biographies*, on-line article. Available from: http://www.ca-research-net.org/pdf/Korth-Language_biographies.pdf (accessed 12 November 2011).
- Korth, B. (2001b) 'Bilingual education in Kyrgyzstan: pros and cons' in proceedings of the bilingual education and conflict prevention conference, September 20-22, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
- Kotan, M (2009) 'Freedom or happiness? Agency and subjective well-being in the capability approach', *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 39(3): 369-375.
- Kothari, U. (2001) 'Power, knowledge and social control in participatory development' in Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (eds.) *Participation the New Tyranny?*, London: Zed Books, pp. 139–152.
- Kotlyarskaya, Y. (1990) *Women, the family and children*, Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publications House.
- Kuczynski, L. (ed.) (2003) *Handbook of dynamics in parent-child relations*. Thousand oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kuehnast, K. (1997) *Let the stone lie where it has fallen: dilemmas of gender and generation in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan*, PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota.
- Kuehnast, K. and N. Dudwick (2004) *Better a hundred friends than a hundred rubles? Social networks in transition —the Kyrgyz Republic*, WB Working Paper 39. Available from: <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/book/9780821358986> (accessed 12 November 2011).
- Kyrgyzstan. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2000) *EFA 2000 assessment - country report – Kyrgyzstan*. Available from: <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/kyrgyz/contents.html> (accessed 28 november 2010).

- Kyrgyzstan. The National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyz Republic (2001) *Proverbs and sayings*, Bishkek: Sham basmasy.
- Lee, N. (1998) 'Towards an immature sociology', *The Sociological Review*, 46(3): 458-481.
- Levine, R. et al. (2009) *Girls count: a global investment and action agenda*, Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.
- Levinson, B. and D. C Holland (1996) 'The cultural production of the educated person: an introduction' in Levinson, B. A. et al. (eds.) *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person. Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 1-54.
- Levison, D. (2000) 'Children as economic agents', *Feminist Economics*, 6(1): 125-134.
- Li, J. (2006) 'Self in learning: Chinese adolescents' goals and sense of agency', *Child Development*, 77(2): 482-501.
- Lieten, G. K. (2008) *Children, structure and agency: realities across the developing world*, New York: Routledge.
- Lister, R. (2010) *Understanding theories and concepts in social policy*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Lister, R. (2004) *Poverty*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lochner, K. et al. (1999) 'Social capital: a guide to its measurement', *Health and Place*, 5: 259-270.
- Lowe, S. (2004) *Housing policy analysis*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lukashova, I. and I. Makenbaeva (2010) *Impact of the global financial crisis on labour migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia. Qualitative overview and quantitative survey*, co-funded report by OSCE, ACTED and the European Commission. Available from: <http://www.osce.org/bishkek/40540> (accessed 27 October 2011).
- Lupton, R. (2005) 'Social justice and school improvement: improving the quality of schooling in the poorest neighbourhoods', *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(5): 589-604.
- Lupton, R. (2004) *Schools in disadvantaged areas: recognising context and raising quality*, CASE paper 76. London, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion. Available from: <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/CASEpaper76.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2011).
- MacKay, R. (1973) 'Conceptions of children and models of socialization' in Dreitzel, H. P. (ed.) *Children and socialization*, London: Collier-Macmillan, pp.27-43.

- Magnusson, D. and H. Stattin (1998) 'Parson-context interaction theories' in Damon, W. and Lerner, R. (eds.) *Handbook of child psychology: Volume 1: Theoretical models of human development*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., pp. 685-759.
- Malmberg, L. E. (1996) 'How do Finnish students prepare for their future in three school types? The relation between content of plans, information gathering and self evaluations', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 66: 457-469.
- Marcus, R. et al. (2002) 'Poverty reduction strategy papers (PRPSs)—fulfilling their potential for children in poverty?', *Journal of International Development*, 14: 1117-1128.
- Martin, D. (2003) 'Enacting neighbourhood', *Urban Geography*, 24(5): 361-385.
- Marx, K. (1852/2007) *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Charleston SC: BiblioBazaar.
- Masten, A. S. (2001) 'Ordinary magic: resilience processes in development', *American Psychologist*, 56: 227-238.
- Matthews, H. et al. (1999) 'Reducing the street: the discourse of curfew', *Environment and Planning*, 31(1): 1713-1730.
- Mauthner, M. (1997) 'Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: lessons from three research projects', *Children & Society*, 11: 16-28.
- Mayall, B. (2000) 'Conversations with children: working with generational issues' in Christensen, P. and James, A. (eds.) *Research with Children*, London: Falmer Press.
- Mayall, B. (ed.) (1994) *Children's childhoods observed and experienced*, London and Washington: The Falmer Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934) *Mind, self and society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, M. (1928/1961) *Coming of age in Samoa*, New York: Morrow Quill paperback.
- Melton, G. B. (2000) 'Parents and children: legal reform to facilitate children's participation', *American Psychologist*, 54: 941-951.
- Meyer, J. W. and L. P. Jepperson (2000) 'The 'actors' of modern society: the cultural construction of social agency', *Sociological Theory*, 18: 100-20.
- Miles, M. B. and A. M. Huberman (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis*: Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Mills, J. and M. S. Clark (1982) 'Exchange and communal relationships' in Wheeler, L. (ed.) *Review of personality and social psychology*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 121-144.

