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Kyrgyz Nomads and Russian Pioneers: Colonization and Ethnic Conflict in the Turkestan Revolt of 1916*

Nomads were the age-old enemies of Muscovy and the Russian Empire. The tide had long since shifted in the Russians' favor by the late nineteenth century, but the differences separating the nomadic peoples of Central Asia and the settled populations of the empire endured. Submission to the White tsar was only the first step in a gradual process that, by traditional tsarist practice, had to end with the administrative integration of these natives (*inorodtsy*) as subjects of the empire.[1] The growth of trade and the gradual settlement of northern steppe lands were slowly undermining the way of life of the nomads. However, until the late nineteenth century the threat was incremental, creating a very uneasy *modus vivendi* between peasant and nomad. The tsarist decision to undertake massive appropriation of pastoral land of the Central Asian nomads for peasant settlement put an end to that era of unsettled coexistence, and set the stage for the bloodiest nomadic uprising against the empire since the Bashkir wars of the eighteenth century.

The assault on pastoral nomads in the southern region of Semirechie province, land of the Kyrgyz tribes, is the subject of this article. Its attention is directed particularly to the pattern of inter-ethnic relations that evolved out of the influx of European pioneers (i.e., peasants of Russian and Ukrainian nationality, usually referred to collectively as "Russians") onto Kyrgyz lands. As in other frontier regions of the world where settled peoples moved among nomads, the greatest source of conflict lay in the everyday contacts between peoples divided by a cultural and social gulf. That is the realm where the cruel dynamics of inter-ethnic antagonism, in each case unique in their configuration, have incited bloody confrontation.

The area in 1916 where the conflict was most widespread, the destruction most massive, and the loss of life greatest, was the Kyrgyz territory. The environment of this region was quite different from that of the Kazakh lands to the north; this uniqueness contributed its own special qualities to the Kyrgyz nomadic economy and to the Russian policy of peasant settlement there. The Kyrgyz lived in the valleys and foothills of the Tian-Shan mountains between Issyk-Kul lake and the Fergana valley to the southwest, and along the upper reaches of the Chu river basin to the west. Their grazing economy was highly developed, and included the intermittent cultivation of forage crops and grain.

Constrained by the mountainous terrain, the Kyrgyz herders and their flocks made relatively intensive use of the best valley and foothill land. Originally the tsarist regime

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[1] Despite marked differences in methods and legal procedures, the end result for the major nomadic peoples, beginning with the Bashkir, then the Kazakh, the Kyrgyz, and finally Turkmen tribes, was quite similar. See, e.g., ALTON DONNELLY The Russian Conquest of Bashkiria, 1552–1740. New Haven 1968, esp. ch. 10; MARTHA OLCOTT The Kazakhs. Stanford 1987, ch. 3; and RICHARD PIERCE Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917. Berkeley, Calif. 1960, esp. ch. III.

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had set aside all this land for Kyrgyz grazing, allowing peasant settlers (mainly Cossacks) in only a few rural districts. When the Settlement Commission began work there, it could not set aside entire districts (*volosti*) for land settlement as was its practice elsewhere. Such sweeping appropriation of land characterized settlement policy in territories used by the Kazakh nomads, who moved through vast steppe regions and in the lowlands of the Ili river basin. But in the Kyrgyz areas, the administration had to carve out blocks of land in the very midst of the pastoral districts. This area, where European settlers and nomads lived in close proximity, experienced in 1916 an uprising on a scale and of a type very different from the sporadic attacks on Russian garrisons and settlements by raiding parties launched by Kazakh tribes, and the urban riots and demonstrations by the inhabitants of the oasis cities. To understand the 1916 uprising at its most violent one must examine closely the conflict between Europeans and Kyrgyz.

Occurring in the midst of the First World War and just before the revolution, studies of the 1916 conflict have consigned it to the category of minor event in the great upheavals of that time. From our late-century perspective, however, it appears a portentous occurrence, combining elements of nomadic warfare and aspects of inter-ethnic conflict. The historiography of the uprising has all but ignored these dimensions to the events.

Western scholars have chosen to stress the obvious political and social issues. They place the hostilities within the context of the collapse of the empire. In their story, the regime's reckless patronage of peasant settlement at the expense of the nomads' grazing lands aroused widespread antagonism. The colonialist empire bears the responsibility for the uprising, for its abrupt call in the summer of 1916 for labor battalions to be recruited from peoples previously exempt from military service provoked general opposition from its Turkestan subjects. In this scenario, no real distinction appears between the protest demonstrations that occurred in many Turkestan provincial towns, the sporadic outbreak of resistance among the Kazakhs, and the uprising of Kyrgyz peoples that erupted in southern Semirechie province. The government's reckless demand for Turkic recruits ignited the political unrest and set off the 1916 violence.[2]

Soviet scholars in the post-Stalin years accorded the revolt the stature of a historically progressive "popular uprising." Guided by Marxist-Leninist canon and the Stalinist slogan of the "friendship of [Soviet] peoples," they labeled it a popular movement of liberation from imperial oppression. Kyrgyz academicians and historians, who gathered in 1953 to prepare a multi-volume history of their people, acknowledged the presence of an "anti-Russian" movement, but attributed it to the influence of reactionary Muslim mulla and "feudal" clan leaders. In their telling of the conflict, only the vicious forces of pan-Islamism and feudalism temporarily broke the bonds among laboring peoples.[3]

[2] Standard treatments with useful factual details are EDWARD SOKOL The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia. Baltimore 1954; PIERCE Russian Central Asia; SERGE ZENKOVSKY Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia. Cambridge, Mass. 1967, ch. 9; and OLCOTT The Kazakhs pp. 118–126.

