

URBAN TRANSFORMATION, CONFLICT AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN OSH,
KYRGYZSTAN: FROM SOCIALIST LEGACY TO TERRITORIALIZATIONS OF HISTORY
AND MEMORY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Urban Transformation, Conflict And Everyday Life in Osh, Kyrgyzstan: From Socialist Legacy
to Territorializations of History and Memory

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Jennifer Fluri

This dissertation is an investigation of urban transformations in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. It argues that the complex processes through which place and identity have been mutually constituted and contested in Osh over the last 150 years have been erased from narratives of “ethnic conflict” produced by contemporary peace-building and conflict prevention initiatives. The dissertation reclaims a broader understanding of the ways that place and identity intersect, one that is rooted in historical context and in the ways that these processes are lived, enacted and understood by city residents today. It begins by discussing the limits to conducting research on ethnicity and conflict in Osh through an examination of the Kyrgyzstani surveillance state and its impacts on the research process. It then examines peace-building and conflict prevention projects in Osh and the Fergana Valley, arguing that international humanitarian and peace-building initiatives have largely ignored the politics of space in Osh, focusing instead on a flattening of

identities and a rewriting of historical narrative that justifies and enables western intervention. Next, I turn to historiography to offer an alternative framework for understanding the 2010 ethnic riots. I trace the intertwined histories of urban transformation and the construction of ethnic difference in southern Kyrgyzstan over the last 150 years. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's critique of everyday life, I show how new state practices and technologies of modernization, industrialization and development reconfigured the relationship between urban and rural space. The second half of the chapter documents the growing housing crisis, land grabs and protests over a right to the city that preceded the 1990 conflict, leading to an alternate understanding of the 1990 riots. Finally, I describe how residents make sense of these histories, how they remember and recall the spatial politics of recent urban change. Building on feminist geography, I argue that history and memory are situated and relational. Resident voices illuminate urban space as *process*, rather than as simply a locality that exists in opposition to a globalized world 'out there'.

DEDICATION

To my family, Marie-Laure and Duncan P. Ryan.

And in loving memory of Philip W. Ryan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an investigation of urban transformations in Osh, Kyrgyzstan. The broad argument is that the complex processes through which place and identity have been mutually constituted and contested in Osh over the last 150 years have been erased from contemporary peace-building and conflict prevention initiatives. The dissertation seeks to reclaim a broader understanding of the ways that place and identity intersect, one that is rooted in a broader historical context, and to draw attention to the ways that these processes are lived, enacted and understood by city residents today.

As Kyrgyzstan's second largest city, Osh is most well known for its status as the locus of violent clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations. These so-called "ethnic riots," which spread to nearby towns, have occurred twice in recent memory. In 1990, just before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, ethnic Kyrgyz from outside the city clashed with ethnic Uzbeks, who made up a majority of the city's population, over rights to a former collective farm (*kolkhoz*). Twenty years later, with major demographic changes leading to a more balanced make-up of the population between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, the two groups clashed again. The riots of 2010 followed on the heels of political instability and revolution that toppled a president. This dissertation will argue that understanding these episodes of violence as ethnically-motivated is

insufficient because it fails to capture the ways that space and identities have been mutually constituted through state-led development initiatives during the Soviet era.

This dissertation aims to provide an alternative reading of the 2010 riots that moves beyond ethnicity as the primary framework for understanding conflict and post-conflict processes in Osh. I begin by discussing the limits to conducting research on ethnicity and conflict in Osh through an examination of the Kyrgyzstani surveillance state, and its impacts on the research process. I then examine peace-building and conflict prevention projects in Osh and the Fergana Valley. I argue that international humanitarian and peace-building initiatives have largely ignored the politics of space in Osh, focusing instead on a flattening of identities and a rewriting of historical narrative that justifies and enables western intervention. Next, I turn to historiography to offer an alternative framework for understanding the 2010 ethnic riots. I trace the intertwined histories of urban transformation and the construction of ethnic difference in southern Kyrgyzstan, from 19th century Russian imperialism to 20th century Soviet modernization to national independence in the 21st century. By focusing on the effects of these processes on material space and on the movement of bodies between urban and rural areas, my aim is to draw attention towards an alternate reading of the 1990 riots. Finally, I draw on interviews, participant-led tours of Osh, and ethnographic vignettes to understand how residents themselves make sense of these histories and the relationship between space and identity in the city.