Mizen, P. and Y. Ofosu-Kusi (2011) 'A talent for living: exploring Ghana's 'new urban childhood' *Children & Society*, DOI:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00386.x. Article first published online 6 July 2011.

Mizen, P. et al. (2001) 'Why be a school age worker?' in Mizen, P. et al. (eds.) *Hidden Hands: International Perspectives on Children's Work and Labour*, London: Routledge
Farmer, pp. 37-54.

Morrow, V. (2008) 'Ethical dilemmas in research with children and young people about their social environments', *Children's Geographies*, 6(1): 49-61.

Morrow, V. (2007) 'Studying children's everyday worlds: qualitative and creative methods' in Engwall, K. and Söderlind, I. (eds.) *Children's Work in Everyday Life*, Stockholm: Institute for Futures Studies, pp. 25-48.

Morrow, V. (1999a) 'Conceptualising social capital in relation to the well-being of children and young people: a critical review', *The Sociological Review*, 47(4): 744-765.

Morrow, V. (1999b) 'It's cool... 'cos you can't give us detentions and things, can you?!': Reflections on research with children' in Milner, P. and Birgit, C. (eds.) *Time to listen to children: personal and professional communication*, London: Routledge, pp. 203-215.

Morrow, V. and M. Richards (1996) 'The ethics of social research with children', *Children and Society*, 10: 90-105.

Morse, J. (1994) 'Designing funded qualitative research' in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2nd edition, pp.220-35.

Moses, S. (2006) 'The impact of neighbourhood-level factors on children's everyday lives, well-being and identity: a qualitative study of children living in ocean view, Cape Town', *Social Dynamics*, 32(1): 102-134.

Moulton, P. et al. (1998) 'Gifted and talented: exploring the positive and negative aspects of labelling', *Roeper Review*, 21(2): 153-156.

Munro, M. and R. Madigan (1993) 'Privacy in the private sphere', *Housing Studies*, 8: 29-45.

Nieuwenhuys, O. (1994) *Children's life worlds: gender, welfare and labor in the developing world*, London: Routledge.

Nesbitt, E. (2000) 'Researching 8 to 13 year-olds' perspectives on their experience of religion' in Lewis, A. and Lindsay, G. (eds.) *Researching Children's Perspectives*, Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 135-49.

Nussbaum, M. (2001) 'Adaptive preferences and women's options', *Economics and Philosophy*, 17: 67-88.

Oakley, A. (1999) *People's ways of knowing: gender and methodology* in Hood, S. et al. (eds.) *Critical issues in social research: power and prejudice*, Buckingham: OUP.

O'Brien, M. et al. (2000) *Childhood urban space and citizenship: child-sensitive urban regeneration*, ESRC Briefing summary and end of award report. London: University of North London. Available from: www.esrc.ac.uk/my.../502e1399-17eb-49c5-9303-302d4122e664 (accessed 3 August 2011).

O'Kane, C. (2000) 'The development of participatory techniques: facilitating children's views about decisions which affect them' in Christensen, P. and James, A. (eds.) *Research with Children*, London: Falmer Press, pp. 136-159.

Olcott, M.B. (1995) 'Islam and fundamentalism in independent Central Asia' in Ro'i, Y. (ed.) *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting legacies*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 21-40.

Oldman, D. (1994) 'Childhood as a mode of production' in Mayall, B. (ed.) *Children's Childhoods observed and experiences*, London: Falmer, pp. 153-166.

Open Society Institute (2002) *Education development in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: challenges and ways forward*, OSI Education Support Program report, Hungary. Available from: <http://www.osi-edu.net/esp/events/materials/final.doc> (accessed 14 November 2011).

Panelli, R. et al. (2007) *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: young rural lives*, New York: Routledge.

Perren, K. et al. (2004) 'Neighbouring in later life: the influence of socio-economic resources, gender and household composition on neighbourly relationships', *Sociology*, 38(5): 965-984.

Philo, C. (2000) 'The corner-stones of my world': editorial introduction to special issue on spaces of childhood', *Childhood*, 7(3): 243-256.

Piaget, J. (1947) *The psychology of intelligence*, London: Routledge.

Pole, C. et al. (1999) 'Realising children's agency in research: partners and participants?', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2(1): 39-54.

Pomfret, R. (1999) 'Living standards in Central Asia', *MOCT-MOST Economic Policy in Transitional Economies*, 9(4): 395-421.

Pridmore, P. and G. Bendelow (1995) 'Images of health: exploring beliefs of children using the "draw-and-write technique"', *Health Education Journal*, 54: 473-88.

Prout, A. and A. James (1997) 'A new paradigm of sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems' in James, A. and Prout, A. (eds.) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood. Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 7-33.