[3] See KH. TURSUNOV Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane. Tashkent 1962, pp. 304–331; also, Istoriia Kirgizskoi SSSR. Vol. 2. Frunze 1985, pp. 337–347; and K. USENBAEV Vosstanie 1916 goda v Kirgizii. Frunze 1967, esp. pp. 282–285.

These political and economic issues are useful in identifying general trends behind the revolt in the Turkestan governor-generalship, but they omit key factors at play in the southern area of Semirechie province. My attention was drawn to events in this area (the Pishpek and Przhevalsk *uezdy*) by the discovery in the Uzbek State Archives of reports prepared by an officer of the Turkestan office of the Imperial Gendarmerie, Captain Iungmeister, sent in October, 1916, to conduct a thorough investigation of the violence there. His two-month-long mission was unique – I know of nothing comparable anywhere else in the territory. His presence is easily explained by the scale of the violence there, where lives and property suffered to an extent unparalleled anywhere else in Turkestan.

Iungmeister's findings, when set alongside evidence of social and economic trends in the area, support the argument that inter-ethnic relations were a key factor in the uprising. To focus on Russian-Kyrgyz relations turns our attention to the complex cultural and social issues that do not emerge in either the simple colonizer-colonized antagonism stressed by Western historians, or the exploiter-exploited dichotomy of Marxist interpretations.

Iungmeister's account, like that of most other observers, recognized that many Kyrgyz took no part or were dragged unwillingly into the revolt. Still, he made clear that the uprising was a massive act of violent resistance, with assaults on larger Russian towns conducted by thousands of mounted rebels. In Iungmeister's words, the "pattern of attacks was everywhere almost identical – the Kirgiz [the generic term employed at the time by Russians to designate Turkic nomads; I will use it in translation even when the Kyrgyz are the people under discussion], armed with lances and a small number of rifles, fell upon the [Russian] settlements, [and] massacred the men." They took many prisoners, and killed anyone, mainly "the elderly women and children," unable to move rapidly with their forces. He confirmed stories of atrocities that accompanied the killings and gave credence as well to tales of mass rape of the women who were taken prisoner. He indicated that the Kyrgyz rebels had seized all the settlers' livestock and a great amount of booty, and that they had burned all the captured settlements. In the wake of the uprising, the entire territory was stripped of most of its wealth.

The evidence suggests that the rebels directed their attacks solely against the Europeans. Fear of their enmity spread among the Sart and Tatar traders recently settled in the area, who in their eagerness for protection joined the columns of refugees. In fact, their real enemies proved to be European mobs; no evidence emerged that any of them were harmed by the rebels. As a result of the uprising, Iungmeister concluded, "Przhevalsk district, the richest area in Semirechie, is almost totally wiped out. Only the town of Przhevalsk and nearby settlements remain intact."[4] The most reliable estimates made subsequently of the total Russian dead were above 2 000.[5]

[4] Raport 30 December 1916, Turkestanskoe raionnoe okhrannoe otdelenie. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistana [TsGARU], fond [f.] 461, opis' [op.] 1, delo [d.] 1888, pp. 68 back, 69 back. Of Iungmeister's two reports, only this one was published in a censored version in: Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane: Sbornik dokumentov. Ed. by A. V. Piaskovskyi [et al.]. Moskva 1960, pp. 395–402.

[5] P. GALUZO Vosstanie 1916 g. v Srednei Azii, in: Krasnyi Arkhiv 34 (1929) pp. 39–94, here p. 43.

But death and destruction among the settlers are only half the story. Russian punitive expeditions sent out when the authorities finally realized the scale of the uprising appear to have dealt brutally with any Kyrgyz who fell in their path. More still would have died had they not joined the mass exodus of nomads over the mountains into Chinese Turkestan provoked by word of Russian retaliation. In addition, self-appointed Russian militia and mobs lynched any Muslims who fell into their hands – Kyrgyz, Chinese Muslims (Dungun), and Sart refugees. Iungmeister's instructions specifically ordered him to find the culprits responsible for the "slaughter" of "native traders" and "Sart traders." His general conclusion was that the "cruelty [of the Russians] was equal to that of the Kirgiz."[6] No one attempted to evaluate the total dead among the native peoples as a result of the repression, but it certainly surpassed by far the Russian casualties. The flight of many Kyrgyz over the mountains in winter weather, their massive loss of livestock (both that of the Russians and their own), and their forced return by the Chinese led to further loss of life.

