



Coping Strategies: Public Avoidance, Migration and Marriage in the Aftermath of the Osh Conflict, Fergana Valley

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Abstract

This paper examines the changing survival strategies of Uzbeks in the aftermath of mass violent conflict in Osh in June 2010. After the riots, Osh Uzbeks were exposed to many difficulties. The Kyrgyz government used economic and political pressure to isolate minority groups from the titular nationality, and this opened the door to mistreatment of minorities in the form of the seizure of properties, job losses, and even verbal and physical abuse. Despite this mistreatment, however, Uzbeks have proved reluctant to leave the Osh area. Uzbeks have a long history of living in the region of Osh; strong emotional and historical sentiments bind them to the region and its graveyards and sacred sites. Uzbeks have thus had to develop alternative ways to cope with the uncertainty and insecurity of their situation. They have adopted strategies which reinforce their vulnerability on the one hand, but provide security for their children during post-conflict reconstruction on the other. These strategies include avoidance of public spaces and public attention, marrying daughters early, and sending male family members to Russia as labor migrants. These strategies are geared to the underlying aims of protecting the honor of the community, maintaining social networks, and preserving Uzbek identity without attracting attention. Uzbeks describe this strategy of patience as *sabyrdu*.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan; Uzbeks; conflict; coping strategies; marriage; avoidance; migration

1. Introduction

Fergana valley is shared by the three former Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The valley can be seen as a heterogeneous arena with complex cultural and religious constellations. On the one hand, history tells us that nonviolent practices for regulating violence and maintaining social order have been a constant in the area,¹ but on the other, Fergana valley can be seen as a critical junction in a 'hot' geopolitical field (Megoran, 2002; Reeves, 2005). It is a sensitive border region with a high degree of militarization that is legitimized by a security discourse which perceives the region as a breeding ground for fundamentalist Islamic groups such as the (al-Qaida-linked) Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. As a place where people are constantly moving back and forth, Fergana valley attracts attention whenever localized conflicts turn violent (Reeves 2010 a, b). This became obvious in June 2010, when a series of inter-communal riots² between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks erupted, primarily in and around the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan. This violence has been seen as a repeat of the inter-communal violence between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz that took place in Osh two decades earlier in 1990 (Tishkov, 1995). Interpretation of the recent Osh clashes has, moreover, also been influenced by the discourses on the wars in Afghanistan, the Tajik civil war, and the violent suppression of social protest in Andijan, Uzbekistan (Kendzior, 2007; Kandiyoti, 2009).

In this paper, I examine how the Uzbek minority is coping with conflict in the aftermath of the recent Osh riots. My main argument is that most of the ethnic Uzbeks are following a strategy of avoidance (*Meidung*) (Elwert 2004). Elwert's central idea here is that conflicts must be regulated, or 'embedded' in certain rules, if societal anomy is to be avoided. Shunning or avoiding conflict is a conflict style that is often described in terms of inaction and passivity, as I will show in this paper. Government pressure on the Uzbek population has led to a situation in which the latter has recourse to norms, relationships and institutional arrangements that are based on revived customs and

traditions. Through these, the Uzbek community finds alternative ways to cope with uncertainties.

In this working paper, I will, firstly, give an account of the political conflict. Then I will discuss the situation in the aftermath of the conflict, in which the government consciously creates uncertainty for Uzbeks. I conclude by stressing the importance of the institution of marriage, migration, and public avoidance in the aftermath of the conflict for balancing aspects of mobility and immobility in Osh Uzbeks' lives and operating as building blocks in the constitution of order.

2. Ethno-historical Background

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have a long history of peaceful coexistence in Fergana Valley and more particularly in Osh. The two ethnic communities have been closely linked by intermarriage (Reeves, 2005; Megoran, 2002; Liu, 2012). Their long history of coexistence is rooted in their different ecological adaptations: nomads (Kyrgyz) used to reside in the mountains, and the settled population (Uzbeks) used to live in the towns and farm irrigated land. Ethnic identity could be also considered as evidence of belonging to a certain economic segment – Uzbeks were famous as traders and craftspeople for centuries in southern Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyz were nomadic herders in the mountains (Liu, 2012: 26; Starr, 2011). Such divisions were not an obstacle to translocal marriages and cohabitation (Reeves, 2005; Roberts, 2010; Liu, 2012).

Before the Soviet era, being a native of Bukhara, Osh, and Jalalabad was more important than being Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uyghur, or Tajik. During the Soviet era, Russian was the language of communication, and ethnicity was a cultural, but not a political phenomenon (Hirsch, 2005). In the pre-Soviet period, 'Kyrgyz' and 'Uzbek' did not exist in Fergana Valley as the categories with which we are familiar today. It was the case, rather, that people defined themselves in terms of tribe, descent and lineage (nomads) or town and mahalla (neighborhood), not primarily according to 'ethnicity' or

'nationality' (Hirsch, 2005; 8; Tishkov, 1997:30). In the early 1920s, the Soviet regime and its ethnographers started to create nations in Central Asia where tribal and settled groups were perceived to lack national consciousness. Central Asian societies were viewed as feudalist, and clans and tribes were seen as hangovers from feudal times. It was followed from this that the integration of clans and tribes into nationalities was a necessary step on the path towards socialism (Hirsch, 2005:8). Thus, Central Asian ethnic and national identities were at least partly created by Soviet rule. During Stalin's regime, ethnicity served as a guiding principle, and as a result, Fergana Valley was divided in the three national republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Tishkov, 1997; Abashin, 2011c). However, these countries had ethnically-mixed populations in many areas, and the boundaries of ethnicity itself were very blurred, such that it was impossible to determine distinctly even the very names of Soviet nationalities, let alone their territorial boundaries (Tishkov, 1997:30-31). Despite the successfully completed formation of Socialist nations, many Soviet citizens still expressed very vague feelings of ethno-national belonging (Tishkov 1997: 20).

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the independent countries of Central Asia started applying ethnographic primordialism in the quest for new identities, as well as in nationalist political discourse (Tishkov, 1997:7). Conflicts have been exacerbated by Soviet definitions of ethnicity involving fixed and rigid sets of characteristics that are now taken as a given and widely asserted (Liu, 2011:12). Tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz began to rise as early as in the late Soviet period; competition over land and for political and economic influence eventually led to the 1990 Osh Riots (Liu, 2012:22, Tishkov, 1995). Liu (2012) provides us with a detailed analysis of the structural inequalities of the socialist era that led to the 1990 violence, i.e. the fact that Uzbeks were generally better educated and "over-represented" in the state administration in Osh. These "structural" inequalities persisted in new forms in the last two decades, with Uzbeks "out-performing" Kyrgyz in cross-border trade. This would explain the nationalist reaction of the ethnic Kyrgyz. However, Central Asians are more Soviet, in terms of everyday routines and categories of thinking acquired during the Soviet period, than is

often accepted by commentators who see the Soviet element of Central Asian identities as a mere veneer (Kandiyoti, 2002: 253).