- Pugh, G. and D. Selleck (1996) 'Listening to and communicating with young children' in Davie, R. et al. (eds.) *The voice of the child: a handbook for professionals*, London: Falmer Press, pp.120-136.
- Punch, S. (2003) 'Childhoods in the majority world: miniature adults or tribal children?', *Sociology*, 37(2): 277-295.
- Punch, S. (2002a) 'Youth transitions and interdependent adult-child relations in rural Bolivia', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 18(2): 123-133.
- Punch, S. (2002b) 'Research with children: the same or different from research with adults?', *Childhood*, 9(3): 321-341.
- Punch, S. (2002c) 'Interviewing strategies with young people: the "secret box", stimulus material and task-based activities', *Children and Society*, 16: 45-56.
- Punch, S. (1998) *Negotiating independence: children and young people growing up in rural Bolivia*, PhD Thesis, University of Leeds.
- Purdy, L. (1992) *In their best interest? The case against equal rights for children*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993) *Making democracy work. Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Qizilbash, M. (2006) 'Well-Being, adaptation and human limitations', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 81: 83-110.
- Qvortrup, J. (2005) *Studies in modern childhood: society, agency, culture*, Basingstoke: Panmgrave MacMillan.
- Qvortrup, J. (1994) 'Childhood Matters: An Introduction', in Qvortrup, J. et al. (eds.) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*, Aldershot: Avebury, pp. 1-23.
- Rankin B.H. and J.M. Quane (2002) 'Social contexts and urban adolescent outcomes: the interrelated effects of neighbourhoods, families, and peers on African-American youth', *Social Problems*, 49(1): 79-100.
- Redmond, G. (2009) 'Children as actors: how does the child perspectives literature treat agency in the context of poverty', *Social Policy and Society*, 8(4): 541-550.
- Redmond, G. (2008) *Children's perspectives on economic adversity: a review of the literature*, Discussion Paper No.2008-01, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence. Available from: <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/497> (accessed 10 December 2009).
- Rees, G. et al. (2009) *Understanding children's well-being: a national survey of young people's well-being*, the Children's Society. Available from: <http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/childsoc.php> (accessed 17 May 2010).

- Renninger, K. et al. (1992) *The role of interest in learning and development*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Reynolds, P. (1991) *Dance civet cat: child labour in the Zambezi Valley*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Richardson, D. et al. (2008) 'Child well-being in Central and Eastern European Countries (CEE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)', *Child Indicators Research*, 1(3): 211-250.
- Ridge, T. (2002) *Childhood poverty and social exclusion: from a child's perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Riley, M. W. et al. (1988) 'Sociology of age' in Smelser, N. J. (ed.) *Handbook of Sociology*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 243-290.
- Ritchie, J. and J. Lewis (2003) *Qualitative research practice: A Guide For Social Science Students And Researchers* (eds.), London: SAGE Publications.
- Ritzer, G. and P. Gindoff (1994) 'Agency–structure, micro–macro, individualism–holism–relationism: a metatheoretical explanation of theoretical convergence between the United States and Europe' in Sztompka, P. (ed.) *Agency and structure: Reorienting social theory*, Yverdon: Gordon and Breach, pp. 3-23.
- Robson, E. et al. (2007) 'Conceptualizing agency in the lives and actions of rural young people' in Panelli, R. et al. (eds.) *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*, New York: Routledge.
- Rotberg, R. (ed.) (2004) *When states fail. Causes and consequences*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rowlands, J. (1997) *Questioning empowerment*, Oxford: Oxfam.
- Ruciman, W. G. (1966) *Relative deprivation and social justice*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ruget, V. and B. Usmanalieva (2007) 'The impact of state weakness on citizenship: a case study of Kyrgyzstan', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 40: 441-458.
- Ryan, A. M. (2001) 'The peer group as a context for the development of young adolescent motivation and achievement', *Child Development*, 72: 1135-1150.
- Ryan, R. M. et al. (1995) 'Autonomy, relatedness, and the self: their relation to development and psychopathology' in Cicchetti, D. and Cohen, D. J. (eds.) *Developmental psychopathology: Theory and methods*, New York: Wiley, pp. 618-655.
- Rychlak, J. F. (1988) *The psychology of rigorous humanism*, New York: New York University.

