



Kyrgyzstan: Tragedy in the South

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Abstract

This paper is authored by three experts who worked at the international Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, and is based on primary data collected in the field. It argues that political processes and the actions of the authorities cannot exclusively account for the violent clashes that occurred there in June 2010. Rather, the violence emerged out of a growing alienation between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities which over time developed a mutual antipathy, and lacked a shared vision of the future. Formal provisions for minorities failed to offset the rising nationalism of the majority group in the South. Political resources and mechanisms for managing interethnic relations had been in steady decline since independence, while politicians came to rely on informal arrangements with Uzbek community leaders. The crisis of April 2010 created a window of opportunity to redefine the place of Uzbeks in the new political order, which their leaders grasped. Surge in criminal rivalries and rapid immigration from the countryside influenced social context, in which violence took place. As interethnic grievances became politicised, the ineptitude of the authorities contributed to the transformation of spontaneous riots into full-scale clashes. A logic of collective insecurities, in both rural and urban contexts, lay behind the actions of both sides. The conflict narratives that emerged in the aftermath continue to feed a situation of a latent conflict, making reconciliation more difficult still.

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1. Introduction

The study analyses the June 2010 interethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the South of Kyrgyzstan, the smallest of the Central Asian countries located on the borders with China and Uzbekistan, and homeland to a large Uzbek minority. Prior to these events, in which up to 470 people died, the country has undergone a ‘revolution’ – a turbulent change of power, already second in its short history since independence. The clashes occurred in the context of political turmoil that followed the ‘revolution.’

The study is authored by three experts who conducted field investigation for the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC).¹ The original material collected for the inquiry is used in the paper, which concentrates on the problems in majority-minority relations and the aspects of conflict, which have not been sufficiently analysed. It analyses the ideological foundations of the state, resources and mechanisms of managing interethnic relations, and grass-root community perspectives exacerbated by the lack of measures towards integration and inclusivity. It explains the events, which triggered the tragedy and reconstructs its course, outlining the actions of the authorities, and discusses the formation of conflict narratives.

The paper argues that the key reason for the conflict was a widening gap between the two communities in the South in the post-independence period, when the groups interacted and understood each other less and less, and increasingly saw the other as a threat. This led to mutual suspicions and consolidation of one’s own ethnic identity. In 2010 the crisis of political authority and weakening of security sector created a sense that power was up for grabs for those who dared to take it, raising the stakes for ethnic entrepreneurs. Eventually, politicisation of ethnic grievances made the collision between the communities almost inevitable, while the forces of integration in society were too fragile to withstand pressure of polarisation. Growing reign of crime barons influenced the climate, in which violence became possible. Urban-rural divide contributed to rapid mobilisation from the countryside which overwhelmed the cities as the conflict broke out.

¹ The narrative also draws upon research and ideas of other colleagues who worked for KIC, Peter Felch, Marc Behrendt and Alan Waddams, for which the authors wish to express their gratitude.

Moving forward, the paper acknowledges the tension between the reconciliation and justice agendas, and seeks to bring peace into the forefront of the debate. It aims to lay the foundation for the establishment of more congenial relations between two communities, and tries to explain more and condemn less. In addition to acknowledging the ineffective strategies by the authorities, it points out that the logic of collective insecurities and violent action dictates specific strategies, which cause forceful responses by both sides.

The narrative tries to reconstruct the history of the clashes as accurately as possible, and presents a close approximation of the events that took place. Inevitably, witness respondents relied on memory which can wipe out certain moments, compress or extend duration and timing of the events, and exaggerate the pain and sacrifice of their group, and diminish the suffering experienced by the opponents. Every effort was made to cross-check the information and to tell a balanced story. The paper indicates instances where there was no entire clarity. Witness respondent names remain anonymous, but interviews with experts and officials are quoted.

The study is structured as follows: it first discusses the situation of the Uzbek minority in the context of the recent political history of Kyrgyzstan and then outlines the process between the April power change and June events, which triggered violence. It further provides a narrative of the events, explaining the logic behind the actions of the parties to the conflict, and reconstructs the history of mobilisation from rural areas. It concludes by analysing perspectives on the conflict, which emerged among both communities and the positions in which they found themselves vis-à-vis the other in the aftermath of violence.

2. Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan

2.1 Situation of the Uzbek Minority

Kyrgyzstan became part of the USSR after the October 1917 Revolution, in 1936 achieved Union Republic status and in 1991 became an independent state. The country is divided into the North and the South, each having distinct identities which affect the political divide. The first president Askar Akayev, a Northerner, ruled the country from 1991 and was deposed from power by protests against the falsified parliamentary elections of February 2005. Kurmanbek Bakiyev, a Southerner, was elected president in June 2005 and ousted on 7 April 2010 by a storm of violent protests. Bakiyev's rule heavily relied on his family in

power, which caused much public resentment. Still, his fall had a divisive effect, regarded in the South as a victory of the North. It brought to power a mixture of opposition politicians, who established a 'Provisional Government' (PG) with Roza Otunbayeva as the leader, then president. Parliamentary elections of October 2010 created a new government, which succeeded the PG, but included some of its members, and paved the way for the presidential elections that took place in October 2011.

Modern Kyrgyzstan has legal infrastructure for minority protection, including reserved quotas in political representation. The constitution provides safeguards against 'incitement of ethnic hatred' and guarantees the use of Russian as an 'official' language *on par* with Kyrgyz, the 'state' language. State support for Uzbek-language education and media is available. Still, Uzbeks are underrepresented in the judiciary, prosecution, intelligence service and police. Senior executive appointments do not involve any Uzbeks. Civil service jobs are more accessible for the Kyrgyz than for minorities, as the 2004 Language Law created a link between proficiency in Kyrgyz and civil service employment. However, these jobs pay little and many Uzbeks find the private sector more attractive.² The recruitment requirement for the police service is the completion of the army service, which Uzbeks seek to avoid because of incidents of hazing.

The South is home to an Uzbek minority. About 55 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks live in Osh and 32 per cent in Jalalabad provinces. Osh is regarded as 'the capital of the South.' Batken province is 14.5 per cent Uzbek. There are small numbers in the North. The population composition of Osh city prior to the conflict (2009 census) was represented by the following main groups:

TABLE 1: POPULATION COMPOSITION OF OSH CITY, 2009

	2009
Uzbek	48.31%
Kyrgyz	43.05%
Russians	2.7%
Turks	2.36%
Tatars	1.16%

Source: (National Census, 2009).

² An Uzbek NGO respondent admitted that she could find a public administration job, if she wanted to, but working in a foreign-sponsored project was better paid and more interesting (KIC interview, Osh, October 2010).

The population of Osh city in 2009 was 47.9 per cent Kyrgyz, 44.1 per cent Uzbek and 2.4 per cent Russian, and was a product of social engineering. City administrative borders were drawn in such a way as to create a semblance of equal standing of Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. For example, according to the 1982 reorganisation of city boundaries, Kenesh village (populated by the Kyrgyz) became a part of Osh, while Uzbek neighbourhoods of Kyzyl-Kyshtak and Fourkat were assigned to Osh province, instead of Osh city. Some Uzbeks from Osh city were moved to the suburb of On-Adyr³ to vacate land for Kyrgyz newcomers within city boundaries. In Jalalabad, several Uzbek neighbourhoods were allocated to Suzac district.

Violent interethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks already had taken place in the South in 1990 (Tishkov, 1995, Asankanov, 1990). The *Adolat* (Justice) Uzbek youth movement served as a vehicle for expression of the community grievances and was opposed by *Osh Aimagy* by the young Kyrgyz. Over 330 were proven dead and 462 seriously injured in the 4–8 June 1990 clashes.⁴ A rise of ethno-nationalism on both sides, a weakening of political authority, an atmosphere of openness, which enabled expression of demands, and a sense of historical opportunity to make gains were among the causes. A dispute over land grabbing at Kolkhoz Lenina served as a trigger for the violence.

All significant actors in the 2010 clashes were associated with the Uzbek National Cultural Centre (UNCC), founded in response to 1990 events. Hierman argues that ‘Uzbek politicians invest in ethnic organisations (cultural centres and a university) as a means to increase entry costs for rival Uzbek politicians’ (Hierman, 2010). The initial leadership of UNCC by Mahammadjan Mamasaidov⁵ was very cautious, and was challenged by Davron Sabirov for making UNCC too pliant. UNCC leaders were successful businessmen and owned lucrative assets in the South. They marginalised the Uzbek old establishment, as the latter’s appeal among the younger generation was fading. Its key figures stayed in the country after the conflict, but gradually got excluded from political life.

³ Named Amir-Timur at present.

⁴ KIC Anna Matveeva (AM) and Igor Savin (IS) interview with Valery Bolshakov, deputy chief investigator of 1990 events, Moscow, October 2010.

⁵ He did not respond to the president Otunbayeva’s request to go to Osh on 11 June and disappeared for ten days.

Tensions within UNCC persisted until Kadyrjan Batyrov emerged on the political scene. Against the background of the old and wary leaders, Batyrov was a breakthrough. One of the richest people in the South, he was part of Kyrgyzstani establishment and an MP in 2005–7 elected as the leader of *Rodina* (Motherland) party. The party had mostly an Uzbek membership, but to comply with the law it included representatives of other ethnicities. Out of its seven-member board three were non-Uzbeks. Given Batyrov's promotion of Uzbek interests, his sponsorship of rallies, conferences and news outlets, it was difficult to convince the Kyrgyz public that *Rodina* was anything but an Uzbek pressure group. Batyrov also founded the University of Friendship of People ('Uzbek University') in Jalalabad, which emerged as a sore spot for the southern Kyrgyz as it served as a centre of *Rodina's* political activity.⁶

2.2 Framing the Issues

Given that interethnic clashes unfolded in South Kyrgyzstan for the second time, the issues at stake must be deeper than actions of the politicians who happened to be in office on the day. Tensions had been inbuilt in the political trajectory the state took since independence.