In the all-to-familiar dialectic of inter-ethnic conflict, the Kyrgyz had directed their attacks at all Europeans, no matter what their standing or wealth, and settlers and officials wreaked indiscriminate violence against all those who in their eyes counted among the "natives." The collective mark of what we call ethnicity designed the victims on both sides. As Captain Iungmeister recognized, there was no simple explanation for the Kyrgyz revolt. Looking beyond Kyrgyz anger at the labor reserve call, he pointed to four "internal reasons for deep dissatisfaction" among the nomads: 1) land seizure; 2) factional clan conflict among the Kyrgyz; 3) brutal treatment of the Kyrgyz by the settlers; 4) administrative corruption and incompetence.[7] I find particularly notable the importance he attached to what we would call social and ethnic antagonism, both within the Kyrgyz tribes and between European settlers and Kyrgyz. Focusing on the refusal to serve in the labor brigades gives a far too narrow view of the objectives of the Kyrgyz fighters.

The search for the origins of this tragedy has to start with the Russian colonial experience. Russian colonialism had set in motion profound changes in the lives of the population, both as a direct consequence of imperial policies and as a result of economic and social developments that began after the Russian conquest. Three factors are particularly noteworthy. First, Russian colonial rule in Turkestan had stopped the age-old sporadic nomadic raiding and wars that had disrupted commerce and had impeded the spread of farming and urban-rural trade. It put to an end the clear separation between pastoral and trading economies, settled population and nomads, that these wars had maintained. Kyrgyz nomads began, as they had in earlier times of peace, to cultivate (and irrigate) lowlands, principally for forage crops. Second, trading between towns and countryside increased as traders (Sarts and Tatars) from Turkestan's oasis cities moved into these Kyrgyz lands to settle and to exchange their goods for Kyrgyz wool, meat, and cloth. In other words, a market economy was penetrating the countryside. No matter what settlement policy the

[6] Raport p. 69.

[7] Obzor prichin, techeniia i posledstvii miatezha tuzemtsev..., TsGARU, f. 461, op. 1, d. 1888, p. 55 back - 56 back.

Russian administration chose, the irreversible decline of the old nomadic way of life had begun.

In these conditions, the tsarist decision to promote peasant settlement produced a drastic acceleration of the reordering of social and inter-ethnic relations already under way (though not everywhere at the same pace, and that is part of my story). The third important consideration is that Russian officials applied at various times very different settlement policies. These variations reflected sharply differing opinions about the desirability and goals of promoting peasant settlement in Kyrgyz lands. The military administration of the territory had over the decades evolved a minimally functional arrangement with the local (*volost'*) leaders of the Kyrgyz. To introduce peasant settlements into this fairly orderly hierarchy upset clear-cut administrative lines of authority; as serious, it risked disrupting the peaceful conditions among the nomads, whose orderliness was the principal care of the local Russian officials. Some officials remained so confident of the effectiveness of their system of native rule that even on the eve of the uprising they refused to credit reports of impending rebellion.

It is no wonder that the authorities periodically sought to block peasant settlement, even when the Resettlement Commission got seriously to work in the years after 1905. They seem to have had a hearty distrust of the pioneers from European Russia, whom they claimed to be made up largely of "shiftless [*brodiachie*]" segments of the population.[8] But the displacement of nomads, losing a sizeable part of their winter pasture lands, was the greatest cause of concern. The Turkestan governor-general himself was dismayed by the arrival of a seemingly endless flood of settlers in a "country heavily settled by non-Christian, native peoples [*inovertsev*, *inorodtsev*]." He protested in 1907 the summary procedures of the surveyors who were setting aside for settlement large blocks of land in Semirechie province formerly allotted to the Kyrgyz and who, he claimed, had failed to conduct a real land survey.[9]

Yet at times the authorities had welcomed more peasants from European Russia to their frontier land where the colonizers constituted a relative handful of vulnerable officials and soldiers among the masses of Muslims. Security was their concern; they in effect viewed the settlers as surrogate border Cossacks without the military training. The first governor of Semirechie, General Kolpakovskii, had allowed several hundred peasants to settle around Vernyi. In later decades, his example was cited approvingly by officials. In 1902, the military governor of the province recognized the likelihood of Siberian settlers moving south into his "obviously empty territory with rich agricultural land." He welcomed the "strengthening of Russian power" and the "rapid economic development" that would result.[10] The clearest statement of the authorities' military concern came from

[8] Over a century earlier and half-way around the world, British officials expressed the same disdain for American settlers in Indian lands and for similar reasons – their undiscipline, and their mistreatment of the natives (RICHARD WHITE The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815. New York 1991, p. 317).

[9] G. F. CHIRKIN Polozhenie pereselencheskogo dela v Semirech'i. Zapiska kommandirovannogo v Semirechenskuiu oblast' letom 1908 g. revizora zemleustroistva. No place, no date, pp. 9, 27.