The situation of Osh Uzbeks clearly exemplifies the national contradictions within Central Asian states: the nation-state concept does not fit the situation of Osh Uzbeks, who look to Uzbekistan for their ethnic identification and to Kyrgyzstan for their citizenship. Liu (2012) argues that that Osh Uzbeks have developed ways of belonging to Osh that are deeply rooted in city locations: the mahalla, bazaar, mosque, etc. Osh Uzbeks treat their urban places as frameworks for making sense of the world and potentially acting on their interpretations of it (ibid: 13). Even as these Uzbeks are caught between two republics, they are excluded from meaningfully belonging to either of them (Liu, 2012: 10). Therefore, domination of local communities by the central state has been a defining feature and the most enduring characteristic of nationalism in Kyrgyzstan (Abashin, 2011a). The Kyrgyz nation-state building project was effectively legitimized through the constitution and laws, which have divided Kyrgyzstani citizens into those (nicknamed 'titles') who belong to the 'titular' ethnicity (such as the Kyrgyz ethnic group) and all the others. One of the government's practices has been the creation of governance structures that favored the representatives of Kyrgyz ethnic identity (Abashin, 2011). The division between 'us' and 'outsiders' is fixed in another popular idiom – 'Kyrgyzstani land' – with its implication that non-Kyrgyz are 'guests' or 'arrivals' (Abashin, 2011a). The materialization of this idiom is accomplished by filling the public space – public institutions, central squares and streets, museums, libraries – with signs of 'Kyrgyzness' in the form of inscriptions in the Kyrgyz language, but also portraits and monuments of the heroes of 'Kyrgyz' stories in the style of 'Kyrgyz' culture (Gullette, 2008, 2010a; Light, 2011). Jacquesson (2010:234) argues that descent and genealogy were taken into consideration by the state not only as a means of legitimizing its powers but also as a means of asserting hegemony within the country of the ethnic Kyrgyz. Abashin (2011a) states that any attempt to reshape symbolic space tends to be perceived as an attack on the 'Kyrgyz people' and the 'Kyrgyz state'.

3. The Osh Conflict

The Osh conflict that broke out in southern Kyrgyzstan in summer 2010 was the worst conflict the region had seen in years. The conflict, which involved two ethnic groups, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, erupted in the city of Osh on June 10 2010, in the form of intercommunal clashes. It then spread to the region of Jalalabad. As a result of this conflict, more than 470 people were killed and thousands were injured, with some sources claiming that the true figures are much higher.³ Hundreds of private homes were burned down, and properties were looted. The report of an international inquiry commission (KIC 2011) stated that Uzbeks made up nearly 75% of the 470 people killed, and that a 'disproportionately high number' of Uzbek-owned properties were destroyed. The violence lasted for almost a week.

During and after this conflict, thousands of ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz fled from southern Kyrgyzstan. The KIC report stated that about 111,000 people were displaced temporarily to Uzbekistan and that a further 300,000 were internally displaced (KIC, 2011). In the fall of 2010, with the help of foreign donors, the authorities began building transitional housing for victims of the violence. While the international community was able to provide for people's basic needs in the first year of the conflict, there remained a significant gap between the survival needs of minorities within the state and the humanitarian assistance that reached them. Even with humanitarian aid, local people still needed local strategies to survive. Large numbers of locals had to rely to a greater or lesser extent on their own survival strategies, which I intend to scrutinize in this paper. In order to understand local responses to the conflict, though, it is first necessary to examine the various interpretations and narratives through which the Osh conflict has been understood.

The conflict erupted two months after President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was ousted in a popular revolt, creating what the report termed a 'power vacuum' (KIC, 2011). Although the recent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz around Osh may seem to be part of a small-scale political drama involving only two ethnic groups and competing political

factions in one nation state, a more thorough examination of the tableau highlights the subtle, yet effective, influence of other forces. It transpires that the conflict was multi-layered, included local, national, and international dimensions, and revolved around competing interests. Different narratives about the conflict exist. A first narrative offered by the National Security Service of Kyrgyzstan claims that Islamist groups sparked the violence:

‘The relatives of the toppled president Bakiev colluded with the Taliban and other Islamic militant movements to provoke the ethnic violence that has destabilized the Fergana Valley. Bakiev's relatives met in summer in Afghanistan with representatives of the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Tajik militants to discuss plans to trigger unrest in Kyrgyzstan. In May 2010, Islamic Jihad Union members formed a group of 15 militants of Uzbek origin, experienced snipers and miners among them, and sent from Pakistan to Kyrgyzstan via Tajikistan’⁴.

The National Security Service of Kyrgyzstan states that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was eager to use the chance to destabilize Fergana valley. This official document, part of the National Commission’s report that aimed to reveal the cause of the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, does not provide any confirmed evidence and, without justice being administered by an independent judicial system, its statements are merely assertions (Schoeberlein, 2011). While the report certainly addresses relevant factors, it can be taken as a given that a national security organization stresses those that are in line with its own interests and are likely to stimulate reactions from important sources of potential support for their work, projected as anti-terrorism, within and outside the country.

A second narrative by the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission holds leaders of the Provisional Government, the separatists (some Uzbek leaders), those who fought for power (i.e., the Bakiev family), and criminals responsible for the conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan (KIC, 2011).

The dominant narrative provided by state officials and existing alongside these other explanations does not differentiate between different causes. The goals pursued by the Bakiev family, IMU and Uzbek leaders are described in official documents as identical⁵

(destabilization of the region, provocation of ethnic and religious animosity and clashes, intimidation of civil society). This has reinforced the notion of 'Uzbek disloyalty' to Kyrgyzstan. This argument is flanked by other accusations which serve to justify Kyrgyz nationalist sentiment; since the Osh riots, the Uzbek population has been accused of corruption, militancy, and religious hypocrisy (Schoeberlein, 2011). Moreover, nationalist rhetoric has intensified in Kyrgyzstan as a result of specific features of the division of elites into numerous lineage and kinship factions, built on regional and lineage identities, which compete for power. These groups have often appealed to their 'Kyrgyzness': they have also been under pressure to prove that they have the interests of their own particular Kyrgyz lineages at heart (Ismailbekova, 2011). One of the things this demonstrates is that non-Kyrgyz external powers are seen as creating threats. In this context, 'Uzbeks' are regarded as the most 'dangerous' group (Uzbekistan 'closed', 'uncivilized,' 'Islamic threat', etc.) (Abashin, 2011a, b).⁶