In this introduction to the dissertation, I begin by situating Osh in historical and geographical context and describing the events of the 1990 and 2010 riots. Building from Liu's landmark study of Osh (2012), I then propose that we should "think with the urban" as a way to understand the interplay between different ethnic groups and territories in the city. Studies of

urban change in postsocialist spaces grapple with the difficult question of how to deal with the socialist legacy. I propose that Henri Lefebvre's critique of everyday life and urbanism can lead us past this impasse, to ask questions about the evolving relationship between urban and rural populations in Central Asia, and how industrialization and urbanization have transformed everyday life. The Chapter then proceeds with a discussion of research methods, including a deeper consideration of the value for geographic inquiry of participant-led tours. It concludes with an outline of the dissertation plan.

1. Situating Osh

Osh is Kyrgyzstan's second largest city. It is located in the predominantly agricultural Fergana Valley and sits roughly mid-way along the former Silk Road. In ancient times it was an important trading center, not just for Silk Road traffic but also for nomadic and sedentary populations to exchange goods and services. The city is located just five kilometers from the border with Uzbekistan, and it is the center of economic and educational life in the southern half of the country. Its numerous universities attract students from across the three southern oblasts. International borders cut through the Fergana Valley in a seemingly random and wild fashion, and with the hardening of borders after independence, getting to Osh from the country's northern capital, Bishkek, involves driving a circuitous and lengthy route around Uzbekistani territory. Contrary to many accounts that suggest the zigzag borders of the Fergana Valley were Stalin's attempt to "divide and conquer" the area, these borders were actually the outcome of several years of negotiations among local leaders and Moscow in the early days of Bolshevik rule. Soviet economists, anthropologists and geographers aimed to create Republics that made sense as economic, cultural and national units. Ethno-nationalism was seen as an unfortunate but

essential step towards achieving socialist identity. While Osh was a majority Uzbek town, it was assigned to the Kyrgyz SSR in order to provide the Republic's southern half with a sizeable market city, and with a small piece of agricultural territory. Thus, Osh is at once peripheral and central to the Kyrgyzstani nation state today.



Map 1.1: Topography and hydrography of the Fergana Valley, from Novikov and Rekecewicz 2005.

Since the Soviet period, authorities have openly whispered about making Osh Kyrgyzstan's second capital, or perhaps even moving the capital to Osh from Bishkek. It is one of the most diverse cities of the Fergana Valley, and perhaps because of its large Uzbek population, plans to make it a capital city were never realized. Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, is a thoroughly Russified city, while Osh's Russian population was always a significant minority.¹

¹ Bishkek was overwhelmingly Russian when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Today its Russian population has dwindled and it is overwhelmingly Kyrgyz, but Russian is still a dominant language in public and private life. Many

Osh's skyline is dominated by the sacred mountain Sulaiman-Too (Solomon's Throne), a favorite spot for locals and tourists that sits at the city's social, educational and economic center. The mountain has been a site of pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian and Muslim pilgrimage for millennia. In the year 2000 Osh celebrated its 3000th anniversary with a series of lectures by historians and archeologists, as well as a public festival and numerous artistic commemorations. Yet, while the city is verifiably ancient, there is very little physical testament to its age, with the exception of a few cave petroglyphs that are now accompanied by early 19th century Russian graffiti and the carvings of more recent visitors.

In spring Sulaimain-Too bursts into a short-lived bout of greenery, but most of the year it is dry and yellow. Capped with five craggy peaks, its flanks and small passes are crisscrossed by a number of dirt pathways. The formal approach up the mountain, a paved road closed to vehicles, leads gradually up the long south-facing flank of the mountain. It begins near the "new mosque," built in 2012 by Saudi Arabian benefactors, and leads past the Soviet-era Ethnographic Museum of Culture and Religion. The museum was blasted into an existing cave and its concrete facade protrudes from the rock face of the mountain like the horn of a giant trumpet, a curious reminder of the concrete- and TNT-loving Soviet modernist architects. The pedestrian road turns into a narrow path guarded with rails and passes above an ancient graveyard, then by several little grottos worn into the smooth limestone rock formation. Near the top, a portion of the rock has been worn to a slick finish through the ages, forming a slide that is said to make women's wishes of fertility come true. While most of the features on the mountain have religious significance, the slide is also a popular feature with local kids, blending the sacred with leisure and play. The mountain's mystical and Zoroastrian history have made it particularly important

Kyrgyz residents of Bishkek do not speak Kyrgyz. Meanwhile, Osh was certainly not untouched by Russian influence, a process discussed further in chapter 4.

for religious pilgrims from mountainous parts of Kyrgyzstan, where Ismaili Islam mixed with animist practices and arrived relatively late compared with the Sunni Islam that dominated the settled plains. The mountain is an important attraction for visitors from across the country, who come for its religious and historic significance. One of my ethnic Kyrgyz research participants who was raised in a village in the nearby Jalal Abad oblast recalled that as a child, his aunts schemed to make a pilgrimage to Osh just to visit the mountain. The pilgrimage was a major event in their lives.