- Saito, M. (2003) 'Amartya Sen's capability approach to education: a critical exploration', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(1): 17-33.
- Samman, E. and M. Emma Santos (2009) *Agency and empowerment: a review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence*, OPHI Research Paper 10a. Available from: http://www.ophi.org.uk/pubs/RP_SammanSantos_Agency.pdf (accessed 28 September 2010).
- Sandelowski, M. (1995) 'Focus on Qualitative Methods: Sample Size in Qualitative Research', *Research in Nursing & Health*, 18: 179-183
- Save the Children (2004) *So You Want to Involve Children in Research? A toolkit supporting children's meaningful and ethical participation in research relating to violence against children*. Available from <http://images.savethechildren.it/f/download/Policies/st/strumenti.pdf> (accessed 17 May 2013).
- Save the Children (1995) *Towards a children's agenda - new challenges for social development*, London: Save the Children UK.
- Schaffer, C. (1975) 'Social development in infancy' in Lewin, R. (ed.) *Child Alive*, Garden City, NY: Andor, pp. 22-29.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. and C. Sargent (1998) *Small wars: the cultural politics of childhood*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schnur, O. (2005) 'Exploring social capital as an urban neighbourhood resource: empirical findings and strategic conclusions of a case study in Berlin-Moabit', *Tijdschrift voor economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96(5): 488-505.
- Schuler, M. (2007) 'Migration patterns of the population in Kyrgyzstan', *Space, Population, Societies. Les populations D'Asie central*, 1: 73-89.
- Scott, J. (2000) 'Children as respondents: the challenge for quantitative methods' in Christensen, P. and James, A. (eds.) *Research with Children. Perspectives and Practices*, London: Falmer Press, pp. 98-119.
- Sen, A. K. (1995) 'Gender inequality and theories of justice' in Nussbaum, M. and Glover, J. (eds.) *Women, culture and development: a study of human capabilities*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 259-273.
- Sen, A. K. (1992) *Inequality re-examined*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sen, A. K. (1990) 'Development as capability expansion' in Griffin, K. and Knight, J. (eds.) *Human Development and the International Development Strategy for the 1990s*, London: Macmillan, pp. 41-58.
- Sen, A. K. (1987) *The standard of living*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Sen, A. K. (1985) 'Well-being, agency and freedom', *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXII: 169-221.
- Settersten, R. et al. (1997) 'The measurement of age, age structuring, and the life course', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23: 233-61.
- Sewell, W. H. (1992) 'A theory of structure: duality, agency, and transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 98: 1-29.
- Shamatov, D. and K. Sainazarov (2006) 'The impact of standardized testing on education quality in Kyrgyzstan: the case of the program for international student assessment (PISA)' in Alexander, W. (ed.) *The Impact of International Achievement Studies on National Education Policymaking (International Perspectives on Education and Society, Volume 13)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.145-179.
- Shanahan, M. J. (2000) 'Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: variability and mechanisms in life course perspective', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26: 667-692.
- Shropshire, J. and S. Middleton (1999) *Small expectations: learning to be poor*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- SIAR (1999) *Child labour in Kyrgyzstan*, Bishkek: SIAR.
- Sibley, D. (1995) *Geographies of exclusion*, London: Routledge.
- Silova, I. (2002) 'Returning to Europe: facts, fiction, and fantasies of post-Soviet education reform' in Nóvoa, A. and Lawn, M. (eds.) *Fabricating Europe: the formation of an educational space*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 87-109.
- Silova, I. et al. (2007) 'Education and the crisis of social cohesion in Azerbaijan and Central Asia', *Comparative Education Review*, 51(2): 159-180.
- Sinclair, R. (2004) 'Participation in Practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable', *Children and Society*, 18: 106-18.
- Smith, A. et al. (2005) 'Children's perspectives on their learning: exploring methods', *Early Child Development and Care*, 175(6): 473-487.
- Solberg, A. (1996) 'The challenge of child research: from 'being' to 'doing'' in Brannen, J. and O'Brien, M. (eds.) *Children in Families: Research and Policy*, London: Falmer Press, pp. 53-65.
- Stace, S. and D. Roker (2005) *Monitoring and supervision in 'ordinary' families*, London: National Children's Bureau.
- Such, E. et al. (2005) 'Anti-war Children: representation of youth protests against the second Iraq war in the British National Press', *Childhood*, 12(3): 301-326.
- Such, E. and R. Walker (2005) 'Young citizens or policy objects? Children in the 'rights and responsibilities debate'', *Journal of Social Policy*, 34: 39-58.

- Sutton, L. et al. (2007) *A child's-eye view of social difference*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Swart, J. (1990) *Malunde: the street children of Hillbrow*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Tandy, C. A. (1999) 'Children's diminishing play space: a study of inter-generational change in children's use of their neighbourhood', *Australian Geographical Studies*, 37(2): 154-67.
- Taylor-Gooby, P. (1998) 'Choice and the new paradigm in policy' in Taylor-Gooby, P. (ed.) *Choice and Public Policy: The limits to welfare markets*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 201-222.
- Theis, J. (1996) 'Children and participatory appraisals: experiences from Vietnam', *PLA Notes* 25: 70-72.
- Thoits, P. A. (2003) 'Personal agency and multiple role-identities' in Burke, P. J. et al. (eds.) *Advances in Identity Theory and Research*, New York: Kluwer, pp. 179-194.
- Toursunof, H. (2008) 'Kyrgyzstan: childhood denied', *Transitions Online* issue: 1-5.
- Triandis, H. C. (1994) *Culture and social behavior*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, Geneva: United Nations.
- UNDP (2010) *National Human Development Report 2009/2010. Successful youth - successful country: the Kyrgyz Republic*. Available from: <http://www.undp.kg/resources/e-library/article/28-e-library/1317-nacionalnyj-doklad-o-razviti-i-cheloveka-20092010?lang=en> (accessed 25 June 2011).
- UNDP (2003) *Common country assessment - the Kyrgyz Republic*. Available from: <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=229&f=K> (accessed 13 November 2011).
- UNDP (1997) *The shrinking state: governance and sustainable human development: Europe and the CIS*. Available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/regionalreports/europethecis/name,2801,en.html> (accessed 13 November 2011).
- UNESCO (2006) *Global education digest: comparing education statistics around the world*, Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Available from: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/ged06-en.pdf> (accessed 19 December 2010).
- UNICEF (2010) *Child disciplinary practices at home: evidence from a range of low- and middle-income countries*. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/eapro/child_disciplinary_report.pdf (accessed 30 July 2011).

UNICEF (2009a) *Gender and livelihoods of migration: Kyrgyzstan*. Available from: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/GenderandLivelihoodsofMigration.pdf> (accessed 30 September 2010).

UNICEF (2009b) *National study on child poverty and disparities in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Kyrgyzstan_English_ChildPovertyReport.pdf (accessed 30 September 2010).