This nationalistic policy was translated into political action directly after the conflict; as a result, blame was assigned to Uzbeks, and protection was accorded to the Kyrgyz population and to government officials in particular. The KIC report on the conflict in the summer of 2010 found that some ethnic Kyrgyz government officials had committed crimes against humanity. In response, the parliament declared the author of the report⁷ persona non grata, passed a resolution blaming Uzbek leaders for starting the violence, and banned a news website that had reported on Kyrgyz and Uzbek deaths (KIC, 2011). According to my informants, many Uzbek signs were vandalized and Uzbeks' businesses seized during the conflict in June 2010. The Uzbek community became the main target of the government's activities: threats, illegal arrests, illegal detention, disappearances, torture, and denial of access to justice all occurred, as was also noted in the KIC report. During my own research, many Uzbeks complained to me that 'some Kyrgyz state officials discriminate against us and are nationalists' and that Uzbeks were afraid to go outside their neighborhoods. But Kyrgyz locals told me that Uzbeks had continuously been planning the conflict since the first intercommunal conflict in 1990. It was commonly rumored among Kyrgyz that Uzbeks had a secret plan to increase their

numbers by 'marrying off their daughters early and producing many children. Now the Uzbeks are preparing for the next war in twenty years' time.' How this nationalist politics translates into daily life in Osh is what I would like to examine next.

4. Local Politics in Osh

During my research in Osh and Jalalabad, I learned that the discourse of mistrust is fresh and widespread. Whether people identify and are identified as 'Kyrgyz' or 'Uzbek', the language they speak at home, the neighborhood they live in – these are issues of profound importance. Many young Kyrgyz men are strongly motivated to blame the violence on Uzbeks and to justify the actions of Kyrgyz people who engaged in all sorts of terrible violence against people (including women and children) and property. They say that the worst actions were the work of Uzbeks, but they also acknowledge that Kyrgyz did bad things, too. But instead of being inclined to condemn everyone who committed violence, they align themselves with those with whom they identify on the basis of a shared Kyrgyz identity. For them, there is a very compelling concept of commonalty and a powerful process of identification at work. All kinds of differences that might exist between them and the people who committed the violence – levels of education, a sense of belonging to an urban versus a rural culture, the inclination to engage in sexual violence – do not really undermine this sense of commonalty. For example, people's view of reality is colored by stereotypes and nationalistic slogans: 'Uzbeks should go to their Uzbekistan if they do not like it here' or – as if the Osh Uzbeks had come from somewhere else – 'let them go back'. The victimhood of ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks is a reflection of the competing historical narratives of Osh's ethnic identity (Megoran, 2010).

My research was conducted in Karajygach neighborhood (*Uzbek mahalla*), a central Osh *mahalla* that was more strongly affected by the conflict than other neighborhoods in the city. Many destroyed and burnt-out houses belonging to Uzbeks as well as to Kyrgyz

were present in the surrounding area; however, the *mahalla* itself was predominately inhabited by Uzbeks, with only a few Kyrgyz also living there. As I am ethnically Kyrgyz, many of my Kyrgyz informants warned me that I should be very careful of entering the Uzbek *mahalla* alone, since many Uzbeks who had lost family members during the conflict were eager to get revenge. I entered one street where the majority of the houses were under reconstruction after having being burned down; this was the street of the official head (*elliq boshi*) of Karajygach,⁸ who would, I assumed, be Uzbek. To my surprise, though, the *elliq boshi* of the Uzbek *mahalla* was Kyrgyz. His name was Myrza; in his early fifties, he was a very close relative of the mayor of the city of Osh, who had appointed him as *elliq boshi* for the Uzbeks in the aftermath of conflict with the aim of *keeping peace* in the neighborhood and *keeping an eye* on the Uzbeks⁹. His house, where he had also lived before the conflict, was huge, well-constructed and undamaged, unlike the Uzbek houses nearby, which had all been burned down. While we were knocking at his door, we met one Uzbek man who, with his 14-year-old son, was also looking for Myrza that day.

As Myrza was not at home, I decided to talk to the man and to find out more about life in the *mahalla*. He immediately began by saying that Myrza was collecting schoolchildren in order to send them to Issyk-Kul for two weeks for psychological treatment, which was sponsored by the state. However, Myrza had not informed any Uzbeks in the *mahalla* about this opportunity, so they were not included; the Uzbek man I spoke to had heard about the project by chance, from a Kyrgyz man who was sending his children through Myrza. After speaking to this Uzbek man, I took a taxi out of the neighborhood and talked to the Kyrgyz driver; he also briefly mentioned to me that he was collecting the birth certificates of his sisters' children from Batken, in order to send them to Issyk Kul together with his own son, as if the children were all from that neighborhood. He told me that this arrangement was possible thanks to the Kyrgyz *elliq boshi*, who had been providing the Kyrgyz with a lot of support since the conflict.

The following day, when I was able to interview the Kyrgyz *elliq boshi*, he did not seem to be 'neutral' but was openly hostile to the Uzbeks in his own neighborhood, starting

his talk by saying ‘*Uzbeks started the war first*’. While I was interviewing him, an Uzbek woman came and asked him for a residence document, and he was very rude to her. He told her that he needed to finish talking to me, and it was only afterwards that he might have time – this despite the fact that he had assistants (*narodnyi drujenniki*, literally ‘friends’) who had the power to check the documents of strangers in the *mahalla* at any time of the day or night. It is notable that the majority of those assistants were Kyrgyz, Tatars, and Russians.

Usually, the *elliq boshi* is elected by the community, after every candidate has been thoroughly checked. Only the most respected and trusted man in the community is allowed to hold this position. The *elliq boshi* is responsible for mediating internal family and community disputes as well as those between different ethnic groups. Karajygach *mahalla* had both a *ming boshi* (a leader of a thousand households) and an *elliq boshi* (leader of 50 households); previously both had been Uzbeks, but after the conflict, the state administration had replaced both with Kyrgyz leaders who would support the ‘nationalistic’ ideas of the city mayor. On Radio Azattyk, the mayor of Osh city, Myrzakmetov, an influential politician who held the ‘national patriotic’ view, publicly stated that ‘if Uzbeks want war, they will get it’.¹⁰ Many other Kyrgyz men are actively involved in the discourse that ‘Kyrgyz territory belongs only to the Kyrgyz; Uzbeks should leave Kyrgyz territory for their Uzbekistan.’¹¹ Many Uzbeks could not trust Kyrgyz leaders because, as people would tell me, ‘Myrza declared himself *elliq boshi*’ and ‘no one invited Uzbeks to vote for the leaders of the *mahalla*’.