[10] Vsepoddanneishii otchet voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti za 1902. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv [RGIA], library, d. 86, pp. 148–149.

General Grodekov, governor in the late 1880s of Syr-Darinsky province. He devised a plan for large-scale settlement, to which he coupled a proposal to arm the settlers with rifles (an exceptional privilege). This frontier-style "self-defense" received the tsar's approval in 1891 but the rush of desperate peasants, fleeing the famine of 1891, overwhelmed the administration and put a halt to the plan.

In 1898, however, the revolt in the Fergana Valley of over two thousand Kyrgyz and Uzbek followers of a Sufi elder (the so-called "Andizhan uprising") brought Grodekov's project to life again. "Self-defense" appeared a necessity of state to the Turkestan governor-general. He very optimistically anticipated that armed settlers could become a "cavalry force"; as a result, the administration set aside 13 000 military rifles for possible civilian use. By the turn of the century, 5 000 had actually been distributed. The importance (and precariousness) of Semirechie settlements is evident in the fact that 3 000 of these rifles went to that area alone.[11] Still, nothing comparable to Wild West gun-slinging against American Indians came of the measure. An official survey of 1907 revealed most of the rifles to be in such poor repair that they were unusable. As a result, the administration called in their weapons.

Even the Settlement Commission and its agents in the region, the emissaries of colonization, did not share identical views of the aims of tsarist land settlement. St. Petersburg authorities proclaimed the primacy of "general state needs" but could not formulate a clear set of guidelines. A special commission looking in 1907 into nomadic land settlements in Semirechie reached the disturbing conclusion that it was "impossible to stop [Russian] settlement" and "impossible to settle the nomads in accordance with nomadic standards." In these circumstances, land settlement required expropriation of the "surplus land" in the hands of the Turkestan Kyrgyz. But the "defense of the interests of the nomads" was essential to avoid "the cruel policy of the Americans toward the Indians."[12]

Contradictory opinions marked as well the actual settlement program in Semirechie province, which began in 1905. Some officials, who might be designated the culturalist group, were committed to the "slow withdrawal of excess land" to be used for settlement. They justified this land appropriation by claiming that the Kyrgyz were firmly established in "the present nomadic life," far removed still from "the last stage in their progress...to land division for farming."[13] In effect, they shared the local authorities' view of the insurmountable social and economic gulf that would remain in the foreseeable future to separate nomad and peasant. Social and cultural differentiation divided into two profoundly distinct groups: Kyrgyz tribes and European settlers; two different ways of life erected an impenetrable social wall between the two.

But other settlement officials disagreed, and based their argument on a close ethnographic study of the Kyrgyz grounded on what one might call an evolutionist point of view. Denying nomad and peasant any ethnic value, they claimed room for Kyrgyz settlers under the aegis of the resettlement program. Speaking in terms of progress and eco-

[11] P. G. GALUZO Vooruzhenie russkikh pereselentsev. Tashkent 1926, pp. 9–10, 21, 25.

[12] Zhurnal soveshchaniia o zemleustroistve kirgiz. S.-Peterburg 1907. TsGARU, f. 1, op. 27, d. 611, pp. 18, 19 back.

[13] CHIRKIN Polozhenie pereselencheskogo dela pp. 27, 32.

nomic development, these officials proposed to help the willing Kyrgyz as well as settlers to establish farming communities. Defending Kyrgyz claims on agricultural land, one official argued that "we have no right to ignore peoples with their own needs and land requirements [in the area] where the [Russian] migration is heading."[14] They welcomed any sign of the readiness of the nomads to take up farming, believing that economic integration of these peoples was in the best interest of progressive imperial rule. They had in effect adopted for the Kyrgyz the strategic policy for nomadic land settlement promoted sporadically among Russian administrators of Kazakh regions since the 1830s.[15] To them, nomadism was transitory; farming settlements, like the empire itself, were permanent.

In the short term, these conflicting views of the Kyrgyz readiness for farming slowed the work of resettlement commissions and exacerbated the chaotic conditions that many settlers encountered on arriving in southern Semirechie province. As a result, local authorities were, in the words of one settlement official, "completely unprepared to accommodate from one year to the next the swelling wave of unexpected guests."[16]

By the early years of this century, Semirechie province already contained nearly 70 000 "Russians." In the Kyrgyz areas, the 1897 census found 23 000 European settlers. Many of them had arrived without authorization (*samovol'nye*) and had either received some land legally or were living as squatters. By 1911, the Tashkent administration estimated that among the nearly one million Turkic nomads in Turkestan over 150 000 settlers had taken up farming. Over 80 000 had settled in the areas of Pishpek and Przhevalsk *uezdy*, among an estimated 325 000 Kyrgyz. In addition, the region included small groups of Muslim migrants from other regions of the empire, notably 13 000 Tatars and slightly more Sarts (the term that commonly designated the Turkic townspeople in the oasis cities of Turkestan, and that appeared in Russian census reports).[17] Nowhere else in Turkestan did Europeans settle in rural areas in such large numbers.