UNICEF (2008) *The State of the world's children*. Available from: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc08/docs/sowc08.pdf> (accessed on 29 June 2008).

UNICEF (2007a) *Progress for children: a world fit for children statistical review*. Available from: http://www.childinfo.org/files/progress_for_children.pdf (accessed 29 June 2008).

UNICEF (2007b) *TRANSMONEE 2007 features*. Available from: http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/tm2007_features.pdf (accessed 29 June 2008).

UNICEF (2006) *Innocenti Social Monitor 2006: understanding child poverty in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Available from: http://www.unicef-irc.org/cgi-bin/unicef/series_down.sql?SeriesId=21 (accessed 4 January 2008).

UNICEF (2004) *Innocenti Social Monitor 2004*, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Valentine, G. (1997) "'Oh yes I can.' 'Oh no you can't': children and parents' understandings of kids' competence to negotiate public space safely', *Antipode*, 1: 65-89.

Valentine, G. and S.L. Holloway (1999) "'The vision thing': schools and information and communication technology", *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 5: 63-79.

Valentine, K (2009) 'Accounting for agency', *Children and Society*, DOI:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2009.00279.x. Article first published online 9 December 2009.

Van Eijk, G. (2010) *Unequal networks. Spatial segregation, relationships and inequality in the city*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.

Voice for the Child in Care (VCC) (2004) *Start with the child: stay with the child. A blueprint for a child- centered approach to children and young people in public care*, London: VCC.

Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Wacquant, L. J. (1996) 'Red belt, black belt: racial division, class inequality and the state in the French urban periphery and the American ghetto' in Mingione, E. (ed.) *Urban Poverty and the Underclass*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 235-74.
- Wacquant, L. J. and W. J. Wilson (1989) 'The cost of racial and class exclusion in the inner city', *Annals of the American Academy*, 501: 8-25.
- Waksler, F. C. (ed.) (1994) *Studying the social worlds of children: sociological readings*, London: The Falmer Press.
- Walford, G. et al. (eds.) (2010) *Sage handbook of measurement*, London: Sage.
- Walker, C. (2005) 'Reflective teaching in post compulsory education: casting wide the net but coming up short', *Higher Education Review*, 38(1): 68-89.
- Watson, H. A. (2000) 'Global imperialism, the third technological revolution and global 2000: a perspective on issues affecting the Caribbean on the eve of the twenty-first century' in Hall, K. and Benn, D. (eds.) *Contending with destiny*, Kingston: Ian Randle, pp. 147-153.
- Weisner, T. and R. Gallimore (1977) 'My brother's keeper: child and sibling caretaking', *Current Anthropology*, 18(2): 169-190.
- Weller, S. and I. Bruegel (2009) 'Children's 'place' in the development of neighbourhood social capital', *Urban Studies*, 46(3): 629-643.
- Wentzel, K. R. (2004) 'Understanding classroom competence: the role of social-motivational and self-processes' in Robert K. V. (ed.) *Department of psychological sciences*, San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press, pp. 213-241.
- Wentzel, K. R. (1998) 'Social relationships and motivation in middle school: the role of parents, teachers, and peers', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(2): 202-209.
- Wentzel, K. R. (1994) 'Relations of social goal pursuit to social acceptance, classroom behavior, and perceived social support', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86: 173-182.
- Werner, E. and R. Smith (1982) *Vulnerable but invincible: a study of resilient children*, McGraw-Hill: New York.
- White, B. (1997) 'Child labour in the international context' in McCloskey, S. (ed.) *No Time to Play: Local and Global Perspectives on Child Employment*, Belfast: One World Centre for Northern Ireland, pp. 11-28.
- White, S. C. and S. A. Choudhury (2007) 'The politics of child participation in international development: the dilemma of agency', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 19(4): 529-550.

- Winchester, H. P. and L. N. Costello (1995) 'Living on the street: social organization and gender relations of Australian street children', *Environment and Planning*, 13(3): 329-48.
- Wood, T. (2006) 'Reflections on the revolution in Kyrgyzstan', *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 30(2): 43-56.
- Woodhead, M. (1999) 'Reconstructing developmental psychology - some first steps', *Children and Society*, 13: 3-19.
- Woodhead, M. (1996) *In search of the rainbow: pathways to quality in large scale programmes for young disadvantaged children*, Early childhood development: practice and reflections, 10. The Hague: Bernard van leer Foundation.
- Woolcock, M. and A. T. Sweetser (2002) 'Bright ideas: social capital—the bonds that connect', *ADB Review*, 34(2): 1-26.
- World Bank (2005) *Growth, poverty and inequality: Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, Washington: World Bank.
- Wyness, M. G. (1999) 'Childhood, agency and educational reform', *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, 6(3): 353-368.
- Yarkova, T. et al. (2004) 'Childhood poverty in Kyrgyzstan: initial literature review', CHIP Report 1. Available from: <http://www.childhoodpoverty.org/index.php/action=documentfeed/doctype=pdf/id=62/> (accessed 21 April 2008).
- Yin, R. K. (1989) *Case study research: Design and methods*, 2nd Edition, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Young, G. and T. Gately (1988) 'Neighbourhood impoverishment and child maltreatment: an analysis from the ecological perspective', *Journal of Family*, 9: 240-54.
- Zapf, W. (1984) 'The four wellbeing positions' in Glatzer, W. and Zapf, W. (eds.) *Lebensqualität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Objektive Lebensbedingungen und subjektives Wohlbefinden*, Frankfurt: Campus, pp. 11-26.
- Zselizer, V. (1985) *Pricing the priceless child: the changing social value of children*, New York: Basic Books.

