

Central Asia and Caucasus Studies in the UK: Focusing on Communities, Societies and States

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Rebecca Reynolds (U of Glasgow) rebeccajreynolds@gmail.com Bio: Rebecca Reynolds is an ESRC sponsored PhD student at the University of Glasgow studying concepts of personhood and the importance of place in Kyrgyzstan. The work focuses on individual experiences of socially ascribed personhood, and the mutual constitution of these subject positions and senses of place in Naryn oblast, northern Kyrgyzstan. She received her BA Hons in French with Development Studies from Sussex University. Building on an MSc in Anthropology at University College, London, Rebecca went on to study for an MRes at the Department of Central and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow. She began her PhD in 2005 and between September 2006 and April 2008 carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan. She hopes to defend her thesis in 2010.

Paper title: Homebuilding, homemaking and consumption of domestic space in rural Kyrgyzstan

Abstract: The importance of place and movement are common themes when thinking about identity in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan's long history of transhumance and the reconfigurations of the Kyrgyz political and economic system during and following the break up of the Soviet Union have ensured that scholars attend to issues of space and place across a broad range of disciplines. While new forms of dwelling and engaging with places have emerged in both rural and urban locations, new articulations of the significance of rural places and an imputed 'return to the land' have been documented throughout the post socialist space. From a professionalised population performing labour tasks appropriate to an industrialised model of agriculture, people found themselves responsible for farming their own small pieces of land and making their way in 'wild' capitalism. In some cases the refocus on the importance of rural places has led to essentialised notions of 'the peasant' and rural people's relationship with the land. In Kyrgyzstan, identity has increasingly been discussed in terms of tribes and clans linked to particular areas of the country. In addition, regionalism has come to be seen as a key factor in peoples' identities. In order to problematise such notions, this paper will look at the different ways women and men relate to rural places, and in particular how they relate to their domestic spaces in rural context. It will examine the way such engagements can be seen as expressions of self as opposed to a unifying rural identity. Drawing upon interviews and participant observation carried out in a village in Naryn region, I will investigate domestic places as embodied spaces and attend to shared experiences and ways of being in domestic places. It is hoped that an analysis of both being in a place and of imagining and talking about places will provide a means to examine the ways men and women express different aspects of their selves in relation to rural domestic spaces. As such, this examination of visiting, dwelling and working in rural domestic places will draw out the gendered nature of domestic spaces and the mutual construction of both place and self.