I also had a chance to interview the *ming boshi*,¹² who openly revealed his negative attitude towards Uzbeks by constantly heaping blame on them. The intention of the mayor was to build peace by exercising total control over Uzbeks within their own communities. He accomplished this by appointing his own Kyrgyz followers to key positions in the *mahalla*. These followers could then be elected as deputies of the city, which would present the mayor with an opportunity to strengthen his position. This resulted in many Uzbeks feeling that they could not rely on state officials at all, because the majority of them were ethnically Kyrgyz and very sensitive to their ethnic

background. 'Before the conflict, the majority of state officials were also Kyrgyz, but they were not as aggressive and cold as they are now,'¹³ said my Uzbek informant, Nuradil.

State officials had to implement state policy and fulfill the state program, '*unity and friendship of two ethnic groups in Osh in 2011*' in spite of their negative opinion of Uzbeks. The state officials, including the *ming boshi* and *elliq boshi* (leader of 50 households), organized various different activities in the *mahalla* such as feasts, sports competitions, national costume and food competitions, a Nooruz feast, interethnic youth competitions, Kyrgyz language competitions, song contests, and 'Manas' saga telling competitions after the conflict. The main sponsor was the state, which supplied various prizes for winners, as my informant told me. In addition, the Kyrgyz *ming boshi* and *elliq boshi* were responsible for preparing elections and organizing cleaning days, for providing residence permit documents, birth certificates, and passports, and also for distributing humanitarian aid. Nowadays, it is beneficial to be an *elliq boshi* because of the power to control or at least observe people very closely. The most important task is the distribution of humanitarian aid, which comes directly to the *ming boshi* and *elliq boshi*, not to the state administration¹⁴.

Despite this attempt on the part of the state to replace the leaders of the Uzbek *mahalla*, Karajygach Uzbek *mahalla* residents still go to their previous *elliq boshi* (an Uzbek man) and *ming boshi* to request various kinds of moral, psychological, and financial support. While many of the previous Uzbek *mahalla* leaders accept that they have lost their offices in the official sense, they still exercise their functions informally among the Uzbek population. Uzbeks told me that many people were dissatisfied with the Kyrgyz *elliq boshi* and *ming boshi* because every part of their activities was observed by the Kyrgyz state. What I found interesting was that many residents of the *mahalla* immediately showed me the house of their previous *elliq boshi* while I was searching for the house of the *elliq boshi*. Many Uzbeks also expressed their dissatisfaction with the Kyrgyz *ming boshi*, for being very 'nationalistic'.

That day I had the chance to meet the previous *elliq boshi*, Muhtar *aka*, who has been serving his people for almost 30 years and is now in his early eighties – he is a well-respected man in the *mahalla*. It was only in June 2010, after the conflicts, that the mayor of Osh removed Muhtar *aka* in line with his new policy of replacing Uzbek leaders with Kyrgyz ones. As an *elliq boshi*, Muhtar *aka* used to be officially and is now *informally* responsible for 250 to 750 households in his own neighborhood. He used to work as the mediator between state and *mahalla*, during both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Nowadays, he works informally for his own people by giving various kinds of advice and calling on his people to be patient and silent and to avoid any possible conflict in public. A lot of people come to the *elliq boshi* complaining that they have been assaulted in the street by young men, or that their daughters have been treated as if they are sexually available. Others complain that policemen catch and arrest young Uzbek men, only releasing them when their parents pay bribes of 1000 dollars. Muhtar *aka* told me that he initially used to advise them to report this to the police. Everybody refused to do so, claiming that the police would not solve the problem. Because the majority of police officers are corrupt, and they are all representatives of the Kyrgyz ethnic group, they usually do not heed reports by Uzbeks, especially if the offender is Kyrgyz. After that, in order to avoid conflict, he advised tolerant behavior (*sabyrduu*).

The Uzbek *elliq boshi* told me that ‘we have to live together as peacefully and quietly as possible because we have no other choice’. The mayor seemed to work very hard at mixing the two ethnic groups by placing them in mixed housing blocks and thereby *enforcing* peace. The Uzbek *elliq boshi* told me that ‘this would not lead to a peace building process’. Uzbeks are vulnerable: they have lost their economic security and also their political position and status, and they are thus excluded from valuable state networks in various political and economic fields that would bring them advantages. I heard that many Uzbeks had changed the names of their restaurants or hired more Kyrgyz people to avoid being visible in their own restaurants and cafés. Other Uzbek business owners either hired Kyrgyz to work for them or completely closed their businesses. I attended many festivities in the city during my research stay in Osh, such

as the Day of Osh, Independence Day, and so on. I did not see many Uzbeks in the streets or actively attending these events as they used to. So Uzbeks appear less and less in public as individuals, and they have lost their political representatives.

When people cannot fully rely on a strong functional state, local communities find recourse to coping strategies for managing violence that can tear interdependency apart. Uzbeks have been developing their own regulatory mechanisms for managing violence and searching for alternative ways of channeling aggression, such as public avoidance and being patient and tolerant (*sabyr boluu*). Uzbeks are isolated in their communities and keep a very low public profile, to the point of being almost invisible. Many Uzbeks are now afraid to leave their houses and their local neighborhoods. 'I'm afraid to leave my neighborhood,' says a young boy in Karajygach. 'When we complain, officials tell us we're lucky to be alive,' adds his father.¹⁵ However, the situation for Uzbeks is better in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan than in the south; persecution is not prevalent in the north.

5. Migration as an Avoidance Strategy

Migration, as an avoidance strategy, represents one of the ways Uzbeks in Osh¹⁶ cope with their situation. Different kinds of mobility are practiced, such as refugee movements, labor migration, and ethnic repatriation due to policies in Russia, Germany, and Kazakhstan (Rugot and Usmanalieva, 2010; Reeves, 2009, 2010 a, b; Sanders, 2010; Isabaeva, 2011). Moreover, the mass character of migration has resulted in complex adaptation and social interaction processes, as well as different perceptions and experiences of migration and its consequences for different generations (Thieme, 2008; Hegland, 2010; Reeves, 2009; 2012; Isabaeva, 2011). Reeves (2012:112) argues that Central Asian labor migration dynamics are embedded within local structures of value. Even though the Uzbeks, like other ethnic groups in Central Asia, used to practice migration during peaceful times as a way to earn money and send remittances back to

their families, another form of migration has been imposed upon them as a result of conflict (McBrien, 2011). Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan have been forced to leave as a result of the nationalistic politics of Kyrgyzstan, and limited opportunities and negative propaganda have prevented people from moving to neighboring Uzbekistan. According to Ikbol Mirsaitov, a political scientist and an expert in the Southern Division of the Kyrgyz Presidential International Institute of Strategic Studies:

‘Official statistics indicate that over 37,000 people left the area via Osh area in the first three months after the clashes. More than half of those who left were Uzbeks, with most of them leaving Kyrgyzstan for places like Russia. Kyrgyz, too, were moving out, but often to the north of the country, where the capital Bishkek is located’¹⁷ (IWPR, 2011).