Despite the formal slogan of 'Kyrgyzstan – our Common Home' proclaimed by the first president Akayev, an ideology based on primacy of the 'titular' group was taking hold. The concept of a nation-state did not acknowledge the place of minorities within it. Whereas in the Soviet era all expressions of nationalisms were discouraged, only Uzbek nationalism became 'wrong.' Such an ethnocratic model of developing statehood led to an absence of a shared vision between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks of what Kyrgyzstan is. The two communities did not have a mutually acceptable version of life together and co-existence in a shared space was not more than a tolerable compromise. The Uzbeks considered their pre-June 2010 position as in the need of improvement, while the Kyrgyz viewed the standing of the Uzbeks as already gained too much in the 'Kyrgyz land.'

The place of the Uzbeks in the culture of Kyrgyzstan is marginal and the dynamic is not in their favour. Under the second president Bakiyev (2005–10) Uzbek language was taken

⁶ Confirmed by AM visit and interviews at the University on 7 June 2010, Jalalabad.

from public notices, including in Uzbek-language schools, and businesses were forced to adopt non-Uzbek names. Uzbeks were largely excluded from the official picture of Kyrgyzstan: the display of local dignitaries of Uzgen, a Kyrgyz–Uzbek mixed town in Osh province, contains 20 busts, two of which are Russians and one – astronaut Sharipov – is Uzbek. The Osh and Bishkek Arts museums show scenes depicting Uzbek people as ‘exotic elements’ in ‘our land.’

The state failed to develop adequate resources to manage ethnic relations. Akayev, a popular-elected president credited with the establishment of Kyrgyzstan’s statehood, had some institutional resources at his disposal, but Bakiyev’s rule weakened many institutions of the previous era. Informal resources, such as ethnicity, clanic connections, tribalism and reliance on criminal structures gained prominence. The problem was that although Bakiyev’s leadership found it easier to rule the country this way than through formal institutions, such resources were not viewed as legitimate by the public.

The Uzbek leaders also mastered the game by relying on corrupt relationships with the predominantly Kyrgyz authorities and police to conduct their business. The Uzbek elite were represented in the Akayev and Bakiyev’s parliaments, and among the deputies of city and district councils. The Osh city *kenesh* (council) had prominent Uzbek deputies.⁷ As the standing of these institutions declined, so did the power of their individual members. These Uzbek representatives stood less and less for their constituency but concentrated on promotion of their own business interests instead.

Thus, when the PG shot to power, it discovered that it had no real institutions to employ and had to rely, at least in the short term, on informal and illegitimate resources to get through the turbulent period. In doing so, it became hostage of the situation. The PG was viewed in the South as ‘Northerners’ who came to power illegitimately, and their support base was limited. Otunbayeva did not have a real constituency in the South, and her government had to appeal to the Uzbeks for support against the Bakiyevs, vying to return to power.

⁷ Prior to April the distribution of political power was as follows: Osh oblast had five MPs, two mayors of towns, eight deputies of rural and town councils, one Osh vice-mayor, 11 municipality heads, one district head and three deputy district heads. Jalalabad oblast had three deputies of rural and town councils, two deputy mayors and seven municipality heads, data received from Osh and Jalalabad provincial administrations, December 2010.

After the June clashes the PG switched to the southern Kyrgyz resource, as respect for it in the South was so low. It became a hostage again: if it tried to contain the southern Kyrgyz more rigorously, they would be so alienated that they would not consider the PG legitimate to rule, risking the split of the country into the North and the South. A botched attempt to dismiss Osh mayor Melis Myrzakhmatov in August 2010, who retaliated that the PG powers did not apply in the South, served as a reminder that there were strict constraints on what Bishkek could do.

Mechanisms of addressing interethnic issues also weakened. Akayev's personnel policy in executive jobs was not anti-Uzbek *per se*, but his patronage system relied on distribution of appointments to clients, which needed to be made vacant for this purpose. It was easier to dismiss Uzbeks to make room for the 'right people,' as the Uzbeks as a minority group had fewer resources to resist. Bakiyev's policy of expelling Uzbeks from power was more consciously based on ethnonationalism.

The trends in society were towards segregation, as there were few state efforts to maintain integration mechanisms. Police did not have instruments to deal with interethnic tensions as its cadre was growing monoethnic and the remaining Uzbek officers had to demonstrate loyalty to their Kyrgyz bosses rather than mediate their community interests. Internationalist education at schools no longer existed. Intelligentsia did not rise above ethnic divisions either. Many among Kyrgyz intelligentsia repeated the same stance as the authorities, believing that those Uzbeks who spoke about representation and rights, were 'radicals.' Donor-sponsored NGOs were split into Kyrgyz and minority ones. Osh Kyrgyz intelligentsia argued that since out of 28 NGOs active in Osh before the clashes 13 were Uzbek-headed, the Uzbeks had their fair share.⁸ Donors sponsored conflict prevention programmes in the South, which made little effort to reach out to Uzbeks and were reluctant to recruit them.

2.3 Community Perspectives

The argument of the paper is that the two communities were not driven by imminent resentments against each other, but by realities of ethnic and social categorisation, when

⁸ 'Геноцида в Кыргызстане нет! Только факты' (No genocide in Kyrgyzstan! Only facts), statement of 35 prominent members of Osh Kyrgyz intelligentsia, Osh, 2010.

they were boxed into niches with few stakes in a shared destiny. Cooperative ties were too fragile to withstand a political crisis. Thus, it is important to explore community perspectives on the 'self' and 'other' to see how the gulf between the two was widening.

The Uzbek worldview reflects the spirit of old urban environment, where it is important who your neighbour is. Communities are bound by a territorial principle, but at the same time relationships are commercialised. Material assets are cherished and are a sign of achievement. The community's self-image is as builders, creators and wealth generators. The Uzbeks comprise an enterprising community in Osh, a tradition inherited from Soviet times and boosted during independence. There exists a sizeable stratum of established Uzbek entrepreneurial middle class and intelligentsia in cultural and educational facilities. The remaining pre-revolutionary architecture, especially the religious one, is largely Uzbek.

Life opportunities open for the young Uzbek men typically are to enter a family business, which requires learning a skill since one's teens, work in agriculture seeking to accumulate land and save it from re-division (this explains marriages between cousins) and labour migration to Russia. Professions are often inherited from father to son. Those who sought politically-engaged jobs had to find positions created by international projects or go abroad. Journalism and academia are possible avenues, but they employ few people.

As the Uzbeks were in a way detached from mainstream politics and society in Kyrgyzstan, they lived in monoethnic communities, which were largely self-contained. Shahid-Tyube, Kashgar Kyshtak, Nariman, Fourkat, On-Adyr functioned as segregated neighbourhoods with self-regulated life and little intermix with other residents. City and suburbs' ethno-territorial delineation worked to increase their alienation. Uzbeks and other minorities were absent from certain aspects of Osh street culture. Uzbek boys did not participate in territorial fights between schools and in school racket.⁹ Such youth pursuits are regulated by unwritten rules, and become schools of fighting and survival in the urban environment.

Uzbeks were convinced that they were in retreat in Kyrgyzstan, because as compared to the Soviet times they suffered heavy losses in access to formal power and to informal

⁹ KIC Emil Suyunaliyev interview, Osh, November 2010.

authority. They maintained that they were loyal citizens, did not cherish territorial aspirations and did not want to join Uzbekistan. They were not a threat to Kyrgyzstan's statehood, but felt that they should be treated better. They also feared Kyrgyz encroachment into 'their' cities and diminishing standing of their community, and suspected that the Kyrgyz had no respect for the old city traditions, Uzbek property, and their efforts to create material culture and work attitudes. The Uzbek community related to the state not as citizens, but as a segregated group, which tended to avoid dealing with the majority unless it had to.

Historically, the Kyrgyz universe is a community of relatives, when a person should be able to name seven generations of their relatives. These relatives, real or imagined, create a universal 'whole' which requires solidarity and mobilisation for their defence when threatened. Those men who came to Osh to save their 'sisters' during the June clashes, not necessarily had a real sister in the city. Nevertheless, these 'sisters' for them were relatives. Such culture carries many non-material values, such as solidarity, devotion, patriotism, and can be quite neglectful of 'possessions'. The Kyrgyz think of themselves as more democratic and less inclined to bow to authority.

The Kyrgyz middle class is smaller, represented by civil servants, educators, doctors and public sector workers. The Kyrgyz are largely stratified into two groups. Rich men are at the top: they build mansions in affluent suburbs and the origins of their fortunes are obscure. Poor and very poor newcomers rent their lodgings from the Uzbeks; men work at lowest bazaar jobs and young women as waitresses. Social deprivation in Osh affected the Kyrgyz more than it did the Uzbeks. There was also no support system to integrate Kyrgyz newcomers into the urban environment, where they struggled to find a place. Many Kyrgyz had worked in industries in towns, such as Kyzyl-Kiya, Khaidarken, and Kadamjay, which collapsed with the USSR demise. They came to the cities, from where Europeans were withdrawing, into casual employment with uncertain housing prospects. At the same time, a sense of a narrow social perspective and limited opportunities for younger generation dominated in both communities.

Young Kyrgyz men in the countryside had three main life choices on offer: subsistence agriculture, mostly cattle-breeding, entering a rough environment of Russian big cities and internal migration to Osh and Bishkek, which pays little. In Osh, competitive sectors for the

Kyrgyz were civil service, police and other security sector agencies. Crime was another area. Sports' clubs played a pivotal role in community life, where the most popular pursuits were wrestling, kickboxing, and other combative sports. Most clubs are ethnically divided and it is rare for Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth to train together.¹⁰ It is widely believed that sports' clubs serve as a recruitment ground for organised crime. The communities had different resources. The Kyrgyz were the majority nation and had an 'administrative resource' at their disposal. Uzbek resources were corporate solidarity, trading capital and entrepreneurial skills, and a long urban residency.