After a series of steep stairs cut into the limestone rock, the path reaches its zenith on a promontory that overlooks the city. Set back from the overlook is a small house and mosque said to have been established by the teenage Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire in the 15th century. In his memoir, Babur emphasizes the clean air as one of the unique qualities that distinguishes Osh from other Fergana Valley cities. Indeed, on a clear day snow-capped peaks loom paradoxically large but distant in three different directions from the lookout point, although usually the view is hazy. In winter the air is muddied by the burning of charcoal, the cheapest form of heat. In summer, the dust of agriculture in this arid region clouds the air. The mountain, an elongated limestone formation, runs perpendicular to the Ak-Buura river that bisects the city. Once a vigorous tumble of frigid white water, the Ak-Buura is now tamed by an extensive network of dams and canals built at the height of Soviet modernization in the 1960s and 70s.

Almost the entire city is visible from the main promontory. At dusk the viewing platform is crowded with local youth, and at dawn the city's young male wrestlers and boxers diligently run up and down its trails in striped tracksuits. I sometimes ran here too, once overtaking an older woman walking alone in the morning, her head loosely covered with a scarf. She turned, at first surprised, and then shouted words of encouragement to me in perfect Russian. "Molodets,

devotchka!” To the north, one looks out over the Navoi and Shahit-Tepe (“martyr’s hill,” in Uzbek) mahallas, bordered by agricultural fields that visually mark the city limits. Many of the homes along Navoi street have shiny new roofs, an indicator to the knowing viewer that they were destroyed during the 2010 rioting and rebuilt with the help of foreign aid agencies. The new roofs are concentrated along the main arteries of the neighborhood, testament to the micro-geographies of violence during the conflict, whereby homes set back from main roads were more protected from the violence. In the distance the Dostuk/Do’sstlik (“friendship,” in Kyrgyz and Uzbek) border crossing to Uzbekistan is clearly visible. To the north-east, across the river, rise the stacks of a defunct textile factory, KhBK (Cotton-Paper Factory), that once employed a large portion of the city’s population in the Soviet period. The worker housing for the plant, a vast area of standardized apartment blocks that were once home to the city’s significant Russian and other “European” minorities, sits opposite the factory grounds.

A trail descends steeply from the viewing platform down hundreds of smooth stairs to one of the city’s oldest surviving structures, the Ravvat Abdullakhana Mosque, dating to the 16th century.² When Russian imperial forces arrived in the late 18th century, the city’s skyline is said to have been dominated by dozens of mosques. Most of them were later destroyed, but mosque-building is today said to outpace school-building across Kyrgyzstan, and especially in the south. While in Bishkek the call to prayer is rarely heard, in Osh it rings across the city at dusk from every direction in a chaotic but clearly coordinated pattern.

A bit further down the hill, a group of Roma women beg for money, and just a bit further, one suddenly arrives to the bustle of the central business district. Alymbek Datka park sits at the base of the mountain. It is filled with fountains, ice cream sellers, Kyrgyz-language music, noisy

² Babur’s house and mosque were destroyed during the Soviet period and rebuilt in the early 1990s. It is rumored that the original pieces of the house, including important manuscripts, were hidden from Soviet authorities by local residents and are still kept privately today.

³ Chapter 3 elaborates on this point.

⁴ However, this neat division of ethnicity and settled/nomadic spaces is a problematic simplification, as discussed in

go-carts for rent, and a three-story yurt-museum. The park is popular with wedding parties, and it is common to find a caravan of white stretch limos waiting while bride and groom make the requisite rounds of city monuments for their photos. These weddings, usually between ethnic Kyrgyz couples (traditional Uzbek weddings take place at the bride and groom's houses) can be extravagant, costing tens of thousands of dollars. The park's wrought-iron benches and railings are inscribed with the *tunduk*, the national symbol of Kyrgyzstan that also adorns the flag. A circle with two sets of crossing lines, the *tunduk* symbolizes the top opening of a yurt—traditional nomadic Kyrgyz dwelling as national symbol. Since the 2010 riots the *tunduk* has proliferated in the city's public spaces while other marks of ethnic identity, such as the square hat or *doppa* worn by Uzbek men and the *atlas* and *ikat* patterns of Uzbek women's dress, have faded from public spaces.