Appendix 1 Group discussion with children: Topic guide

Total time required: 45 minutes

Break: 5 minutes

The purpose is to obtain general understanding of individual child's situation and perspectives:

- how children take decisions and make choices at home, school, work, neighbourhood etc.
- who and what affects child agency
- what is most/least important for them, why

I. Introduction (5 m)

- Welcome participants and introduce myself.
- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants were chosen
- Discuss the purpose and process of group discussions
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment
- Outline general ground rules and discussion guidelines such as the importance of everyone speaking up, talking one at a time, and being prepared for the moderator to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Review a break schedule and where the restrooms are.
- Address the issue of confidentiality.
- Inform the group that information discussed is going to be analysed as a whole and that participants' names will not be used in any analysis of the discussion, although some direct quotations will be used in the final research text.
- Record date, time, place, names and characteristics of participants
- Constant recording of the general description of the group dynamics (level of participation, a presence of a dominant participant, level of interest)

Discussion Guidelines:

I would like the discussion to be informal, so there's no need to wait for me to call on you to respond. In fact, I encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you don't understand a question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

If we seem to be stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you and if you aren't saying much, I may call on you directly. If I do this, please don't feel bad about it; it's just a way of making sure we obtain everyone's perspective and your opinion is included.

I do ask that we all keep each other's identities, participation and remarks private. I hope you'll feel free to speak openly and honestly.

As discussed, I will be tape recording the discussion, because I don't want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room will have access to these tapes and they will be destroyed after my DPhil project is over.

Let's begin. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time.

INTRODUCTION: Icebreaking exercise: I will start with name labels, introduction game and ask them to give two reasons of what is good and bad of being a child.

II. Topic Generation. Main themes: (30 minutes)

DAILY ACTIVITIES: I will ask children to do an exercise about their daily lives identifying main activities that they do during a day, the ones they like or dislike and how they allocate time for them. Children will be asked how they are able to make choices and decisions in aspects of their daily lives related to time use and a choice of activities. Firstly, they will brainstorm about the main themes and then they will be divided into groups to talk about those themes in more details. Possible themes would be around home, school, paid/unpaid work, play, etc. what is best about those activities, why.

This exercise will be linked to parents/carers/other adults in terms of decisions they make about children's time use and activities. Then I will move to the topic of relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS: Children aged 12 will be asked to draw a child and an adult on the blackboard and brainstorm about similarities and differences between the two. I will ask them to reflect on what helps them and stops them to take decisions that matter to them and we will brainstorm on types of decisions which matter to them that they want to decide themselves. Their ideas will be written on the whiteboard. Then I will ask them to discuss what they think ideal relationships between children and adults are and which relationships they would think are least ideal and why. Children will reflect on who they think the main influences in their lives are and why and to what extent they feel able to influence decisions.

Older children will talk about the significant people in their lives 'who is the main person in the family?' and 'who is the main person at school?' Each group will be given vignettes with corresponding scenario related to school and home context. Every group will have a choice of two possible scenarios and children will have to choose the one which is more realistic and explain why.

In the second round of group discussions, children will be working on two additional exercises such as their feeling of wellbeing, aspirations and settings.

WELLBEING, ASPIRATIONS: Children will reflect on happy and unhappy childhood in groups and describe unhappiness and happiness. Younger children are welcome to draw. Each group will come up with some ideas of happiness and unhappiness and a list will be made up. They will discuss what support and resources are available for them to achieve their future aspirations and be happy, and what could prevent them.

SETTINGS: In the first round of group work, it has been discovered that children's abilities to act vary from place to place, so next exercise will be around the role of settings in the lives of children. Children will be asked the questions about their feelings with regard to where they live, their school and what resources they have there; where

they can play and with whom, what they think about other neighbourhoods, how settings differ e.g. whether they have differing relationships in different settings, various responsibilities and whether someone help with those responsibilities and why they need to do them; their roles, activities and whether they feel free in specific settings, or more controlled/supervised etc . which settings are their favourite and why.

III. Closing (5 m)

- Closing remarks
- Thank the participants

Appendix 2 Semi-structured interview with children: Topic guide

Total time required: 1 hour
Break: 5 minutes

The purpose of interviews with children is to obtain detailed understanding of each individual child's situation and perspectives of his/her experience of childhood and how children take decisions and make choices at home, school, work, neighbourhood etc. from the child's point of view. This will enable collection of data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences. The focus will be on respondents' characterisation of their understanding and experience of agency and the role of agency in their everyday life i.e. relationships and activities at different settings. The interviewing will prioritise respondents' interpretative accounts of their scenarios when they use their agency and their views on a wide range of factors affecting their capability to do so.