With the private sector largely monoethnic, the number of jobs with a multiethnic environment fell as public sector employment declined. Spaces for everyday cross-ethnic interaction were narrowing down to functional exchanges. As a result, the two communities understood each other's problems less and less. The Kyrgyz could not see why the Uzbeks thought of themselves as deprived. They could observe that Uzbek businesses flourished and they barely paid tax, as it was easier for them to bribe officials. They enjoyed Kyrgyzstan's freedom as compared to a restricted environment in Uzbekistan.

The Kyrgyz felt resentful because they suspected Uzbeks to cherish separatist aspirations and be a threat to the statehood which was still fragile. They also believed that in the 'Kyrgyz state' they as a 'titular nation' should have a preferential treatment. Otherwise in a fair competition with the Uzbeks, they suspected the Uzbeks might have an upper hand. They also felt culturally threatened by Uzbekistan, its formidable neighbour, and regarded Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks with attitudes of superiority attributed to them, as its extension. A Kyrgyz woman expressed to Otunbayeva visiting Osh to promote the new Constitution: 'You should write straight into the Constitution that Uzbeks should respect us.'¹¹

Such perspectives were present in Osh for decades, exacerbated during independence as social interaction reduced, and influenced street life. Antagonism between the two communities was constantly recreated, as conditions were not altering and life strategies were moving apart. Dormant under the surface in the time of peace, these perceptions crystallised at the moments of confrontation and served as a mobilising force. A window of oppor-

¹⁰ KIC Birimdik interview, conducted in Russia, December 2010, place name withheld to protect the respondent.

¹¹ AM interview with Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI) and FTI focus groups, Bishkek and Osh, June-July 2010.

tunity, which opened after the April 2010 power change, allowed them to enter public politics.

3. A Fatal Chain of Events

3.1 Politics after April

Uprisings do not necessarily happen when life is utterly intolerable. They happen when a sense of an alternative appears and change seems possible. Such an opening came about with the overthrow of the previous regime in April 2010 when change seemed possible, as the PG in Bishkek promised to redefine the rules of political game.

As a window of opportunity opened, those with ambitions rushed to take their chance. This included Uzbek politicians, whose wings were clipped under Bakiyev, as they had been deprived of participation at the forefront of Kyrgyzstan's politics. These political opportunists wanted to enjoy the public profiles, the same as their Kyrgyz counterparts, and sought satisfaction of their career aspirations. Uzbek leaders had another interest in entering politics, which was to protect their assets from corporate raiding. For that, they needed positions in power and ability to influence the police.

In doing so, Uzbek politicians appealed to their natural constituents – the Uzbek minority – as they had no other card to play, the way the Kyrgyz typically appeal to their regional homelands. This brought the Uzbek leaders a following, but also led to a rapid politicisation of ethnicity. The stance, which prominent Uzbek politicians took – especially Kadyrjan Batyrov and Karamat Abdullayeva, the main ideologues – resonated in the hearts and minds of the Uzbeks, as it reflected grievances. They managed to inspire their community, especially the Uzbek youth, to stop abstaining and take an active part in politics.

Within the next few days after April's power change Uzbek *kurultais* started in Jalalabad, Kashgar-Kyshtak, On-Adyr and Aravan, discussing demands such as status for the Uzbek as a regional language in the areas of Uzbek settlement and increase in representation in power and law-enforcement bodies. Some Uzbek community indicated that Batyrov with his campaign was unwelcome, as in Noukat.¹² More cautious figures among the Osh

¹² The reason was Batyrov's refusal to interfere in prosecution of the 'Noukat events' cases when alleged members of *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* were condemned to lengthy prison sentences. Noukat Uzbeks appealed for help to Batyrov, an MP at the

Uzbek establishment warned against using the city as a launch pad for demands that could hit back.

Gatherings of Uzbeks alarmed the southern Kyrgyz public for reasons of cultural vulnerability, perceived threats to the Kyrgyz statehood and a lack of appreciation of the Uzbek minority problems. Expressions of Uzbek strength and solidarity, and sudden expansion in participation gave them a sense that 'Uzbeks always come up with their demands when we are weak.' The UNCC leaders were not sensitive to the effect that their actions produced. In the meantime, time worked towards radicalisation rather than reconciliation.

The elite balance of the Bakiyev period altered among the Kyrgyz, with new politicians vying for power and control over assets. Three forces were contesting: the newcomers brought in by PG, the ousted Bakiyevs' entourage, and the aggrieved Southern elite, who had parted company with Bakiyev, but were sidelined by the new order. The latter group concentrated around the Ata-Jurt party. Bakiyevs made several attempts to recapture power in April and May. In Osh a Bakiyevs-organised gang briefly succeeded in overtaking the administration in May. Criminal groups assisted the new authorities to stay in power.

In Jalalabad, the Bakiyevs' homeland, the PG was holding on by a thread when challenged by the ex-president's forces in May, who captured the province administration, ousted the governor and put their own people in charge. Bishkek resorted to asking the Uzbek leadership for help, as its own resources were inadequate. Batyrov indeed came out with his armed men on the side of the new government, which joined the Kyrgyz supporters of the PG in a joint assault on the province administration premises. A witness saw between 50 to 100 Uzbeks close to the Toktogul monument who had been loading their rifles and bearded middle-aged men in sports' clothes who had been shooting.¹³ Four Kyrgyz and two Uzbeks were killed and 72 were wounded in the disturbances.

Batyrov also used the opportunity to promote the Uzbek cause and present himself as indispensable. This increased vulnerability of the local Kyrgyz who interpreted the Uzbek

time, saying that persecution in reality was a means of extortion of bribes from wealthy Uzbeks, but Batyrov remained unreceptive. KIC AM and BF field research in Noukat, November 2010.

¹³ KIC IS interview, Osh, November 2010.

show of strength as a threat to the 'Kyrgyz statehood,' which had been weakened by the April events, Bakiyev's downfall and general sense of crisis.

They reacted with a display of force to what they saw as an Uzbek display of force, as they advanced on the symbolic target of the 'Uzbek' university, which they stormed. The PG advised Batyrov to lie low until trouble went away, but then chose to give him up. Under popular pressure, it issued an arrest warrant and imitated activities to apprehend him.

Uzbek politicians were not satisfied. They felt that PG encouraged Batyrov to come up with demands and led them on in a belief that it was possible to achieve gains. The UNCC leadership had been invited to join the Constitutional Council, to which they brought four proposals for inclusion into the new Constitution.¹⁴ Roza Otunbayeva and PG members received them several times for political discussions. Aired on TV, these meetings were seen as highly symbolic, as they reinforced a sense of rejection among the Kyrgyz. After the events in Jalalabad, they felt that they were dubbed as Bakiyevs' supporters, that the PG made the Uzbeks its power base in the South, regarding the Kyrgyz as disloyal and rebellious citizens.

The two communities were set on the course of collision, to which both Kyrgyz and Uzbek leaders were blind, lacking political maturity and breadth of perspective to foresee the dangers lying ahead.

3.2 Issues in Osh

Tensions that developed in Osh were less about political standoff between supporters and opponents of Bakiyevs as in Jalalabad and more about local issues. One issue was crime.¹⁵ Since April, Osh city police were concerned with an increase in Kyrgyz-Uzbeks fights. Such developments were unusual. They were registered as incidents of ordinary crime, but the police reported the rise of interethnic tensions to their superiors.¹⁶

¹⁴ There were four proposals, and the one, which was accepted, was to change a formulation in the Preamble so that the Constitution was adopted not in the name of 'Kyrgyz people' but 'people of Kyrgyzstan'.

¹⁵ Analytical material of Foundation for Tolerance International is used in this section and KIC own research in Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁶ KIC AM police interviews, Osh, 18 November 2011.

The reason for this increase was changes in the criminal underworld after April. The Bakiyevs regulated organised crime, drawing profits from it. After their demise the established relations underwent a coup. Crime structure in Osh comprised transregional drug traffickers, and 'blacks' and 'reds' who controlled ordinary crime. The 'blacks' were established crime bosses, typically with prison records. The 'reds' were criminals within security structures, who used their own servicemen, and maintained informal groups which they used both for crime, and law and order purposes. 'Blacks' and 'reds' controlled racket, smuggling and prostitution, and their 'brigades' were recruited from prison inmates, failed sportsmen and street gangs.

The most prominent 'black' group was that of Kamchybek Kolbayev, blacklisted by the US president in June 2011 among the most dangerous foreign criminals and used by the Bakiyevs to threaten and assassinate businessmen or journalists, whom they could not take on openly. After April, other groups challenged Kolbayev's supremacy. In May asset-grabbing and corporate raiding became rampant. The three criminal gangs which had been competing in Osh in April–June supervised looting during the June events.¹⁷

As many among the criminals were Kyrgyz and most businessmen were Uzbeks, racketeering had an ethnic dimension. Kyrgyz businessmen were less vulnerable as they could mobilise support from their clansmen. Wealthy Uzbek leaders were immune to street racketeering, but small and medium entrepreneurs suffered and felt that they could not rely on the predominantly Kyrgyz police. A fight at the railway in April over the import of used cars was a bitter lesson: while Kyrgyz racketeers were arrested and shown on TV,¹⁸ they were released in a couple of days.¹⁹ Corruption and racketeering was also associated with humiliation when the Uzbeks were made to feel that they were lucky to be tolerated at all.

Uzbeks saw the new situation not only as a threat, but as an opportunity to get rid of racketeers once and for all, but they had to fend for themselves. Territorial councils in Uzbek neighbourhoods established citizens' patrols. Older people watched over from *chaikhanas* (teahouse) in the daytime, and younger men took to the streets at night. The authorities

¹⁷ KIC investigation and other research uncovered no evidence that narcotraffickers were involved in the June events.

¹⁸ KIC AM interview with Kursan Asanov, Bishkek, November 2010.

¹⁹ KIC Birimdik interview, Russia.

initially sanctioned their operations, but after the Jalalabad events asked to halt them. By then it was too late, as escalating group fights were an almost daily occurrence.