These settlers were redrawing the ethnic map of Turkestan, and of Semirechie in particular, by their very presence. Laws or no laws, resettlement surveys or no, the settlers were a fact of life. They had started to arrive in large numbers in the early 1890s, pushed by the drought and famine in northern lands and drawn by fantastic stories of a land of milk and honey in a territory that some believed was named "Nizatsia" (apparently a myth with a simple linguistic origin in the official term "kolonizatsia").[18] The official decrees banning peasant settlement there could slow the movement, but they could not stop it.

[14] O. A. SHKAPSKII Pereselentsy, samovol'tsy i agrarnyi vopros v Semirechenskoi oblasti, in: Voprosy kolonizatsii 1 (1907) p. 51.

[15] OLCOTT The Kazakhs pp. 84, 88.

[16] SHKAPSKII Pereselentsy, samovol'tsy i agrarnyi vopros v Semirechenskoi oblasti. S.-Peterburg 1906, p. 95.

[17] Aziatskaia Rossiia. Vol. 1: Liudi i poriadki za Uralom. Ed. by Pereselencheskoe upravlenie S.-Peterburg 1914, p. 87; also, Obzor Semirechenskoi oblasti za 1913. Vernyi 1915, table I, pp. XVIII–XXIII; also, A. I. GINZBURG Pereselencheskii vopros v Turkestane (konets XIX – nachalo XX vekakh): Avtoreferat. Tashkent 1966, pp. 22–23. The estimated numbers of Turkic nomads (Kazakh and Kyrgyz) vary widely depending on the source; 900 000 is the lowest estimate, and hence probably below the real total.

[18] I. I. GEIER Golod i kolonizatsiia v Syr-Dar'inskoi oblasti v 1891 g. Tashkent 1893, p. 15.

The migration wave into Siberia, authorized and encouraged from the 1890s, spilled more and more migrants into the southeastern borderlands. In 1903, two years before the state authorized colonization in Semirechie, an official count (probably far below the real figure) found that 16 000 migrants from European Russia had arrived that year illegally ("*samovol'no*") seeking farm land. No one in the Turkestan administration contemplated sending these self-selected pioneers back; official approval in 1905 for land settlement there turned the movement into a flood.

The adaptation of the settlers to farming under the new environmental conditions of Semirechie constituted a subject of considerable interest to official observers. From them we have an abundance of testimony on the way of life of the pioneers. Their detailed accounts compensate in some small measure for the lack of any records from the settlers themselves. The activities of the new arrivals recreated in many ways the customs and practices that they had learned in European Russia, but revealed as well their awareness of being pioneers in a new land. They brought with them the habits of grain-growing farmers and the customs of acquisitive households. Peasant cottages in European-style villages with Slavic names spread across Semirechie valleys and foothills, and even the lack of forests and streams did not bring any basic changes in these deeply rooted folk ways.

The fertile land (some leased from the Kyrgyz) produced harvests in such abundance that their farms required additional labor. Over 50 000 Kyrgyz farm laborers, most of them menial day workers, were employed on the land of 6 500 settler households in 1906.[19] Like Western pioneers in other strange places, these European farmers transplanted as much as possible of the structure and shape of their homeland, and their invasive economic activities brought them directly into contact with the Turkic peoples whom their farms displaced.

And like other pioneers, they seem to have treated the nomadic inhabitants of their new land with disdain, and to have bitterly resented official efforts to restrain their land hunger to protect the Kyrgyz pastoral economy. The authorized allotments for settlement were perennially inadequate to meet the needs of the new migrants, who often proceeded to settle (semi-legally or completely illegally) on Kyrgyz grazing lands. "Why are the Kirgiz here?" some complained in justifying their actions to a Russian district officer. "The land is the tsar's and we are the tsar's people." Their adamant demand for legal title to the land earned them the epithet of "desperate people" from the frustrated local official confronted by these undesirable squatters. They in turn considered any official who refused their demands to be their enemy, and they understood any state effort to protect nomadic pasture to be directed against their economic needs.

One resettlement official searching for an explanation to this resentment concluded that they interpreted official efforts to restrain their land hunger to signify hostility to their very presence. They were convinced that officials were telling them, in his words, that "no one has a right to take Kirgiz land and no one asked you here; if you don't like it, you can get out."[20] With this conviction (not entirely false), they were inclined to settle

[19] GALUZO Vooruzhenie russkikh pereselentsev p. 60.
[20] Quoted in SHKAPSKII Pereselentsy pp. 74, 90.

their conflicts with the Kyrgyz – land and water disputes, cattle stealing, etc. – by a show of force, and at times by the use of firearms. The rifles that often hung in their homes were, in their view, "a warning to the Kirgiz."