Uzbeks staying in Osh often sent one of the male family members, either a son or a husband, to Russia on a temporary basis. I would call this a post-traumatic strategy of conflict avoidance. Usually, young men are a force in protecting communities as well as participants in conflicts. Young men sometimes start to engage in conflict immediately when their daughters, sisters, or mothers are assaulted. Sending young males belonging to Uzbek communities far away was one of the most commonly deployed strategies for protecting them.

During my field research, the Karajygach neighborhood was populated with elderly people, women, and young children; the majority of the working population, men aged between 20 and 45, live in Russia today. The families I interviewed had decided after the conflict to send sons or husbands to Russia in order to find jobs, and so that they might be protected against possible discrimination by the police. Every household had a son, husband, or even several brothers working in Russia. Some of them had already been in Russia before the conflict and had been advised by their elders not to return to Kyrgyzstan until the situation settled. As a result of the conflict and the closure of Uzbekistan’s borders for security reasons, many residents of the Karajygach neighborhood had lost permanent jobs or profitable businesses. The closing of the border makes it difficult for people to engage with translocal traders and visit their kinship networks in the neighboring country. Fear of the police is also an ever-present

factor. Those who already had ethnic and kin networks in Russia have found it easier to find jobs there than those who went to Russia without enjoying any support from close social networks. Young men who migrate leave much behind in Osh: not only their families, but also economic activities and properties.

I saw many houses that had been burned down, but since rebuilt, as well as houses that were being rebuilt with financial support from international organizations. However, women and older members of families had taken over these tasks – usually the preserve of young men – and were busy rebuilding the houses. Some of the families have already received money sent by relatives from Russia; others have already been waiting for a long period of time.

One couple I met, Kadyrbek and Sabyra, have four sons and a daughter. Three of their sons were in Russia before the conflict began. The youngest used to live with his parents, but after the conflict, the police started searching for young men and arresting them randomly and without evidence. Kadyrbek and Sabyra decided that it would be better for their son and his wife if both joined the son's elder brothers in Russia: the couple would be safer there than if they stayed in Osh and paid bribes to the police. The young couple left their two small children with Kadyrbek and Sabyra, who receive close to 16,000 som (200 Euros) from their sons every month and use the money to buy food, clothes, and building materials for the reconstruction of their burnt-out home. Kadyrbek and Sabyra told me that the price of a plane ticket from Osh to Moscow had risen from 200 dollars to 1000 dollars after the conflict. As their son could not get hold of a ticket, he had had to leave Osh city by bus, through Bishkek.

I also met an Uzbek man, Tohir, whose father had had a second stroke and become seriously ill after the conflict¹⁸. Tohir had lost his profitable business within a single week. He is staying in Osh, with his own family (including two children), for the sake of his elderly father and mother, even though both are trying to force him to leave before he gets arrested by the police. All of his close relatives from Osh left for Russia in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. During the conflict, Tohir was rescued by his Kyrgyz friend, Nurlan. When the conflict began, Nurlan saved him from other Kyrgyz men by

telling them (in Kyrgyz) not to touch his Uzbek friend. Tohir cannot apply for state support to rebuild his own business due to a lack of documentation and evidence that would allow him to borrow money from the bank. He told me that many Uzbeks in Osh shared this problem, because they had usually not registered their businesses officially, preferring to pay bribes to state officials instead. In return, state officials had closed their eyes to the non-payment of taxes. As a result of this situation, Tohir is currently jobless and lives off his parents' pension, together with his family. He lives in constant fear and humiliation, pressured by state officials as well as by Kyrgyz people in the city who assault him openly in the street or threaten to arrest him at any time. As a result, he rarely goes outside his neighborhood or meets his friends, many of whom have already left the city. Tohir told me that he was waiting for an invitation from friends in Russia. If he gets this invitation, he will definitely leave Osh: his young wife and his two children would remain behind with his parents. In the aftermath of the conflict, when his house was burned down, they had moved to his wife's parents' house for one year. The parents of the bride had helped them a lot by meeting their basic needs and giving them money and clothes.

An additional factor motivating migration in the aftermath of the conflict was the cleansing policy or police raids – many young Uzbek men were persecuted without evidence that they had participated in the conflict. Even though many young Uzbeks were arrested, they were rescued immediately if their parents or relatives paid bribes. Because of this fear of state power and the constant threats it presented, parents chose to send their sons far away for a while. The conflict provided an opportunity for many Uzbeks to move, but a large number did not leave their houses and families completely. Where, as many Uzbeks asked me, should they go? They have been living on this land for many centuries. One Uzbek man in his thirties showed me his grandparents' graveyard near Solomon Mountain, implying that his grandparents used to live nearby. The same person told me that he would return to his own land once things had become settled in the city of Osh.

When I went to the bank in Osh, I found it full of people waiting for remittances from Russia. Some of them received financial support from close or distant relatives in Russia. Every relative in Russia helped those who had remained in Kyrgyzstan as much as they could, with some providing cash in order to meet household expenses and others sending money to rebuild houses. The level of help and support varied from one family to another and from one supporting relative to another. But the common thread running through these different family histories was that many parents had sent or were sending both married and unmarried sons to Russia. I often heard that many young Uzbek men went to Russia, but I also heard that some of them were returning to their homeland because the work situation in Russia was difficult, at least when help and support from relatives and close social networks was not available. One mother in her fifties, Tahmina, told me that her son wanted to come back from Russia because it was very hard for him there. She had asked him to be patient and tolerant. Many young men send a significant portion of their earnings home, but those who could not find jobs returned to Kyrgyzstan. So the poorest people are the most vulnerable in this situation.

6. Giving Daughters Away for Free¹⁹: Marriage as a Strategy

Another important avoidance strategy that people adopt in the aftermath of conflict is marriage. Affinity ties give them an opportunity to build social networks and strengthen ties between families. The security of young women is often perceived to be at risk, and it is important that daughters are protected. However, marriage in Central Asia is more than just a strategy; it is a major stage in the life cycle of young women and men. Through marriage, they move socially from childhood to adulthood. The parents of the bride and groom arrange the vast majority of marriages, but marriages also occur when young people practice bride kidnapping (both with and without the bride's consent). During the years of Soviet rule, the nature of marriage changed significantly. However, neither form of marriage was eradicated completely (Kamp, 2006; Werner, 1997). The study of marriage is the best way to learn more about the relationships that promote

intergroup alliances and serve to form social network structures. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1958) argued that exchange is the universal basis of kinship systems, the structures of which depend on the type of marriage rules that are applied. The hypothesis of a 'marriage-alliance' is based on the interdependence of various families and lineages, on inter-individual relations, and also on what constitutes society. The idea of the alliance theory is thus one of a reciprocal or a generalized exchange which founds affinity.