- To clarify topics surrounding child agency i.e. life spheres where child agency is most likely to be exerted and factors which affect its realisation
- To explore whether children would give more thoughts and views about childhood and child agency in one-to-one interview

I. Introduction (5 m)

- The purpose of the interview.
- The terms of confidentiality. Who will get access to answers and how the answers will be analysed. Their comments are to be used as quotes and I will get their written permission to do so. Once again I ask for permission to record the interview which has been collected through the consent form signed by interviewees.
- Indicate how long the interview usually takes - maximum of 1 hour.
- Make sure the child understands that s/he can stop at any time and, for whatever reason, can skip any of the questions.
- Any questions from participants before we start the interview.

I will then take some background information from a child such as name, and record date, time, place of an interview.

INTRODUCTION: I will start the interview with discussing 'About myself' sheet. Likes/dislikes'. What are the things you like to do most? What are the things you like to do least? Why do you have to do these things? Who decides you should do these things? This is a follow-up exercise of the group discussion and is to encourage ice-breaking before an in depth exploration of personal biography, past, present and future.

At this point, children may start talking/following up on their responsibilities in the home/household, school, any paid and unpaid work.

II. Topic Generation (45 minutes)

Children will be asked to engage with the activity called 'A life course'. A child draws a chart with a line on a sheet of paper, which will represent their life course. S/he will mark the beginning of the line as the past when s/he was little and a numeric age on the other end of the line to represent the future when s/he will get old. The child will ideally be talking about different events that happened to him/her at certain age and give me some details such as why those events are memorable, what special things happened during the events discussed, who/what helped them happen, who played an important role, why, what about the child him/herself, what was challenging/sad and happy. Young children can use colour coding to identify sad/happy events. These events will include those in their homes, families, households, school, neighbourhood or country. Children will be reflecting on any transitions in their lives and their role in making them happen and their outcomes.

In this stage, I will probe for any details with regard to their relationships with adults, other children, their activities, responsibilities, settings, etc. Then a child will be asked questions about his/her present time, if s/he is doing well, in which ways and why (or why not), what they would like to change and why. Questions will then be directed to the child's future and what aspirations s/he has about the future, who will help make them happen and what s/he is able to do, or if this will not happen.

III. Closing (5 m)

- Closing remarks
- Thank the participant

Appendix 3 A list of core methods and activities

Name of Activity	How	Who	Why	When
Phase I				
Name labels	Introduce oneself and answer the question about what is good/bad about being a child	Aged 8-12 and 15-16	To establish rapport	During child group discussions
'Daily lives'	To write and draw daily activities that children usually do every day and how they feel about them	Aged 8-12 and 15-16	To identify what activities children engage in, in which areas of life they are most active, who decides about their activities, etc. To explore age- and gender-related changes in time-use, and in roles and responsibilities	During child group discussions
Drawing and talking: 'a child and an adult: who is who?'	To draw a big child and an adult and to write words which characterise children and adults and their differences/similarities.	Aged 8-12	To initiate discussion about the role and place of children and adults and outline power relationships between children and others	During child group discussions
A discussion of 'who is the main person in the family?' and 'who is the main person at school?'	Each group will be given vignettes with corresponding scenarios related to school and home context. Every group will have a choice of two possible scenarios and children will have to choose the one which is more realistic and explain why	Aged 15-16 and parents	To shed light on the practical side of child agency by discussing life situations constraining and promoting child agency. To discuss the main people in the lives of children and how they negotiate options with adults.	During child/parent group discussions
Diary writing	Children are asked to keep a diary of the main decisions they made in their daily lives	Aged 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16	To elicit how children think about and practice their decision-taking possibilities and how they are affected and by whom	Distributed at the beginning of the fieldwork and discussed during group sessions
Phase II				
Happy and unhappy childhoods	In small groups children are asked to draw or play and discuss a scenario of happy and unhappy children	Aged 12 and 16	Previous activity suggested that children are closely related to other people and that they are dependent on their decisions. This exercise is to investigate further how children deal with these scenarios and what makes them happy and unhappy, their aspirations for the future	During child group discussion
My settings/neighbourhood	Children are divided into small groups and are welcome to draw or write, brainstorm about their main settings and activities, their relationships within those settings	Aged 12 and 16	Previous group work identified main settings for children as home, school, neighbourhood. This activity is to explore further children's views of their neighbourhoods and why these are important settings for their agency.	During child group discussion

			To ask what children do in specific settings, where they like spending their time most, why; how much choice they have over setting-based activities and how they feel about these activities.	
Like/dislike	To discuss what they like and dislike doing and what matters to them the most/least and why	Aged 12 and 16	Having explored what activities children do, I need to explore further how they feel about them, and why, how they negotiate things they do not like.	During interview
‘Life map/course ‘	To draw a chart with two axes on a big sheet of paper for aged 12 and to discuss for aged 16. S/he writes/ draws significant events that were important to children. To identify how much say s/he has or other people have a say in making those decisions. How they feel about their current situation, their future	Aged 12 and 16	To discuss who is important in children’s lives and how children themselves play a role in matters affecting their lives; to what extent children are able to decide on their own choices and what factors affect them. This is to compare experiences of children in a shared social-cultural context but contrasting economic backgrounds and explore any similarities/differences across age and gender	During interview
‘Childhood and children – the past, present and the future’	To generate a list of topics surrounding children/childhood, their place and role in society in the past, present and future	Parents at both schools	To explore differences and similarities between childhoods in the Soviet era and in the modern time; to discuss reasons for them	During the 2 nd visit
School teacher interview	To talk to teachers of sampled children	Aged 12 and 16 at both schools	To discuss how teachers perceive children within school environment and their views on general topics such as children’s home environments, local labour market	Upon their availability
Head of local authority	To meet the local authority to gather additional information about the neighbourhood	Head of the authority in the poor neighbourhood	To elicit the context of socio-demographic descriptions	Upon their availability