Another contentious issue was the Osh Development Plan of urban rejuvenation, which resonated differently in the two communities. Osh includes *mahallas*: areas of traditional Central Asian habitat with fenced houses joining together, narrow streets and outdated sanitation systems. Plans to transform it into a modern urban space were elaborated in the Soviet era, but the collapse of the USSR brought them to a halt. Under Bakiyev the idea was revived by Bishkek at the Central Agency of Reconstruction, Investment and Innovation (TsARII) chaired by Maxim Bakiyev, the ex-president's son.

The plan envisaged trade rationalisation measures, prohibiting street trade and making traders use commercial space, get registered and taxed. They were intended to end practices of paying token taxes into the budget and making deals with officials instead. The measures were unpopular among Osh traders who were mostly Uzbeks. The mayor, a Kyrgyz, was assumed to benefit from the plan, as he owned such new commercial space. Thus, implementation of the plan cut into the city's ethnic map, as it ran into vested concerns that challenged interests of some and benefited the others. The Osh mayor with little awareness of complexities of old city life assumed that he could blunder through the interests and territories of Uzbek capitalists. But they were determined to stand their ground.

The plan also envisaged the creation of mixed neighbourhoods with modern apartment blocks. This challenged closed Uzbek habitats, where several family generations live under the same roof. The move from *mahallas* to apartment blocks was also breaking attachment to land around private houses, cherished by the Uzbek residents. The mayor, the main engine behind the plan, became in the eyes of the Uzbek community its chief villain.

Ethno-nationalism has always been a factor in Osh, but it migrated from the dark corners of private gossip into the forefront of mainstream urban life. Ordinary Kyrgyz rallied behind the mayor, whom they saw as their champion. Two processes came together among the Uzbeks: the political ambitions of the UNCC leadership, keen to build their careers, for which they politicised their community to get support; and the resurgence of ethnic pride in mainstream society, which arose among a populace fed up with encroachment on its in-

terests and way of life. Abuse was hurled constantly, but the Uzbeks felt that they were receiving more than a fair share, especially because many worked in the service sector. Both sides felt that their dignity was violated, and everybody was at the end of their tether.

3.3 Why Peacemaking Did Not Bring Peace

While grass-root communities were drifting apart, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek elites knew each other well. Bargaining between them was rampant. Wealthy Uzbek leaders could not conduct their business without patronage from the authorities and ties with the law enforcement, most of whom were Kyrgyz. The latter were progressively worried about deteriorating interethnic relations in Osh. Their fears only worsened after events in Jalalabad. Civil society activists were warning about alarming incidents.²⁰

Using established ties, Osh authorities turned to Uzbek leaders to resolve the situation. They maintain that they made significant – even unprecedented – efforts to meet the Uzbek community demands. The Osh province governor Sooronbai Jeenbekov acknowledged that Uzbeks were underrepresented in public administration and made senior appointments of Uzbeks into Osh province and district administrations. A three-month civil service training course was established, 70 per cent of those enrolled were Uzbeks, with the ambition to fast-track them into public jobs. The governor recommended to Bishkek to speed up Uzbek recruitment in law enforcement and tax inspection. In his view, these policies sat a train of addressing Uzbek grievances in motion. All they had to do was to exercise patience and work together towards their realisation.

Public outreach steps were taken. A Media Advisory council was established in Osh to oversee editorial policies on the interethnic matters. Awareness-raising seminars on the ‘culture of interethnic relations’ were held at schools and universities, and the Osh mayor sponsored a visual campaign of peace-promoting billboards. The governor and the mayor held meetings with the Uzbek UNCC leaders, but were not quite sure what was going on under the surface.

²⁰ For instance, Azimjan Askarov, 9 June 2011, [ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=6984), <http://www.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=6984>, date accessed 24 June 2011, or AM interview with Muradaly Uchkempirov, 7 June 2010, Jalalabad.

The police brought together sports clubs' leaders and groups of 'sportsmen' from both sides to impress on them the need to preserve order. Similar meetings were organised with representatives of the clergy, school headmasters and UNCC activists in Uzbek-majority areas. For example, on 3 May the mayor and police went to On-Adyr to meet the community, together with UNCC leadership. The discussion got heated, participants complained about lack of representation, the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism, boosted by PG actions, and local crime. The mayor promised that racketeers, who created problems in On-Adyr, would be punished. It was agreed to maintain unity, join ranks against criminals, establish people's patrols to control the streets at night, and to run passport and car checks.²¹

Civil activists, such as Birimdik, also geared into action. Birimdik was a grassroots youth movement in Osh, which united a core group of members from both sides and a large network of supporters in a joint effort to preserve peace in the city. The organisation had a volunteer base, which was maintained not by foreign grants but by membership fees. Birimdik was involved in police-community work, and had their own cross-ethnic teams to dispatch to hotspots to put down fires. The rapid response work was complemented by enlightenment work to learn about each other's culture. However, these initiatives were insufficient to counterbalance the trend. Disappointment was settling in at Birimdik.²²

In the aftermath of the conflict Kyrgyz power-holders reflected on their past efforts with dismay, concluding that the reason for lack of success was that the Uzbeks were not sincere, did not want peace, but sought to ignite conflict to break away from Kyrgyzstan. This is not the point. The problem was that peacemaking was in one place, while threats to peace were in another. The weight of the negative factors exceeded positive inputs, and balance tipped in favour of negativity, in spite of efforts to the contrary. The authorities' steps were not wrong, but they were insufficient in the circumstances. They were aimed at changing perceptions of reality and building relationships on that basis. However, they remained of manifesting nature and did not affect substance, as structural conditions were not altering.

²¹ Minutes of the meeting in Amir-Timur on 3 May 2010, submitted by the mayor's office to the KIC.

²² KIC Birimdik interview, Russia.

If people talk peace, but nothing changes in their lives in the areas which affect them, peace is unlikely to be achieved. In pre-conflict Osh making peace was in nobody's interests, as problems did not go away. None of the prominent crime bosses was arrested. The development plan was not explained to and accepted by the communities. Street harassment was getting worse. In such a situation 'making peace' in a sense of stopping voicing demands for the Uzbek side meant succumbing to pressure and acceptance of defeat. They felt they had to make a stand otherwise they would be swept over. A mood of defiance and anger rose among the community. Many were psychologically ready for a fight, reacting quickly to the outbreak of street brawls.

Then the UNCC politicians disappeared on the eve of the events on 8–9 June.²³ This was never convincingly explained by the Uzbek leaders and left the Kyrgyz with an impression that they must have known of developing trouble. It appears that in pursuit of the UNCC politicians' ambitions they unleashed social forces which they could no longer control, and this frightened the Kyrgyz. As clashes broke out, Kyrgyz authorities tried to contact the Uzbek leaders to pacify the crowds, but there was nobody left.

4. June Clashes

4.1 Osh

Violence flared up at several locations in Osh on the night of 10 June 2010: at Hotel Alay, Frunze market and in Oshsky district. This was not wholly unusual, as similar fights, albeit on a smaller scale, took place throughout the preceding period and a mechanism to mobilise men by mobile phones had been developed. The only difference was that the Uzbek crowd gathered at Hotel Alay much faster, was bigger because Uzbek *mahallas* were located nearby, and included some men outside Osh. Many Osh residents were caught by surprise with the outbreak of violence. It must be said that amidst atrocities, the best qualities in people were also evoked. Uzbek residents were saved by their Kyrgyz friends and neighbours, who at times risked their own lives, and vice versa.

²³ Batyrov was under a search warrant and was the only one with a real reason not to be in Kyrgyzstan. Karamat Abdullayeva left Osh on 8 June to a business trip to Istanbul via Tashkent. Rector of 'Uzbek University' Ozodbek Karamatov went to Bishkek on 9 June to participate in the meeting of Roza Otunbayeva with university rectors (scheduled for 15 June), and was there together with Azimjan Akbarov, a *Rodina* party leader. Mahammadrasul Abakjanov from Uzgen attended a wedding in Uzbekistan, to where he went on 9 June. Inomjan Abdurasulov, Jalalutdin Salakhutdinov and other UNCC activists were in Kistakuz meeting Kadyrjan Batyrov. Abdurrahman Abdullayev disappeared from Noukat before the night of 10-11 June.

The five points at which Uzbek and Kyrgyz crowds faced each other were not accidental. They were either the places where Kyrgyz- and Uzbek-majority quarters joined, or were the intersections of Uzbek neighbourhoods with the main roads, leading out of the city, through which groups of Kyrgyz moved in from the countryside.

The area where the violence started was at the Hotel Alay, at the intersection of the road towards Oshsky district leading to Kara-Suu region. Uzbek *mahallas* of Shahid-Tepe and Teshik-Tash are located there. Another was the area around Cosmonaut Square. The road towards Kara-Suu, which traverses through Kyrgyz villages *en route* and the road, which connects two concentrations of Uzbek *mahallas* – one at the railway station and the other around Retail Market (Jidailyk) – intersect there. Two railway crossings – one at the border of Oshsky district and the other separating the suburb of Nariman – serve as natural barriers to make it a self-contained zone.

The third was the Frunze market, hosting the intersection of Uzbek *mahallas* along Kalinin and Ferghanskaya streets, with a road leading out of town to the Kyrgyz-populated suburb of Zapadny, where Kyrgyz *nouveaux riches* live. The fourth was the borderline between Uzbek-majority neighbourhood of Cheremushki and Kyrgyz-populated Tuleiken, through which a South–West road goes to Noukat region and Batken province traversing through Kyrgyz-populated Japalak and Papan. The last was the area along the main road from the provincial hospital to the suburb of Fourkat. The road services two directions: Jalalabad, which goes to Kyrgyz regions of Kourshab and Kara-Kulja, and the Kyrgyz highlands of Alay and Chon-Alay.