Though Russian officials were prepared to believe the worst of the settlers, we must take seriously the dismal evaluation of these settlers given by Captain Iungmeister. In his report on the 1916 uprising, he concluded that "the new settlers look upon the Kirgiz as animals and treat them accordingly. During my travels through the territory I heard them called by no other term save 'dogs'."[21] The violence done by Russians to the Turkic and Muslim people caught in the midst of the uprising suggests that a deep-rooted ethnic prejudice colored the settlers' attitudes toward the peoples among whom they lived.

The Kyrgyz themselves responded to the presence of the settlers in ways which both undermined and enhanced their tribal solidarity. Our information on their situation is even more meager than that on the settlers. A few petitions tell the familiar tale of Kyrgyz efforts to find legal redress for land seized by Russian authorities or settlers. Most interesting are the reports of some of the resettlement officials, who offered an intriguing interpretation of developments among the Kyrgyz clans (a loose term for the local nomadic groups that constituted the basis for the four main "tribal" lineages [*rod*] that divided the Kyrgyz). Their evolutionist approach to Kyrgyz society directed their attention to the dynamics of human relations among a people whose traditional order was fast giving way in some parts of southern Semirechie province to a new way of life. Their argument was in some ways self-serving, but their story, based on direct observation, is a plausible one. No other sources tell as vivid an account of the adaptation of pastoral nomads of the empire to the pressures and constraints of colonial rule.

In brief, they described a growing rift within Kyrgyz clans created by the emergence of a new leadership competing for power and wealth at the district (*volost'*) level. They believed that the victorious Kyrgyz factions, headed by powerful elders (a loose translation of the Kyrgyz term *manap*), were abusing their powers in the elective *volost'* councils by exploiting the land reserves of their clans for their own profit. Local Russian authorities did not interfere, since their interests were adequately served by relying on these native officials to carry out their directives, to keep order, and often to provide bribes. Russian settlements and growing market relations proved a boon to this new Kyrgyz élite and their followers within the *volost'*, for they could monetize the clan's pasturage, held collectively, by leasing it to settlers. In turn these revenues strengthened their hold over the *volost'* elective institutions through bribery at election time.

The loss of pasturage, caused both by Russian seizure of land and these leasing practices, came at the expense of the losing factions, among whom pasturage was often inadequate and whose livestock dwindled as a result. Resettlement officials argued that this group of impoverished Kyrgyz constituted the cohorts of new settlers, seeking to better their condition and to escape rule by rival groups by taking up farming and creating their own village institutions. The example of European land settlement (and perhaps experience working on the settlers' farms) gave them the encouragement to set out their own claims to land.

[21] IUNGMEISTER Obzor prichin... TsGARU, f. 461, op. 1., d. 1888, p. 56.

This Kyrgyz "land rush" was particularly pronounced in the western area (Pishpek region) of Semirechie province, the Chu river valley, where Russian settlement had developed most extensively since the 1890s. Settlement officials welcomed what they called this "normal development." In 1906–1907 alone, 4 200 households (*kibitka*) in Pishpek petitioned for their own land title.[22] These officials noticed that the effort encountered serious obstacles, on the one hand from clan elders seeking to keep clan property under their control, and on the other from local Russian authorities who believed that settlement was a Russian prerogative and that the Kyrgyz remained essentially pastoral nomads (hence had no claim to farm land and village organization). The latter opinion received authoritative support from the 1909 report of the Pahlen senatorial investigation of Turkestan, which found that settled Kyrgyz continued to practice seasonal, migratory grazing "in no way different from surrounding nomads."[23]

The evolutionist group of resettlement officials omitted from their reports another side to the Kyrgyz move for land. In those years even established Kyrgyz elders within certain districts began to push for land settlement for their clans. One Semirechie governor welcomed this move, taking up the cause of Kyrgyz settlement. Writing in 1910, he argued that no one could doubt the "distress of Kirgiz who refuse agricultural settlement and see their pasture land appropriated." He pointed with considerable pride to the decision in the previous year of the Kyrgyz of one entire district in the Pishpek area, presumably acting under the leadership of their elected leaders, to accept agricultural land settlement. In this case, the *manap* apparently judged in his interest to claim title to land under the settlement act, thereby insuring that European settlement did not take away the good land.

The governor believed that this orderly process of linking European and native settlement was advantageous in all respects. As he pointed out in his report, the Kyrgyz land distribution left 12 000 acres as "surplus" for more peasant settlers.[24] Two years later, he concluded that the Kyrgyz were "fully apt for settled life and ready for reform of their nomadic life." In his historical scenario of the triumph of farming over nomadism among the Kyrgyz, "only the most backward districts" refused to collaborate with the resettlement policy.[25]

From the Kyrgyz point of view, the gains were substantial, though probably not in the terms imagined by the Russian administration. There is solid evidence that, as the Pahlen investigators reported, many of the "settled" Kyrgyz continued to practice nomadic grazing. But by accepting land settlement they had assured themselves of farm land. Those on the losing side of the struggle among district factions had escaped the control of the clan elders. Those on the winning side assured themselves of land that the Russians might otherwise seize. The overall Kyrgyz success is evident in the official statistics on

[22] V. VORONKOV Po voprosu o pozemel'nom ustroistve tuzemnogo kirgizskogo naseleniia v Semirechenskoi oblasti. Vernyi 1908, p. 20.