Appendix 4 Group discussions with parents: Topic guide

Total time required: 1 hour 30 minutes

Break: 5 minutes

The following points are the main objectives:

- To generate a list of topics surrounding children/childhood, their place and role in society; child agency – children's taking decisions and making choices i.e. how they act when they disagree with adults' decisions and choices imposed on them; how they negotiate with adults the choices and decisions that matter to them; how adults handle the situations when they have different points of view
- To discuss with parents about their childhood and how it differs from the practices of childhood in modern society and if does differ, then what could be the reasons for such differences

I. Introduction (10 m)

- Welcome participants and introduce myself.
- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants were chosen
- Discuss the purpose and process of group discussions
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment
- Outline general ground rules and discussion guidelines such as the importance of everyone speaking up, talking one at a time, and being prepared for the moderator to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Review a break schedule and where the restrooms are.
- Address the issue of confidentiality.
- Inform the group that information discussed is going to be analysed as a whole and that participants' names will not be used in any analysis of the discussion, although some direct quotations will be used in the final research text.
- Record date, time, place, names and characteristics of participants
- Constant recording of the general description of the group dynamics (level of participation, presence of a dominant participant, level of interest)

Discussion Guidelines:

I would like the discussion to be informal, so there's no need to wait for me to call on you to respond. In fact, I encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you don't understand a question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.

If we seem to be stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you and if you aren't saying much, I may call on you directly. If I do this, please don't feel bad about it; it's just a way of making sure we obtain everyone's perspective and your opinion is included.

I do ask that we all keep each other's identities, participation and remarks private. I hope you'll feel free to speak openly and honestly.

As discussed, I will be tape recording the discussion, because I don't want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room will have access to these tapes and they will be destroyed after my DPhil project is over.

Let's begin. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your first name and give us three words that could describe childhood. I'll start.

Ice-breaking questions:

I will start with asking parents:

What are their children's main daily activities, who makes decisions around how they spend their time, and what is considered valuable and useful, now and for their future? What decisions do parents/carers make about children's time use?

- What activities do your children do? What responsibilities does your child have in the home/household? What is his/her place within the family? Does your child work at the moment? What does s/he do? How was it decided that s/he would work? Do you think it's good for your child to work? How so? What are the disadvantages? Does your child enjoy working? Why?

II. Topic Generation (50-70 minutes)

- **What does it mean to be a child in the Kyrgyz context today and in the Soviet time?** How are children traditionally perceived in Kyrgyz culture? To what extent (if any) do perceptions of childhood differ among the families (across time)? Do they differ by age, gender, are there any personal meanings that a child/parent attaches to agency and material positions? Any difference between Soviet and modern childhood?
- **How do children take decisions and make choices in the Kyrgyz context?** To what extent are children encouraged/discouraged to take decisions and make choices in Kyrgyz society and in its cultural perceptions of childhood? To what extent do children voluntarily take decisions and make choices? Are these choices and decisions based on children's own consideration or are they 'other-regarding'? What role do culture and economic dis/advantage play in discouraging children's decisions and choices? What about their childhood?

Knowledge

- Perception of child agency in Kyrgyz culture
 - Opinions about the role of child agency in family life and childhood and for children themselves
 - Awareness of different constraints and opportunities for child agency exertion
- **How do children experience agency?** To what extent is the Kyrgyz socio-economic and cultural context opportunistic or/and constrained to child agency?

What factors affect child agency? To what extent do economic differences, gender and age matter for children in exercising their agency? How do parents/carers promote or/and suppress child agency? What are other thickening/thinning factors (if any) that affect child agency?

Attitudes

- Perception that child agency is (not) important to child wellbeing and family
- Perception that children are (not) active agents of their lives and the lives of their families
- Influence of family and community on children realising their agency
- Influence of cultural, social and economic factors on child agency
- Children and the future
- The effects of age, gender on child agency

I think here I can bring up subjects to prompt the group i.e. the areas of children's social interactions where they are more likely to exert their agency. This could help for topic generation: Children and family; Children and work; Children and school; Children and peer relations

- **What are the relationships between socio-cultural and economic conditions, age, gender and personal meanings in accounting for child agency?** To what extent do cultural changes in perceiving children/childhood occur under specific economic conditions? How similar are the changes in cultural perceptions and practical experiences of childhood and child agency among different economic groups?

I may add to the general discussion some examples of proverbs with both child agency-friendly and non-friendly conception to let parents think about how culture may affect their agency and whether or not it changed with contemporary economic situation. Then I will ask parents to explore about what is the role of age and gender in exerting agency.

I will then concentrate on the temporal aspect of agency and ask the parents if they have any concerns about their child's current or future life, what concerns they have and whether they can do about them; which things in their views are the most important for their child to be doing now (i.e. at 12 and 16 years old) and what is the most useful for his/her future and why; what they would like their child to be/do as an adult and why.

III. Closing (10 m)

- Closing remarks
- Thank the participants
- Ask if the caregivers have any questions or comments about any aspect of the group discussions