The theatres of the most ferocious action throughout the night, involving fire fights, were Hotel Alay, Frunze market and Oshsky district, especially on the border with Nariman. These were the areas where Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents of Osh lived side by side, allowing to draw on neighbourhood support. By the morning action at Frunze market and Hotel Alay subsided. At Frunze, the Uzbeks barricaded the *mahallas* and the Kyrgyz could not penetrate through their defences, so they stayed near the market, burned and looted the shops. At the Hotel Alay, special troops dispersed the crowd and evacuated the students from the hostel. Tensions continued in Oshsky district near a landmark seven-storey block (*Semietajka*) where opposing Uzbek and Kyrgyz crowds came face to face.

The sides mobilised their kin throughout the night. Uzbeks drove around in cars in the Uzbek-majority areas, calling upon *mahallas* to prepare for resistance, used calls from mosques to alert to danger and were banging on pipes to wake up residents. The Kyrgyz relied more on mobile phones, because Kyrgyz-majority neighbourhoods are widely dispersed around the city, making it more dangerous to move across. For many Kyrgyz residents the events came unexpectedly, but they quickly geared into action because of rape rumours and mosque calls.

Both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were among the killed and wounded in the first hours. Kyrgyz were mostly severely beaten, some beaten to death, and Uzbeks more often were killed or wounded by firearms. Kyrgyz were moving in two directions: some were trying to leave the city, while others sought to get in to help their ethnic kin. Uzbek women and children began to leave for Uzbek villages close to the border with Uzbekistan at Suratash and VLKSM.

Actions of the authorities were chaotic. SOBR²⁴ were first sent to hotel Alay after midnight, after 3am they were moved to guard the bridge over Ak-Buura River near *Dom Byta*, thought to be of strategic significance, then brought to the central square, and then ordered to the *oblbolnitsya* (provincial hospital) to secure the road on Fourkat. They changed their location four times within a few hours, with unclear rationale. A Sentry Patrol Duty (PPS)²⁵ battalion was also sent to Hotel Alay, then to Oshsky district, and subsequently ordered to Aravan, where the authorities feared an Uzbek insurgency, and stayed there.

In the morning of 11 June Cheremushki and Fourkat emerged as the hotspots. This was because they were located on the way of rural Kyrgyz, entering the city from two directions. Those who entered the city from the southwest at Zapadny, split into two streams: one attacked Cheremushki and the other - Uzbek housing along Navoi Street. At the opposite end of the city rural Kyrgyz assembled at Fourkat roundabout, subsequently growing to 5,000. They seized their first firearms from Kara-Suu police, sent to secure the road. Both communities got scared of each other. The Kyrgyz felt trapped in the city blocked by the Uzbeks, who were trying to close the main roads to prevent the rural crowds from en-

²⁴ SOBR in Russian stands for 'специальный отряд быстрого реагирования', which is 'rapid reaction force squad.'

²⁵ PPS in Russian stands for патрульно-постовая служба.

tering. After the expanding Kyrgyz crowds blocked the two arteries into Osh and entered the city, the authorities lost control.

The police chose the path of least resistance. They did not receive orders to use lethal force. Some went home, put on civilian clothes and occupied themselves with the evacuation of their families. Some were instructed to guard the police stations, where they barricaded themselves in. Others tried to talk the crowds out of their destructive intentions. Some defended Uzbek *mahallas*, while others sided with Kyrgyz rioters to attack them. Police volunteers advanced from among the Kyrgyz who accompanied the police. Some members of the police and the army used the opportune moment for personal enrichment. Rich Uzbeks paid up to \$50,000 per family to be evacuated to safe areas, although in many cases Kyrgyz forces evacuated Uzbek civilians for free.

The Kyrgyz authorities made attempts to negotiate 'non-aggression pacts,' e.g. at Fourkat and at the square in front of *Semietajka*. This only worked at Nariman where the municipality head persuaded the Kyrgyz to halt the attack, threatening them with a combination of realistic (to blow up fuel tanks) and unrealistic (to mine the rice fields) repercussions. A high-level PG delegation tried to talk men at Fourkat into withdrawing, but they were too angry to listen, demanded weapons to deal with the Uzbeks, threw stones at the officials, broke their helicopter and came close to a physical assault. Disappointed with the authorities' refusal to give them arms, the crowds at Fourkat took the matter into their own hands and captured two armoured personnel carriers (APCs) sent from a Maili-Suu military base to Osh, together with weapons and ammunition. These vehicles were later used in attacks on Uzbek *mahallas*.

Outsider crowds grew larger and more assertive, conducting hit-and-run attacks on *mahallas* in Cheremushki, Fourkat and around Alisher Navoi Street. Burning of private houses began. Witnesses gave accounts of weapons being handed over before the attacks and of 'snipers' firing from Suleiman-Too Mountain and rooftops of high buildings. There were sightings of units of armed men wearing uniforms unknown in Kyrgyzstan who moved around using maps and asking for directions.

Attacks at Uzbek *mahallas* took place alongside one scenario. APCs were used to break through the barricades, and then rioters entered the *mahallas*, killing and chasing away

their defenders. The second echelon consisted of robbers; some had minivans and lorries at hand or apprehended cars of the Uzbeks, and middle-aged women supervised the looting. The third echelon was responsible for arson, which was conducted in organised fashion and involved the use of petrol sprayed from canisters or unfamiliar inflammable devices. Both random civilians and armed men, most likely from the criminal underworld, who acted as local leaders, participated in the attacks. These leaders inspired or put pressure on others to go forward when they were too scared or too tired to continue. The attacks subsided every so often, but then would recommence with fresh arrivals from the countryside. Late at night the attacks mostly stopped.

On 12 June a 200-strong Kyrgyz group accompanied by an APC advanced from Fourkat roundabout to On Adyr. The rioters only managed to put on fire the houses on the edge, as their APC tipped over in choppy terrain and fell into a ditch. Uzbeks put ferocious resistance, shot at advancing Kyrgyz and used armoured KAMAZ lorries to repel the attackers. About 80 Uzbeks and several Kyrgyz were killed. After the attackers retreated, the Uzbeks got the APC out of the ditch and handed over to the authorities as a part of negotiated settlement.

The attacks of 12 June were better organised and demonstrated some planning, unlike the previous day, when the attackers were driven by strong emotions. Groups of rural Kyrgyz, reinforced by new arrivals, moved deeper into Uzbek residential areas of Kyzyl-Kyshtak, along Kalinin Street, into Teshik-Tash along Lenin Street and into Shahid-Tepe. In early morning an attack on Majrimtal, a historical residential area in the centre of Osh, started. These attacks also demonstrated more public atrocities, such as burnings of wounded and dead, and sexual violence: one woman in Majrimtal was forced to run naked around the *mahalla*. Profit-making emerged: pay was demanded from Uzbeks to spare their lives or houses. Some managed to buy their lives out, but in other cases inability to bring enough money led to killings. The pattern of burnings confirms that often houses of rich people were spared from arson, while the neighbouring houses around were burnt.

The character of Uzbek defences also changed, becoming more conscious. The Uzbeks did not try to move around the city, but concentrated on defence of their *mahallas* and mounted a few successful counterattacks. The epicentre of violence moved to *mahallas* along Navoi Street. However, the fervour was diminishing, and the attackers were scared

to move deep inside traditional Uzbek settlement, where houses join in, for fear of being trapped. Only houses facing the street were burnt.

During the night of 12 June rumours of a retaliation attack by fighters approaching from Uzbekistan caused panic among the Kyrgyz. People with loudspeakers drove around Kyrgyz neighbourhoods, calling to evacuate. The rumours were confirmed by the authorities, which believed them. At 3am on 13 June a massive exodus of Kyrgyz from Osh followed. These rumours were not heard in Uzbek *mahallas*. As Kyrgyz began to retreat, Uzbek apprehended hostages – those Kyrgyz attackers who did not manage to escape quickly enough from the *mahallas* and those who lived in Uzbek neighbourhoods or rented rooms from Uzbeks. They were used to trade for their missing relatives. Some hostages were abused, and there were cases of sexual assaults.

On 13 June some rioters were still in the city and sporadic, ferocious attacks took place in Uzbek quarters which were spared by the previous rounds of assault. This was the case in Shahid-Tepe, where houses untouched by raids remained. Rural Kyrgyz, retreating from the city, stopped *en route* at Fourkat and On Adyr for the final round of looting and arson. By the end of the day clashes were largely over and the authorities started to get the city under control. The role of the army in pacifying the situation grew more prominent, although their actions were often biased against Uzbeks. Attempts at negotiations resumed at different locations, such as exchanges of dead bodies and hostages.

The district police chief of Kara-Suu and his driver were murdered at Nariman centre, where the officer came to negotiate a truce. His body was burnt and his driver was beheaded. The reasons for the double murder are unclear. The most plausible explanation was that drug traffickers were behind it. The police chief was famous for his struggle against narcomafia, while Nariman has a reputation for trafficking drugs. The murders reinforced anti-Uzbek sentiment, including among the security structures.

On 14 June episodes of violence were on a minor scale and involved mostly city residents. Some *mahallas* remained barricaded for another few days, such as Shahid-Tepe and Nariman. Incidents of killings, looting and revenge attacks occurred over the next few days.

4.1.1 Role of Religion

It was often implied in the aftermath of the conflict that religious radicals had a hand in the interethnic violence and masterminded it from behind the scenes. Field investigation did not confirm this; on the contrary, it was found that religion was a relatively weak factor unable to overcome ethnic barriers in the time of crisis.

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are both Sunni Muslims. Communities have no significant differences in cult, but customs and family rituals are different. Many mosques in Osh had a monoethnic congregation and few were mixed because of existence of separate neighbourhoods.²⁶

During the clashes, the imams were well meaning if not always effective in their peace efforts. Most were caught by surprise.²⁷ Uzbek and Kyrgyz clergy acted in the same way as other *aksakals* in their communities. The imam of Kyzyl-Kyshtak mosque, Abdukadyrov, recalled that they called community members to keep calm. He allocated two Uzbek men to protect the Kyrgyz residents in their Uzbek-majority neighbourhood. 'So, my consciousness is clear before Allah and before people'.