[23] Otchet po revizii Turkestanskogo kraia, proizvedennoi Grafom K. Palenom. Vol. 14: Sel'skoe upravlenie: russkoe i tuzemnoe. S.-Peterburg 1910, p. 78.

[24] Vsepoddanneishii otchet voennogo gubernatora Semirechenskoi oblasti za 1910. RGIA, f. 1276, op. 14, d. 254, p. 4.

[25] Otchet za 1912. RGIA, library, d. 86, p. 182.

settlement, which indicated that on the eve of the war Kyrgyz farm land accounted for 20% of the non-pastoral land in the Pishpek region.[26]

Though Russian authorities occasionally objected, they could not block their conquered peoples from turning to their own advantage the colonial strategy of the empire in this distant borderland. Making the best of a bad situation, some Kyrgyz were able to incorporate European-style land title and farming, brought by their colonial rulers, into their modified pastoral economy; a few even named themselves, at least when speaking with tsarist officials, as "peasants." On their own, these Kyrgyz moved into what one historian of colonial Indian-European relations in North America has called a cultural "middle ground" between the new order of a conquering empire and the traditional native community.[27]

But this process of adjustment had by the eve of the war barely spread beyond the Chu river basin. Further east in the Issyk-Kul basin, the move toward semi-settled Kyrgyz life was much less noticeable. There, European settlement was newer and the pioneers still numbered a relative handful (30 000 among 150 000 Kyrgyz).[28] Sheep herding continued to be the predominant source of Kyrgyz livelihood there, and the traditional clan order remained firmly established, with almost no Kyrgyz land settlement. In this region, where the tribe of the Begy was concentrated, tribal ties retained greater strength than in the Pishpek region. It was also the area of greatest destruction in the 1916 uprising. The linkage is only suggestive, but worth examination.

The process of selective Kyrgyz adaptation to market conditions and a more settled life seems to have set limits to effective Kyrgyz mobilization in the 1916 uprising. There are enough clues in Iungmeister's reports and other materials to suggest the goals and hopes that moved the Kyrgyz rebels. We possess no forthright statements from captured rebels of their objectives, for all the extant interrogations stayed strictly within the limits of immediate grievances.[29] Perhaps anger and hostility toward the conscription played a large part in the impulse to resist, and land seizures drew the most visible lines between nomad and pioneer, but these immediate issues should be set in a larger context. The scale of the uprising and the scope of the destruction suggest far more ambitious goals, most understandable from the perspective of the Kyrgyz nomadic past. An alien people had overrun their land and had to be expelled, by the means that Inner Asian nomadic wars had long employed – the destruction of settlements, the capture of their women, the massacre of the old and the young. The outsiders would flee, and the Kyrgyz would once again rule the Tian-Shan mountains.

My theory that this wildly quixotic dream lay at the heart of the rebellion appears more plausible when we take account of the divisions among the Kyrgyz apparent in the course of the uprising. Kyrgyz throughout southern Semirechie province participated in the

[26] The argument is developed at considerable length in M. M. RUMIANTSEV Materialy po obsledovaniiu tuzemnogo i russkogo starozhil'cheskogo naseleniia i zemlepol'zovaniia v Semirechenskoi oblasti. Vol. 7: Pishpekskii uezd. Kirgizskoe khoziaistvo, pt. 2: Tekst. Petrograd 1916, esp. pp. 14, 21–25, 89–92, 274–276, 317–324.

[27] WHITE The Middle Ground pp. X–XI.

[28] GINZBURG Pereselencheskii vopros pp. 22–23.

[29] See Vosstanie 1916 g. v Kirgizstane. Ed. by T. R. Ryskulov. Moskva 1937, pp. 130–159.

revolt. Officials reports suggest, without giving any detail, that leadership for the uprising, prepared weeks in advance, came from a *manap* family in the western area. Acting in the manner of traditional *manap* elders, leaders in time of war, they had circulated in early August a letter to all clans announcing the uprising and calling for a gathering of the tribes in an assembly, the "buruldai."[30] The letter made no mention of the subject of the gathering, but it in all likelihood was to have been the call for a general uprising of the Kyrgyz against their Russian enemy. We possess no evidence that the assembly ever met.

As the letter suggests, the lines of antagonism between Kyrgyz and Russian knew no territorial limits. But it appears that massive support was far greater in Przhevalsk region than to the west. The eastern areas experienced much greater destruction at the hands of the rebels than in the west. The greater intensity of the conflict there suggests that the lure of restoring the nomadic past held greatest appeal among the Begy tribe, which had the briefest and least intensive contact with the settlers. On the other hand, the presence in southwestern Semirechie of a much higher proportion of Kyrgyz who had chosen a semi-settled life and had a longer history of contacts with the outsiders made them less inclined to believe in a return to a nomadic golden age. Their hostility toward the settlers was probably as great as other Kyrgyz, but their readiness to risk everything they possessed to rid the land of the invaders and infidels was much weaker.