The impact of conflict and war on marriage strategies is diverse and varies according to the sociopolitical situation of a given region. In the case of Angola, Agadjanian and Prata (2002: 227) argue that normal demographic phenomena and trends are changed by the socioeconomic and psychological distress caused by the ceaseless presence of threats. In such situations, women are likely to control their fertility and marriage is delayed. In the case of Uzbekistan, Agadjanian and Makarova (2003), in understanding marriage and fertility dynamics, argue that "... contrary to the conventional wisdom that upheaval and uncertainty would make individuals postpone marriage, the *perestroika* years saw earlier marriages than the previous years of stability and predictability" (2003: 470). Roche (2010: 267), meanwhile, examines how the age of marriage in Tajikistan is reduced in order to increase security. The people of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have similar marriage patterns to the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan in times of uncertainty and instability, and these include marrying off daughters early. Randall (2005) also observes how, during the civil war crisis in Mali, the Tuareg population preserved remarkable stability in both fertility and marriage. This is related to the fact that conflict can cause "... entrenchment of demographic behavior which reinforces the population's demographic identity particularly in respect to reproduction" (ibid.: 291). Gale (2007) argues that as a result of conflict and displacement, the survival strategy of many refugee women in the Guinean refugee camp is involvement in *bulgur* marriages (informal 'loving' relationships). *Bulgur* marriage leaves room for multiple 'trajectories', allowing participants to be in several relationships at once (ibid.: 357–358). However, in contrast to what Agadjanian and Makarova (2003) have found in Uzbekistan, Clifford et

al. (2010) established that fertility and nuptiality declined as a result of the collapse of the USSR, civil war in Tajikistan, and the food crisis of 1995.

Before the recent conflict in the Karajygach neighborhood, ethnic Uzbeks in Osh had been following their traditional marriage customs. In traditional Uzbek families (as well as in Kyrgyz families), marriages are often still arranged between families; in more cosmopolitan ones, the bride and groom make the decision themselves.²⁰ The wedding ceremonies of Uzbeks often lasted for days, with the expense borne by the families of both the bride and the groom. While the husband's family might pay for the feast, which usually features mutton, rice, and other food for the guests of the bride's family, the girl's family provided a dowry for her.

The Osh conflict impacted strongly on all these features of Uzbek marriage. Traditional customs have undergone radical change and been transformed into a strategy of survival for future Uzbek generations. The required dowry is not now given for brides anymore; instead, many girls get married without a dowry or with only a very small one. In 2010, many Uzbeks gave their daughters away 'for free', meaning without meat and rice or a wedding feast. Giving daughters away without payment also means that the value of women is lost to the family of the bride. Many parents even stopped thinking about their preferred options; they gave daughters away for free to whoever came to ask for their hands. At times, these daughters had not even yet reached marriageable age; many of those who got married were still in their early teens.

Instead of staying with their parents, youngest sons have to work in Russia, leaving their brides behind with parents. A random survey of mine showed that every household with a daughter aged between 14 and 22 witnessed that daughter get married after the conflict. Many Uzbek families confirmed this to me. Moreover, in one street with 20 households, 18 households had either married off their daughters or taken a bride for their sons directly after the conflict. Many girls even got married to strangers instead of relatives. Furthermore, many of my informants told me that many girls in the community were kept in the mosques of the *mahalla* during the conflict; potential husbands were asked to take these girls as their wives. Let me now describe a few case

studies that illuminate the role of marriage as a coping strategy in the neighborhood of Karajygach.

An Uzbek and Tajik Family

Dilnoza is a Tajik woman, aged 45, whose husband is Uzbek. They live in the city of Osh. Dilnoza has seven children. Her husband works in construction near their *mahalla*, and one of her sons was working as a builder for a Kyrgyz family further away. Dilnoza told me that this eldest son (who was born in 1988) was beaten by several Kyrgyz men in the streets in Osh when he greeted them in Uzbek fashion with '*assalamualaikum*', which is followed by the reply of '*aleikum-salam*'. The Kyrgyz men told him to greet them with '*salamatsyzyby*', followed by '*salamatchilik*'. The young Kyrgyz men, who included the construction site boss of Dilnoza's son, almost killed him in this attack. However, he recovered after several months in hospital. Dilnoza then decided to marry him off as soon as possible and went to the house of an elderly neighbor who was raising a 17-year-old granddaughter. They did not organize a wedding feast or give a bride price; they simply sent four female relatives to take the bride. Roche's (2009) work describes similar uses of marriage to protect young girls as well as young men in Tajikistan during the civil war there.

Marriage was the only strategy, Dilnoza said to me, which would keep her son from joining other young men in the street. Her aim was that having a wife would motivate her son to stay at home and not go outside the *mahalla* as often with his friends. Once her son had been married for three months, Dilnoza asked him to go to Russia to earn money for the family and to save his own life from the Kyrgyz men who had been following him constantly. The family's security concerns, in combination with their poor economic situation, triggered the following strategy: the father's income had to cover the living costs of ten family members. The eldest son went to Russia, and his young wife, who was in the early stages of pregnancy, remained behind with her husband's family. When I met the family, the eldest son had already been in Russia for almost six months, and his young wife did not know exactly when he would come back to Osh. She

was spending time with the eldest of her sisters-in-law, who also had a husband in Russia. Dilnoza's daughter and her daughter-in-law, then, are both at home with their children while their husbands are away working in Russia.

The Dowry got Burnt: What shall I do now?

I met Ada when I visited her house. She has four daughters. Her husband has been living in Russia for three years, and had been there before the conflict started; he has supported the family all this time by sending remittances. Ada brought her daughters up strictly, so that they can all cook and clean. Her eldest daughter, born in 1984, gave birth to her third child in 2011. Ada's house was burned down in the 2010 conflict, and the dowries she had spent years preparing for her other three daughters (clothes, carpets, and dishes) were all lost. Ada told me that she had prepared a costume for the groom and given a lot of money as part of the dowry for her daughter Dilya (born in 1988); however, this daughter, who is now raising her first child, has a difficult relationship with her mother-in-law, in spite of these efforts on Ada's part. Ada told me that a girl who brings in a good dowry is not usually placed under pressure by her mother-in-law; conflicts are more likely when a bride has only a small dowry. Dilya got married in 2010, after the conflict and despite the disappearance of her dowry in the fire; Ada had asked her husband to send money to prepare a new dowry for her daughter. Ada had not known the groom's family very well before, and she had not had time to ask other people about the family's history and reputation. She told me that she had given her daughter '*for free to strangers*' without thinking things through, as she had been afraid that her daughter would not get married at all: during the conflict, girls of 15 and 16 years had been seen as potential brides, and Dilya had already been 22 years old at that point. After this experience, however, Ada told herself that she would not give her other two daughters to strangers instead of close relatives, since strangers had not treated Dilya very well. Among Uzbeks, it is possible for paternal first cousins (the respective children of two brothers) to get married (unlike among Kyrgyz), but the majority of cousin marriages take place between maternal first cousins (as also happens among