On 11 June imams tried to conduct peace talks, but they either had to run for their lives from angry crowds or a few were killed. An Uzbek imam of Fourkat mosque was approached by a Kyrgyz crowd led by a Kyrgyz imam. The two imams tried to negotiate, but could not overcome their ethnic grievances. Talks failed and the crowd grew angrier. The Uzbek imam ran to his mosque, the crowd chased him inside and pointed a gun. He managed to escape and witnessed shooting and burning. Fire spread and the mosque caught fire. The rioters were too angry or agitated to put it out. The mosque has since been repaired and functions, but people are afraid to attend.²⁸

²⁶ There are 53 mosques in Osh, and ten have Kyrgyz imams. The Uzbeks are more diligent in performing the rites, but the attachment to Islam is growing among the Kyrgyz. Languages were used depending on an area's majority congregation. Kyrgyz imams in Uzbek-majority mosques (Fourkat) often pronounced *davat* in Uzbek. As the city was growing intermixed, so were the mosques. Religious activities are loosely controlled by the state and laws are fairly liberal. Several Uzbek imams, such as Bilal mosque imam Mahamadjan Akhmedov, took part in political activities of the Rodina party. They were motivated by a desire for political participation typical for prominent community members – some of whom were imams– rather than because of their religious background.

²⁷ KIC interview with the imam of the central mosque in Kyzyl-Kyshtak Abdurakhman Abdukadyrov.

²⁸ KIC BF interview, Osh, December 2010.

In another mosque near the Fourkat roundabout Kyrgyz imams came to talk to Uzbek imams on 11 June. They held a Koran and requested a safe passage into the city for the Kyrgyz to collect their children. As they were talking, a Kyrgyz car was detained by a group of Uzbeks, who discovered a machinegun and ammunition in the boot and beat the driver. Having seen that, the Kyrgyz imams turned back and shortly the Kyrgyz crowd advanced on Fourkat.²⁹ The *muezzin* in Fourkat was killed on 13 June near his mosque. When the situation calmed down on 14 June, peace efforts were resumed. Imams also saved people, using mosques and madrassas as safe havens. A Kyrgyz imam and his men rescued two detained Uzbek women in *Zapadny microrayon*, taking them into the mosque. They resisted the rioters' attempts to get at the Uzbek women. On 13 June they were exchanged for a group of Kyrgyz hostages.³⁰

4.1.2 Rural Mobilisation

The conflict was not only confined to Osh and Jalalabad cities, but encompassed vast areas of the South which sent people to the cities or balanced on the brink of violence themselves. The role of Kyrgyz who came from the countryside, was crucial in overpowering the Uzbeks, violence and destruction. They were united in a shared sentiment, irrespective of age or status. They came from monoethnic highland Chon-Alay, Alay and Kara-Kulja, and low-lying multiethnic districts of Noukat, Uzgen and Kara-Suu (Mady and Japalak). They explained their motivation by a concern over their relatives – mostly student children – trapped in Osh. They received calls and text messages that 'Uzbeks are killing us and rape our women,' 'there is not a single Kyrgyz left in Osh', which provoked an emotional resonance. Seven bodies of those killed in Osh were taken to their villages in early hours of 11 June and triggered anger.³¹

A witness from Alay³² on business in Osh saw how in Cosmonaut Square Uzbeks were attacking Kyrgyz passersby, stopping cars and beating passengers. He called Alay to raise

²⁹ KIC BF interview, Osh, October 2010.

³⁰ KIC BF interview, Osh, October 2010.

³¹ 'Chronology of June events,' Osh oblast police, information submitted to KIC, November 2010.

³² Mono-ethnic Kyrgyz, population 72,000, 13,000 of whom live in Gulcha, the district's centre.

alarm.³³ By 6am some Alay men left for Osh, others armed with sticks and iron bars tried to figure out how to get there. Mobile phones played some role, but as coverage is limited outside of Gulcha, the centre, other means must have been employed. The Alay *akim* found out about riots only when he came to work in the morning. By this time many men were already on their way to Osh. The Alay chief medical officer had mobilised his emergency units to prepare for casualties.

The men seized weapons from the Alay borderguards, detained 50 KAMAZ lorries *en route* from China to Uzbekistan, beat up their Uzbek drivers and used the lorries to travel to Osh. The military did not attempt to block the mountain pass and a police attempt to put a checkpoint at the exit from the centre proved futile.³⁴ Gulcha hospital admitted 54 casualties, not all from Alay, with gunshot wounds from hunting rifles in the afternoon of 11 June. On 12 June there were fewer casualties, but with worse wounds from military-style weapons. Women organised to deliver food and supplies to men fighting in Osh, collecting money the night before.³⁵ On 13 June most men returned. 62 were wounded and 12 killed from Alay.³⁶

The authorities were concerned with the effects of rural mobilisation on mixed areas and found a solution in diverting the problem of angry Kyrgyz to Osh, rather than keeping them in the vicinity of Uzbek settlements.

Kara-Kulja is the homeland of the Osh governor. He was anxious to prevent Kyrgyz passage through Uzgen, through which they would have to pass to get to Osh. Intermixed Uzgen was the scene of the worst violence in 1990. The governor instructed the police to set three checkpoints on the highway and asked his influential relatives to contain the advance. On 11 June a crowd demanded transport to go to Osh, but was persuaded to disperse. Still, the authorities shared the sentiments of their kinsmen and only a sense of public duty prevented them from succumbing to their demands. During the day the *akim*,

³³ KIC IS interview Alai district, November 2010.

³⁴ According to the authorities (KIC, AM interview with the Alay *akim*, November 2010); but young men who went to Osh said that they saw only one elderly policeman calling upon them to stay at home (KIC IS interview with young men in Alay, November 2010).

³⁵ KIC AM interview in Alay with one of these women, November 2010.

³⁶ According to Alay district authorities, KIC IS and AM interview, November 2010.

the local council chair and the chief medical officer all went to Osh evacuating their children.

The authorities halted mobilisation for a day by persuasion, involving local dignitaries and women's groups.³⁷ Still, men were milling around on the highway at Mirzaky and some got through checkpoints to Osh.³⁸ Uzgen district authorities instructed their Uzbek population to sit tight, close their *mahallas* and not venture into the streets. On 12 June the news of the casualties among the Kyrgyz spread and that Kyrgyz were trapped inside. Kara-Kulja men advanced *en masse*, went peacefully through Uzgen to Osh and returned with their loot on 13 June. A car convoy without number plates was led by a traffic police inspector, whose task seemed to prevent them from stopping in Uzgen.³⁹ 11 were killed, 11 wounded and one person went missing from Kara-Kulja.⁴⁰

In Noukat⁴¹ a witness saw cars carrying armed Kyrgyz civilians towards Osh between 1 and 2am on 11 June. They shouted anti-Uzbek slogans. He tried to alert the authorities to bloc their passage, but in vain. The Noukat police attempted to stop a Kyrgyz crowd at Kyzyl-Teit checkpoint at the border with Batken province, but the numbers were excessive. While an Uzbek administrator urged to set up a barrier at the Osh exit road to stop the Noukat Kyrgyz, the district authorities felt they could not do it.⁴²

Both Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities asked for help to rescue their children, and did not get any. The Uzbeks advanced towards Osh to help their kin, but could not get through the Kyrgyz area of Japalak, where Kyrgyz crowds blocked their way. The Uzbeks returned to Noukat. As more Kyrgyz were moving through Noukat, the Uzbeks felt threatened, set up defences, dug up roads, put out live electricity cables and built barricades at the *mahallas*.

³⁷ KIC IS interviews, 29 November, Kara-Kulja.

³⁸ Kurmanbek Osmonov, an Ata-Jurt MP, arrived into his Kara-Kulja in the morning of 11 June from Bishkek to discover that many men already left for Osh and that the place was fairly empty. KIC AM interview with Osmonov, Bishkek, November 2010.

³⁹ KIC AM interview with a witness from Uzgen, December 2010, Osh.

⁴⁰ According to Kara-Kulja district authorities, KIC IS interview, November 2010.

⁴¹ Mixed district bordering on Batken oblast: the district centre is 70 per cent Uzbeks and 30 per cent Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz dominate in the countryside.

⁴² KIC AM interview with the village head, identity is anonymous.

The authorities concentrated on preserving peace in Noukat itself. The *akim* established a crisis management group, bringing together dignitaries, elders and civil society actors from both communities. Eight mixed Uzbek/Kyrgyz mediation teams were set up and sent around to prevent tensions. Two *Rodina* Uzbek leaders took part, but Abdurrakhman Abdullayev, another *Rodina* associate, vanished. *Akim* ordered the 'Afghans'⁴³ to maintain order. Later, the residents feared that Alay men would come to rob them when they finish at Osh. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks were erecting barricades together to protect Noukat against the Alay men.

Tensions heightened on 13 June when Kyrgyz were returning from Osh with their loot. Their movements were supervised by traffic police inspectors who did not let them enter mixed areas and directed them towards their villages. Still, several violent incidents happened, and some 3,000 Uzbeks fled towards Ferghana (Uzbekistan) via Kyzyl-Kiya. The displaced Uzbeks stayed at the border for two days.

Kara-Suu, a district surrounding Osh city, sustained most casualties: 107 dead, 224 wounded and 16 missing. The Uzbeks live in Kara-Suu town and rural areas are mixed. The authorities were keen to prevent violence in Kara-Suu town, mostly populated by Uzbeks. Kyrgyz crowds from nearby suburbs, e.g. Mady, were the first to enter Osh. The *akim* instructed the police to establish checkpoints on the main roads. They were effective in keeping the Uzbeks locked in their areas, but not in stopping the Kyrgyz advance.