To place the uprising in the context of Kyrgyz social tensions and tribal memories identifies it, like the Sepoy mutiny a half-century before in India, as one of the desperate rebellions thrown up against the alien colonial intruders and against the decay of hallowed, native ways. Both settlers and nomads were displaced, willingly and unwillingly, by Russian colonialism. The familiar customs and patterns of social relations of both groups were profoundly upset by the empire's colonial policies and the process of land settlement. In a manner similar to other conflicts among peoples brought into close contact within a colonial empire, the legitimacy of each side's claim to control their own property and lives was put in doubt. Ethnic hostility had different roots for Kyrgyz and Russians, but in the turmoil of the uprising, both sought to end the ambiguities of inter-ethnic relations by brutally and violently expelling the enemy people.[31] Only the 1917 revolution put an end to proposals by the governor-general to expel all Kyrgyz from large areas of the Chu valley and the lands around Issyk-Kul, to become "purely" Russian.

One can draw three main conclusions from this analysis of the socio-ethnic roots of the uprising. First, the tsarist settlement policies in practice were not uniformly directed

[30] The letter was read by a literate Tatar, subsequently interrogated by Iungmeister, to illiterate Kyrgyz to whom it had been sent. He reported its contents in the course of his interrogation. Protokol doprosa zhandarmskim rotmistrom Iungmeisterom przheval'skogo kuptsa A. M. Ibragimova o nachale vosstaniia v Przheval'skom uezde, 6 November 1916, in: Vosstanie 1916 goda v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane (cf. fn. 4) pp. 381–382. The importance of *manap* leadership of the Kyrgyz is discussed in VASILII BARTOL'D Kirgizy (istoricheskii ocherk). Frunze 1927, p. 70. "Buruldai" referred in Kyrgyz to the tribal assembly familiar in Western literature under its Mongolian name, "kuraltai."

[31] This pattern of violence was not limited to pioneer settlement on the frontier of Central Asia, as is made clear by the parallels with the brutal confrontation between American pioneers and Indians in the late eighteenth century (WHITE The Middle Ground, esp. ch. 9).

against the Kyrgyz. To a significant degree, some officials revised the process of resettlement into a campaign, not against Kyrgyz clans, but against nomadism. Others, to be sure, saw no difference and made European settlers the sole beneficiaries of the land seizure. Second, the most acute source of conflict lay in the deep hostility of European settlers toward the Kyrgyz, to which (we may assume) Kyrgyz replied in kind. The conflict over land allocation there, and perhaps among Kazakh as well, became acute precisely because it focused and highlighted the prejudice that indelibly marked Russian treatment of the natives. Third, the likelihood of an uprising among the Kyrgyz was in these conditions very great regardless of tsarist wartime policy. Nomad and peasant were not divided by insurmountable economic barriers; the ethnic boundaries were formidable. Tragic events in recent years in other lands of ethnically diverse populations provide a sad epilogue and confirmation of this conclusion.

Zusammenfassung

Kirgizische Nomaden und russische Pioniere: Ansiedlungspolitik und ethnischer Konflikt während des Aufstands in Turkestan 1916

In der Erhebung von 1916 im Gebiet der Kirgizen war die ethnische Feindschaft zwischen kirgizischen Nomaden und russischen Siedlern der Hauptgrund für die Zerstörungen und Opfer auf beiden Seiten. Die Ereignisse von 1916 im von Kirgizen bewohnten südlichen Semireč'e unterscheiden sich von denen im Gebiet der Kazachen und in den Oasen-Städten durch den präzedenzlosen Ausbruch von Gewalt, der nur mit den Baškiren-Aufständen des 18. Jahrhunderts verglichen werden kann. Unter den verwerteten archivalischen und publizierten Quellen sind detaillierte Berichte eines Polizeibeamten, der den Aufstand sorgfältig untersuchte, und Rechenschaftsberichte lokaler Beamter über die Auswirkungen der Siedlungspolitik auf russische Pioniere und Kirgizen. Die Feindseligkeit der Russen gegenüber allen „Eingeborenen" war die wichtigste Quelle des Konflikts zwischen den beiden Völkern. Es zeigt sich, daß die nomadische Lebensweise der Kirgizen einen Niedergang erlebte, teilweise weil manche von ihnen bereit waren, sich als Siedler niederzulassen. Die Spaltung zwischen den kirgizischen Stämmen schwächte die Rebellion, die das Ziel hatte, die Russen zu vertreiben. Die wirtschaftliche und politische Last der russischen Kolonialherrschaft war dagegen als Ursache für die Gewalt weniger wichtig als die unüberwindliche Feindschaft zwischen der russischen und der kirgizischen Gemeinschaft.