Kyrgyz). In 2010, Ada also gave away her third daughter, Mubarak, in marriage. She was born in 1991 and got married when she was 20 years old; her mother was afraid that she would not get married at all, since 20 years was the maximum marriageable age after the conflict. Many mothers of daughters over 20 started to become concerned that they would not be accepted as potential brides due to their age now that girls of 14-16 are widely accepted and taken as brides. Ada's youngest daughter is 12 years old, but her mother decided not to marry her so early, as otherwise she would have remained at home alone without support from any of her children. But this youngest daughter told me that some girls at her school aged 14 and 15 have got married, as parents fear that they would otherwise remain unmarried.

Mubarak told me that her marriage had not been accompanied by a feast and musical entertainment, as had been the norm before the conflict. This time, her mother decided to give her third daughter only to her own younger sister's son. Mubarak's marriage was arranged by her mother, and Ada was relieved that her third daughter had finally married. During the conflict, she had lived in fear of men entering the house and raping her daughters, since she was living without a husband and raising her children alone. Mubarak said to me that she used to treat her husband as a cousin and that it had therefore been very hard for her to accept him as a husband. After the conflict, the mother of the boy was also worried by the situation in the city and had decided that it would be good for both families if their children got married and were thus protected; there would be more men in her house, and more relatives would help them.

Guldasta: alone, raising four children

The building I visited contained a number of separate apartments with several rooms each, arranged around a large yard. Four brothers' families had resided in the complex, along with their mother, Yuldyz, and their own families, but three of the brothers had been killed in the conflict, leaving wives and small children. Yuldyz was born in 1924. Of her six children (four sons and two daughters), four had died in 2010 (three sons and one daughter). Yuldyz now occupies a separate house within the larger household with

her deceased daughter's son (born in 1992) and daughter (born in 1995). As well as the daughter who died during the conflict in June 2010, Yuldyz' other daughter was severely beaten and shot in the street in front of other people. Yuldyz' health deteriorated after the deaths of her children, and her daughters-in-law had nowhere else to go after the deaths of their husbands, especially as they all had small children. The upshot of all this was that all the daughters-in-law remained together within the same complex, taking care of their children and of their mother-in-law, Yuldyz. As Yuldyz worried about her grandsons and was not strong enough to protect her young grandchildren, she married off her granddaughter and grandson, making both of them independent, and thus saving them from uncertainty and fear.

Guldasta (born in 1972) was widowed when her husband, Yuldyz' eldest son, was killed during the conflict; she is now raising four children alone. Her husband had tried to protect their house when it was set alight, but young Kyrgyz men burned him alive and then threw his body in front of the burnt house. Guldasta's youngest daughter is now one year old. Her husband never saw the child, as he died before her birth. Their eldest son, Muhtar, was born in 1992, and twins (one girl and one boy) were born in 1995. Guldasta stays with her mother-in-law, two more wives of her husband's brothers, and their young children. The conflict was traumatic for the children, who saw their parents die in front of them. Someone in the street shouted at Muhtar that his father was dead and had to be buried as quickly as possible. After this experience, Muhtar was unable to speak properly, and his eyes remained unfocused. He spent a few months in the hospital, until the money ran out. His health deteriorated every day. In December 2010, his mother decided to marry him off, since this was the only possible solution to his anguish over his loss and to the deterioration of his health. She thought that Muhtar would be kept busy taking care of his own wife once he got married. Guldasta suggested a few girls, but Muhtar decided to get married to his own girlfriend. He married that young girl immediately, by sending a few women (*juuchu*) to ask for her hand. The wedding ceremony was presided over by an Imam. After the couple exchanged their vows, the Imam distributed some of the salted *nan* (a kind of crispy flat bread) to the bride and

groom. This action was regarded as the most meaningful part of the whole wedding ceremony. But there was no music or other entertainments as there used to be in traditional ceremonies.

By marrying, Muhtar recovered. He also started to take on more responsibility, not only for his own small family, but also for the larger household. Muhtar and his young wife live together in a separate apartment, but within the same household as his grandmother and mother. Now Muhtar does not walk alone in the streets as before. Instead, he comes home early and spends time with his young wife and all the members of the wider household, who eat together as one big family. Guldasta has bought a car for her son, but she does not allow him to drive in the center of the city; he drives, rather, within the Uzbek neighborhood. Guldasta fears that if he drove to the bazaar where Kyrgyz men usually get together, they might ask him to drive somewhere else.

Through marriage, the Uzbek community was able to expand their most immediate and distant kinship networks, including both natal and affinal kin members, and protecting their social support networks in the process. I applied Lévi-Strauss' model to Uzbek marriage practices in an attempt to offer an explanation for marriages which, over time, create social structures, as such marriages are primarily forged between groups and not just between the two individuals involved. Affinal relationships through marriage (or kin by marriage) create social networks that support each other in times of need. If Uzbek daughters are kidnapped or raped, this brings shame on the family and the *mahalla*. But once they are married, rape does not represent the same insult or threat to the honor of the natal kin group. The married status of women ensures they are protected by the husband's family. In the same way, married sons often face familial and societal expectations once they are married. In other words, children are protected by their relatives, who provide them with psychological, moral, and financial support. The victims of the conflict all stay at relatives' houses most of the time, sometimes with the bride's family or with relatives related through the male line.

7. Conclusion

I have highlighted how Osh Uzbeks were exposed to many difficulties after the violence. On the one hand, the on-going and ever-present economic crisis and the national exclusion policy pursued by the government translate on the ground into the constant seizure of properties, a shortage of jobs, and verbal and physical abuse. On the other hand, Uzbeks have been living in the region of Osh for centuries and have deep roots in such city locations as the mahalla, mosque, or bazaar (Liu, 2012). This 'rootedness' has made the Uzbek population reluctant to leave the area for good. As a result, they have found alternative ways to cope with the uncertainty and insecurity of their situation and adopted coping strategies that protect their lives in a situation in which their community faces constant threats. Moreover, the strategies people adopt also aim to protect the honor of the community, to maintain social networks, and to preserve Uzbek identity without attracting attention.