The danger of violence was the most acute in Aravan.⁴⁴ A rally broke out after Friday prayers on 11 June, when Uzbek men were leaving the mosque as more news about violence in Osh was reaching Aravan. The imam spoke, but to no effect, as men grew angrier, and an Uzbek deputy *akim* Tursunbai Alimov and the police chief also failed to pacify the crowd. Uzbek *aksakals* asked the *akim* to evacuate Uzbek children from Papan, trapped inside the town by two Kyrgyz crowds. *Akim* pleaded Osh and Bishkek for reinforcements.

⁴³ 'Afghans' is a nickname for the members of the Union of Veterans of the War in Afghanistan.

⁴⁴ Population 110,000, of which 64,000 are Uzbeks, making up 58 per cent of district's population, with the concentration of Uzbeks in the centre, while the Kyrgyz live in surrounding villages.

Uzbek men closed the main square and stopped cars. The situation got out of hand when an Uzbek woman broke into hysteria in the square. The crowd moved, about 300 Uzbeks tried to enter the administration building, others chased the Kyrgyz policemen, trying to seize their weapons, some stormed the national security committee's office, others beat and looted Kyrgyz-owned shops. On hearing about the disorder, a 3,000-strong Kyrgyz crowd advanced from villages towards the centre, blocking the road to Osh. Uzbeks were preparing to blow up two bridges over Southern Ferghansky canal on approaches to Aravan to protect their areas, but the elders talked them out of it. Those who had wanted to go to Osh now realised that this was impossible, as the Kyrgyz crowd stood in front. The Kyrgyz set up a checkpoint at Gulbar, manned by armed rural civilians. Another 5,000-strong Kyrgyz crowd assembled in the opposite direction at Mangyt and stood in hesitation: if the Uzbek would set fire to Kyrgyz homes, they would enter, if not, they would wait. They were persuaded to stay put.

The Uzbeks attacked the police station to seize guns, using petrol bombs, stones, sticks and wooden clubs. They were led by a certain Nadyrov, who wanted to free his detained brother. The police resisted and shot the attackers in the feet. The Uzbeks tried to break through the gates using a fire brigade vehicle, but police shot at the tyres. There were eight wounded among the attackers and 11 police injured. The standoff was resolved by freeing the suspect, but police kept their weapons. A PPS battalion with an APC arrived and rescued the police. The Kyrgyz tried and failed to seize weapons at Naiman (Tumuy-iun–Ak-Shor border guard post). Uzbek women, children and old people tried to flee to Uzbekistan, but were not admitted.

Tensions calmed down when ousted Bakiyev's officials set up a crisis management team, organised evacuation from Osh and took steps to reconcile the communities. A contingent of Batken tax inspectorate arrived to maintain order. Still, on 13 June a village police post in Tepe-Kurgan was burnt down and the Uzbeks were implicated. The Uzbek community was made to repair the police premises, in exchange, as they understood, for lighter sentences for their kin. They were disappointed when the accused received between nine and 11 years in jail.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ KIC AM interview in Aravan, November 2010.

Batken province⁴⁶ witnessed minor incidents of anti-Uzbek violence. About 1,500 young Kyrgyz approached the Batken administration demanding transport to go to help Osh Kyrgyz. The *akim* refused. Then eight men, allegedly criminals from Jalalabad appeared; one of them assaulted the *akim* and tried to provoke a conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Police were too intimidated to apprehend them. The Kyrgyz youth got angry, shouted and abused the governor who tried to talk them down: 'You are a Kyrgyz, why don't you want to help your own people!' The governor refused, but finally told them, 'do what you want, I don't care,' and left. When they got to Osh, about 20 Batken men burnt Uzbek houses near the *Ob/GAI*. As violence ended, they called the administration and asked to be brought back home. They were put on a bus with other evacuees. Two Uzbek male students from Leilek district were stabbed to death in Osh.⁴⁷

4.2 Jalalabad

Rumours of Osh violence reached Jalalabad on 11 June. Known criminals from Jalalabad left for Osh, while Kyrgyz from the North (Bishkek and Talas) embarked on the road to help their ethnic kin in the South. Some were armed and others apprehended weapons *en route*. They travelled via the Bishkek–Osh highway, clashing with Uzbeks in Jalalabad province in places where they tried to bloc their passage. Tensions flared up in mixed rural areas of Kerben and Ala-Buka, and in Tash-Kumyr.

On 12 June Kyrgyz men assembled at the hippodrome and waited until afternoon. They did not see any representatives of the authorities or police. Then Kamchybek Tashiev, an opposition politician at the time, addressed those gathered, stating that he had negotiated peace with the Uzbeks and the men should go home. The crowd did not want to listen, as bodies of dead Kyrgyz killed by the Uzbeks were carried past them for burials. Women shouted at them to 'go and save Jalalabad.' The men grew agitated, and finally attacked Uzbek *mahallas* along Pushkin Street in the afternoon.

As they advanced, they were shot at from locations at the mosque, lyceum and the city hospital. Uzbeks fired hunting rifles, hiding behind KAMAZ lorries used to block the roads.

⁴⁶ Mixed, used to be part of Osh province.

⁴⁷ The account is based on KIC BF visit to Batken on 7–8 December 2010.

Some Kyrgyz were wounded and taken to the hospital in Oktyabrskoe. The Kyrgyz armed with sticks, retreated, but returned with firearms and shot back at the Uzbeks.⁴⁸ The Kyrgyz crowd grew, although it lost several wounded and dead, and the Uzbeks started to retreat. Uzbek-owned shops were burned because of anger that the Uzbeks shot and the Kyrgyz could not respond, but now they at least could destroy their properties. Kyrgyz explained that if the Uzbeks did not shoot at them first, violence would not happen in Jalalabad. In one Uzbek neighbourhood – Ivashin Street at *Sputnik* district – Uzbek elders told the Kyrgyz that they did not support Batyrov and that they were Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks. This neighbourhood was spared from the attack.⁴⁹

On 12 June a Kyrgyz crowd, which had apprehended an APC, attacked Uzbek neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the ‘Uzbek’ University which was on fire. Uzbek rioters burned the customs and police premises, and Kyrgyz-owned businesses. Jalalabad Tele-Radio Company was put on fire. Targeted arson attacks against Uzbek-owned businesses and looting took place, but many Uzbeks who had heard about events in Osh, had already fled.

On 13 June the Uzbeks could not longer contain the Kyrgyz advance. Crowds moved in from two directions. The one equipped with an APC, moving along Pushkin Street, attacked Uzbek neighbourhood of Tash Bulak/Hodja *mahalla*. Uzbek armed groups operated throughout the city, clashing with the Kyrgyz. A crowd of rural Kyrgyz men besieged the police headquarters and the administration, demanding weapons and threatening to overpower the authorities. A tense standoff ensued, but the shots fired by the troops over the rioters’ heads created a sobering impact.⁵⁰ This opened the way for negotiations between informal leaders and the authorities, after which the Kyrgyz men agreed to disperse. Some did indeed go away, while others engaged in wanton destruction and looting. Sporadic fighting between Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups continued at several city locations on 14 June.

The Sanpa episode contributed to escalation. Fire was opened from passing cars at the Uzbek settlement of Suzac *en route* to Osh and six Uzbeks were killed. Ethnic Uzbek security personnel urged the section of the road to be closed and traffic re-routed because

⁴⁸ KIC IS interview with a resident of Oktyabrskoye village, December 2010.

⁴⁹ KIC IS interview with three participants in violence in Jalalabad, December 2010.

⁵⁰ KIC AM interview with Kubatbek Baibolov, ex-commandant of Jalalabad, Bishkek, November 2010.

the Uzbeks were going to respond by force, but this suggestion was ignored.⁵¹ The Uzbeks armed, spilt oil on the road going uphill at Sanpa to make passing cars slow down, and shot and beat Kyrgyz passengers. Shots fired from a minivan without number plates from above the Sanpa barricade killed two Uzbeks. Uzbeks barricaded their village and dug trenches around the police HQ to keep the Kyrgyz police locked in. On 14 June a Kyrgyz mob tried to attack Suzac using the seized APC. The stand-off was resolved by mediation. It was agreed that the Kyrgyz stop attacking Suzac and hand over the APC and weapons to the police, and Uzbeks apologised in presence of the media for Kadyrjan Batyrov and committed to detain him themselves.⁵²

Another flashpoint was Bazar-Korgan where Uzbeks established a roadblock at the bridge to prevent outsider Kyrgyz to join fighting in the South. Police attempts to unblock it resulted in death of one policeman. Intercommunal tensions flared up, and shootings, killings and arson attacks followed.⁵³ Uzbek women and children fled to the border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, to villages in the mountains. Violence in Jalalabad province subsided on 15 June.

4.2.1 Rural Mobilisation

Mobilisation in Jalalabad province occurred from the mountainous part of Suzac district, and the villages of Oktyabrskoe, Taran-Bazar, Kyzyl-Ty, Kara-Alma, Kurmanbek ayil, Kogart ayil, Kok Jangak, Bagit ayil, Tatgorai and Barpy. On 12 June Kamchybek Tashiev visited several villages to persuade Kyrgyz to stay at home, but in vain. They had been more affected by the May events in Jalalabad and it was easier for them to place the June Osh clashes into the context, which they already had in their minds. They explained their advance to Jalalabad by patriotism and a commitment to defend Kyrgyz statehood, threatened by Uzbek separatism, rather than by concern over relatives as in Osh. They heard rumours that 'Osh has fallen to Uzbeks, as you sit around,' so they felt that their national pride was at stake and they had to protect it. Women approached other women whose

⁵¹ KIC AM interview with an ethnic Uzbek security official, Bishkek, December 2010.

⁵² KIC AM Azimbek Beknazarov interview, Bishkek, November 2010.