My research has revealed that Uzbeks have adopted avoidance as a survival strategy (Elwert, 1999). This manifests itself in daughters being married earlier than before, in people keeping as low a profile as possible, and in sons being sent to far-flung locations as labor migrants. This strategy of coping is sustainable in the long term, as these strategies can continue to evolve as the years go by. If we go back in time, it is clear that Uzbeks used the same marriage patterns after the riots of 1990, and that this same strategy is now being deployed and developed once again. It can also be noted that the same patterns in marriage strategies are observed in neighboring countries like Uzbekistan in uncertain or insecure times, and that they have been used in Tajikistan (Roche, 2010) in times of war.

However, Uzbeks' avoidance of public spaces and their isolation within their communities are both linked to their vulnerable political position, itself a product of the dominance of Kyrgyz nationalism. Nevertheless, they would describe this strategy of patience as *sabyrdu*, turning it in a positive manner. This traditional mechanism, with its own social driving forces, has proved to be very effective in eliminating and preventing

conflict or not provoking it. I have also illustrated the direct and indirect effects of the conflict on migration and remittance flows. In times of insecurity and conflict, migration and remittances were coping strategies that people could continue to rely on while keeping their household economies at home. In the current context, conflict has taken its toll on the entire range of livelihood strategies open to Uzbeks, principally because of the seizure of properties, loss of jobs, and verbal and physical abuse of men. The migration of men to Russia on a temporary basis, leaving families behind, is linked with localized insecurity and the possible option of sending the sons and husbands of the Uzbek communities far away as the best way to protect them.

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Notes

¹ The role of elders in mediating conflict and the role of marriage in the Osh conflict in 1990 was crucial.

² I follow the conflict definition used by the Crossroads Asia 'conflict' group (every social conflict can also be interpreted as a political one; one should look at the *processes* involved in conflicts, at emic views of conflict, and at the connections between conflict and mobility).

³ Damien McElroy, Richard Orange and Andrew Osborn (2010) state that the official death toll rose to 124, but Russian sources reported that at least 700 had been killed and more than 1,000 wounded. In: Russia prepares to move in to stop Kyrgyzstan violence spreading.

[<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kyrgyzstan/7827699/Russia-prepares-to-move-in-to-stop-Kyrgyzstan-violence-spreading.html>] Accessed 2 February 2012

⁴ Leila Saralaeva (2010). Kyrgyzstan says Islamist groups sparked violence

[http://www.zoneasia-pk.com/ZoneAsia-Pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=398:kyrgyzstan-says-islamist-groups-sparked-violence] Accessed 7 January, 2011

⁵ Otdel po svyazam s obshchestvennoistu i SMI GSNB Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki. SNB Kyrgyzstana: Pogromy na yuge organizovali Maksim Bakiev, uzbeki i Taliban. 24.06.2010 12:58 Fergana.ru [<http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6629>] Accessed 1 May 2012

⁶ After the mass migration of Uzbeks in the 1990s, this largest grouping among the non-Kyrgyz groups in Kyrgyzstan (one in seven Kyrgyzstani is Uzbek) has become almost unnoticed in the public arena: their representatives are not in the highest political elite, they are not represented in key government positions, and the number of seats they occupy in parliament does not reflect the numerical 'weight' of their ethnicity. The Kyrgyz government categorically refuses to consider giving the Uzbek language even regional official status (instead, it formally recognizes the Russian language as 'official'), and, finally, the term 'Uzbeks' is rarely mentioned in documents and speeches dealing with 'ethnic relations' (Reeves, 2010a; Abashin, 2011a).

⁷ While an independent study confirmed that Kyrgyz killed Uzbeks (though it did clearly point out that Uzbeks also killed Kyrgyz), parliament banned the author of this report, Finnish politician Kimmo Kiljunen, from entering Kyrgyzstan on 26 May (Camm, 2011).

⁸ Names of people and places have been changed.

⁹ The question may remain: how exactly is it possible for the state to appoint an *elliq boshi* if he is supposed to "stand between the state and communities"? Many Uzbek informants complained to me that they did not know about the administration's request to appoint a new leader for the *mahalla* residents. No one knew how the Kyrgyz *eluu bashy* had become leader.

¹⁰ Myrzakmatov interview.

¹¹ Osh kundolugu Azattyk.kg Video archive.

¹² This is a higher position.

¹³ Interview with Nuradil in Osh city, 3 August 2011.

¹⁴ The *elliq boshi* and *ming boshi* stand between state and communities.

¹⁵ However, the situation for Uzbeks is better in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan than in the south, as those in the north are not persecuted.

¹⁶ Waves of Uzbeks as well as Kyrgyz started moving from one place to another within the Osh region itself, as well as outside the region and the country. The largest sending region is Osh *oblast* (province); roughly 35% of all Kyrgyzstani migrants are from this *oblast* or Osh city (Marat, 2009).

¹⁷ Anara Yusupova, Isomidin Ahmedjanov (2012) Proekt po pravam cheloveja v Tsentralnoi Azii 14 Jan 11. Konflikt na yuge Kyrgyzstana privel k razdeleniu. [<http://iwpr.net/report-news/deep-rifts-remain-conflict-torn-kyrgyz-south>] Accessed 1 May 2012; Obshestvennyi reiting. Tatyana Vygovskaya. Fund «Egalitee»: April 2012 [<http://www.pr.kg/news/kg/2012/04/09/22107/>] Accessed 1 May, 2012

¹⁸ The mother of one Uzbek boy (13 years old) told me that he used to speak freely, but now does not want to talk to anyone at all. The mother wants to send her son to Russia next year, when he turns 14, to join his brothers for a while. Many Uzbeks refused to see doctors because of the high cost of treatment at the local hospital, and some families told me that their sons send medication from Russia. It is clear from these and other factors that migration also involves family members who do not migrate and remain in the city.

¹⁹ Giving away one's daughter 'for free' means that the wedding is cheaper and the groom's family does not contribute any food for the celebration of the daughter's wedding feast. The food normally includes two bags of rice, one sheep, and sweets for the guests of the bride's family.

²⁰ By custom, the eldest child should marry first. Marriages between people in the Uzbek ethnic group should be enacted in three steps: the marriage proposal, the exchange of betrothal gifts, and the wedding ceremony. However it is arranged, the match is subject to parental approval, with the mother in practice having the final word. Preference is given to members of the kin group. The family has an especially strong say in the youngest son's choice, as he and his bride will take care of his parents. People tend to marry in their late teens or early twenties.

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Information on the competence network *Crossroads Asia*

The competence network *Crossroads Asia* derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in *Crossroads Asia*. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in *Crossroads Asia*. Mobility is the other key concept for studying *Crossroads Asia*, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group **"Conflict"** will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in *Crossroads Asia*, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group **"Migration"** aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within *Crossroads Asia* as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the **"Development"**-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of *Crossroads Asia* and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on *Crossroads Asia* is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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