⁵³ AM interview with Janna Saralayeva, Bazar-Korgan, June 2010.

husbands did not want to go.⁵⁴ Those who refused to go were treated as outcasts in the aftermath. They were regularly beaten by 'heroes' when the latter got drunk.⁵⁵

In Suzac Kyrgyz youth felt residual anger after the May events when they 'did not finish the job.' They had retreated, pushed by special troops after they attacked the 'Uzbek University,' got under heavy rain, and came home angry, promising to get even. Still, the Uzbek co-villagers were protected from outsider Kyrgyz, because they were members of the same community. Rumours that fighters were advancing from Uzbekistan prompted Kyrgyz women and children to flee to faraway villages. In the aftermath parents of young Kyrgyz killed in Jalalabad, afraid of an investigation, did not declare the deaths. One family received 100,000 soms as compensation from Kyrgyz sponsors in Russia for their 'killed in action' son.⁵⁶

In Taran-Bazar men were mobilised by phone messages saying that the Uzbeks had seized the town, and raped and burnt Kyrgyz alive. They did not trust security structures to restore order because they had failed to reign in Batyrov in May. On 12 June they assembled at the municipal administration building in Taran-Bazar, while district authorities tried to persuade them to disperse. When the news about the Sanpa shootings came, men stopped listening and rushed to the city 'still without weapons.'⁵⁷ They stopped cars on the highway to take them to Jalalabad and saw similar cars with men from other regions.

At night of 12 June the Kyrgyz went home. In Oktyabskoye, they returned late, bruised and battered. Many were drunk and abused other residents. They did not try to conceal their loot from neighbours. Kyrgyz guarded the Uzbeks in their village from attacks of outsiders, for which they had to pay to provide for the Kyrgyz who went to the city. Russians also paid, but less.⁵⁸ The men returned to Jalalabad on 13 June and were preparing to attack

⁵⁴ KIC interview with Muradaly Uchkempirov, Jalalabad, December 2010.

⁵⁵ KIC IS interview with a village head, Jalalabad, December 2010.

⁵⁶ KIC IS interview with a village head, Jalalabad, December 2010

⁵⁷ KIC IS interview with a Taran-Bazar resident, Taran-Bazar, December 2010.

⁵⁸ KIC IS interview with an Oktyabskoye female resident, Oktyabskoe, December 2010

Suzac Uzbeks. However, Kamchybek Tashiev persuaded them to disperse as peace with the Uzbeks was made. He was trusted because he was a 'man of the people'.⁵⁹

5. Perspectives on the Conflict

Conflicting narratives form part of a conflict reality, as they influence hearts and minds, and also help people to process the conflict. The Kyrgyz popular narrative of this conflict is that the Uzbeks started it and were heavily armed (for a well-articulated narrative see Osh mayor Myrzakhmatov's book, 2011). This narrative derives from the argument used by representatives of the city, municipal and district authorities and former administrators of the Bakiyev era to stop fellow Kyrgyz from advancing onto the cities that 'Uzbeks are armed. You can get killed if you go with sticks against machineguns'. They did not say that 'Uzbeks are not the enemy,' as they did not think it would work. Thus, the notion that 'Uzbeks were armed to the teeth and our lads took them on with sticks' became part of Kyrgyz heroisation. It is denied that the Kyrgyz were armed as well. The Uzbek narrative does not mention that their side also had guns.

Both sides believe that the violence was premeditated and the others were organising for it. People 'recall' signs, which they did not pay attention to at the time: 'they' were closing businesses or leaving Osh because 'they' knew something in advance.⁶⁰ The Kyrgyz supposed that Uzbeks collected a levy for the 'war chest' to buy weapons. The Uzbeks thought that public sector workers in Kyrgyz areas paid a toll to finance transport to carry rioters to Osh.

The reason for the conflict, according to the Kyrgyz narrative, was that the Uzbeks wanted autonomy and sought to join Uzbekistan. They expected Uzbekistan to intervene on their side. For that, they wrote SOS signs on the roads and rooftops, which would be visible from the air, using white paint procured in advance.

The Uzbek narrative attached significance to visits of census workers and electricity meter checks as evidence of information gathering. Interruption of gas supplies in the city was part of the plot. The official explanation is that gas supply was cut off on 11 June by the

⁵⁹ KIC IS interviews in Taran-Bazar, December 2010.

⁶⁰ This was a common theme in many KIC Russia interviews.

authorities in order to prevent the spread of fires. Burnings, they claimed, were organised by the city authorities to clear way for the Osh development plan and get rid of traditional Uzbek housing. Likewise, it was said that Kyrgyz men were affected by a drug mixed in a drink, which made them hyperactive and super strong. The drink also made them thirsty and sick. Afterwards they could not remember what happened. This is not true - the rural men who went to Osh, did not suffer a memory loss and some had an opposite problem of being unable to forget what they saw.⁶¹

Official casualty figures are perceived to be diminished. Accounts of secret burials or removal of corpses by the security agents proliferate among the Uzbeks. Kyrgyz believe that more rural men died than claimed, because their families feared investigation into their actions. More Kyrgyz young women were perceived to be raped, murdered and buried undeclared because of a so-called 'shame culture.'

The official narrative reflects some features of the popular Kyrgyz. Three domestic commissions issued their reports on the June clashes. The first by Ombudsmen Tursunbek Akun attributed the blame solely onto Uzbek leaders. The National Commission set up by the president qualified the events as 'interethnic conflict,' admitted that the Uzbeks were underrepresented, concluded that violence was organised in advance, and that several Uzbek leaders, Bakiyevs' clan and foreign *jihadis* were responsible. The Parliamentary Commission was established as an opposition move against the former PG politicians. Its conclusions called for prosecution of the senior civilian and security office-holders who dealt with the crisis, apart from Osh mayor. *Osh Initiative*, an Uzbek exile group, presents an Uzbek perspective on the events in its report, claiming at least 1,000 Uzbeks dead (Osh Initiative, 2011).

The international Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) chaired by Kimmo Kiljunen, the Finnish parliamentarian and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly Representative for Central Asia at the time and mandated by Kyrgyzstan's president, qualified the state actions as crimes against humanity (KIC, 2011). The government accepted certain criticism, but rejected the overall assessment. The par-

⁶¹ KIC interview with Dilbarkhan Mamadjusupova, Osh, November 2010, and KIC interviews with rural youth respondents in Alay district, November 2010.

liament refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Commission and of the conclusions of the report (Jogorku Kenesh statement, 2011).

The inquiries did not bridge the gap between the groups. The Kyrgyz community is afraid that the Uzbeks might strike back in revenge, that they harbour separatist intentions and are determined to establish autonomy. They are apprehensive that next time Tashkent may intervene directly. The Kyrgyz are aggrieved that the suffering of their community went unnoticed and efforts of the Kyrgyz to save Uzbeks were unappreciated. In their view, the Uzbeks started violence while the Kyrgyz retaliated, but in the eyes of the world the Uzbeks became victims and Kyrgyz were depicted as savages.

In the aftermath of the clashes Uzbeks have disproportionately been targeted for prosecution, have been denied access to justice, and Uzbek defendants and their families and lawyers have been verbally and physically attacked in court rooms, and judges have been pressured (KIC, 2011, Amnesty International, 2011, Human Rights Watch, 2011, International Federation for Human Rights, 2010, UN OHCHR, 2012). The Uzbeks feel vulnerable vis-à-vis the security structures and fear asset raiding and harassment by Kyrgyz community members. They feel that they would be left defenceless in an event of further disturbances, as they do not trust the state to protect them. Many among the entrepreneurial Uzbek strata left for Russia. The remaining community realises that it is not the time to pursue demands, but to be humble. Interethnic peace remains fragile.

Understanding of how to forge shared identity remains deficient. The Osh mayor articulated a simple surface solution: ethnic divisions should be abolished and designations 'Kyrgyz' or 'Uzbek' should not be used. All are equal citizens of Osh and should have a shared identity as city residents rather than guard their community corners.⁶² This is easier said than done, as the June clashes emphasised ethnic divisions. People would continue to think along ethnic lines, even if they are banned from using these terms in public. The challenge is not to abolish ethnicity, but to understand how it can work in a positive sense.

Kyrgyzstan has become a more monoethnic society in the last 20 years. Enterprising and educated people from minorities leave. The existing alienation between communities is the

⁶² KIC AM interview with Melis Myrzakhmatov, Osh, November 2010.

result of the weakening of interethnic relations, which cannot be preserved without special measures by the state. As long as the ethnocratic model of statehood is continued to be pursued, tensions with minorities will be re-created. The country needs to re-define the vision for the state, into which minorities fit. It is important for both communities to have a space for a shared responsibility for non-repetition of such hostilities in the future. If the communities would only consider the 'other' responsible, a mutual space for joint responsibility for the future narrows down.

6. Conclusion

The 2010 events changed the situation in the South of Kyrgyzstan in several respects. Firstly, as a result of the conflict ethnic identity of the two main communities – Kyrgyz and Uzbek – significantly strengthened, becoming the predominant marker, and determining how one regards 'self' and the often-hostile 'alien'. Other affiliations, e.g. professional or neighbourhood, became subordinate to ethnic belonging. This explains, for instance, the drive away by Osh and Jalalabad city residents from mixed neighbourhoods, which did not suffer directly during the clashes, and the desire to move to monoethnic settlements.

Secondly, a resolution of the conflict which would have brought it to an end and allowed a post-conflict settlement to go forward, has not taken place. Instead, the latent conflict continues. The Uzbek side suffers from harassment and prosecution, and its demand for justice is not satisfied. The Kyrgyz side experiences apprehension that the Uzbeks might strike back in revenge. In such a scenario, which is not implausible, this would not be a spontaneous street revolt, but a well-organised action supported from abroad. In these conditions reconciliation remains more talk than reality, and collective insecurities persist in the public mind.

Thirdly, an ideology of Kyrgyz nationalism received a boost from the political level, being actively promoted by the authorities, who prior to the conflict had pursued at least a semblance of multiethnic stance. Previously marginal 'Kyrgyz first' discourse moved into the mainstream, while proponents of equal rights for minorities barely dare to raise their voices (ICG, 2012). Looking ahead, the process unleashed by the June 2010 clashes is likely to change Kyrgyzstan into a different society, moving away from an open civil character, which appeared to have been its distinct feature at the time of independence.

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