The two main thoroughfares on the left bank—Lenin and Kurmanjan Datka Streets—run parallel to each other with one-way traffic moving in opposite directions. A Lenin statue still presides over the city's main square, while Kurmanjan Datka, a 19th century female ruler of southern Kyrgyzstan, is a heroic national figure. In keeping with early Soviet city planning, these two streets are straight as arrows, comparatively wide and lined on both sides with trees and four-story apartment blocks. Several of the buildings along the streets bear the scars of earthquake damage. The first floors of these apartments are taken up by Internet cafes filled with young men, as well as small shops and cafeterias for the university crowd. Nearby sits the distinctive red-and-white striped building of Osh State University, a prestigious institute that got its start in WWII when a Russian university was evacuated from the western front. Beyond the university is another public park named after the famous 15th century Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi, next to the imposing structure of the Uzbek Drama Theater. Wide, crumbling steps lead down to

the river, passing between a small ferris wheel on the right and a Yak-40 model airplane on the left. The leafy river-side park has a carnival atmosphere on weekends, filled with hawkers of sugar-coated popcorn, amusement park rides, open-air karaoke and various tests of masculine strength. One area of the park, a long line of small square tables, is entirely dedicated to chess. It is always packed by elderly men in *doppas* (ethnic Uzbek headwear) and *kalpaks* (ethnic Kyrgyz headwear) hunched in deep concentration over their boards. Crowds of onlookers surround the games. Frequently, they are also surrounded by tourists who want to witness and document the public and visual display of ethnic harmony and multiculturalism, which have disappeared from most other parts of the city. Just a bit further down the river is the sprawling market of Silk Road fame, once Osh's biggest tourist attraction. The old spaces of the market, where the arches of ancient caravanserais loomed above dried fruit and spice sellers, saw heavy destruction in the 2010 riots. Market reconstruction has mainly focused on building a more modern indoor space on the opposite side of the river.

From the neighborhood streets of Osh, the view of daily life and private spaces is quite different than the view from up high and from the public parks. The city is heavily segregated by ethnic group, and since the 2010 riots the residential separation of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz has only increased. Uzbek populations live in mahallas, and while each mahalla has a unique feel, history and infrastructure to it, they are generally characterized by single-story homes built around courtyards, and shared by extended families. In the Soviet period some mahalla residents were displaced from the city center to make way for urban development projects, including the construction of factories, mikrorayons and public buildings. Apartments offer amenities that must be installed at private cost in the mahallas, especially running water, sewage and gas. Groups of apartment buildings form mikrorayons that often have a public space of their own,

usually a playground or carpark where neighbors linger to chat and escape the heat of the apartment block in summer. Most of the apartment complexes of the city house the Kyrgyz population, although this is only a general rule and there are many exceptions. While the city is diverse, its non-Uzbek and non-Kyrgyz populations are quite small: most Russians left after the collapse of industry in the early 1990s. A spattering of new modern high-rise apartment buildings throughout the city suggests that Osh's low-profile skyline may soon change. This fact is almost universally lamented by westerners who harbor romantic notions about the ancient Silk Road city, but it is broadly a welcome development from the perspective of local residents, who want better living conditions and who see the urban infrastructure as a potent symbol of Osh's status within the country. A third type of housing in Osh is called "novostroika" – literally "new construction." Novostroikas are concentrated on the territories of former kolkhozes (state-run farms) on the city's outskirts, and they tend to be inhabited by wealthier Kyrgyz residents who were able to afford to build a house. Older novostroikas are not that different from the suburbs of western cities: two-story homes that occupy the majority of a small plot of land, walled off from neighbors and the street.

2. The 1990 and 2010 riots

The causes and consequences of the 1990 violence are not widely documented, but some basic facts are well established. Osh, like the other major cities of the Fergana Valley, was a majority ethnic-Uzbek town in 1990. In June of that year a group of ethnic Kyrgyz from nearby villages seized the agricultural fields of the Lenin kolkhoz near Osh, demanding possession of the property. Two large crowds, one of angry Uzbeks and one of angry Kyrgyz, gathered opposite one another on the field. While major violence was mostly averted on that day through

the intervention of the police, mass riots spread to the neighboring city of Uzgen, which was also a majority Uzbek town. The conflict was one of the worst incidents of violence to occur in the USSR: 120 Uzbeks and 50 Kyrgyz were killed, and atrocious crimes of sexual violence, pillage and torture were committed by both sides. The violence lasted four days, ending when Soviet troops were sent to the region and a state of emergency imposed. Soviet authorities conducted extensive investigations into the crimes and held several dozen criminal trials, convicting 46 individuals of various crimes. Much of the court case material was held in secret, but as Tishkov reports, the judges and most of the lawyers involved in the prosecutions were ethnic Kyrgyz, and members of both groups were convicted (Tishkov 1995).

Twenty years later, in July 2010, a week of riots between ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Kyrgyz that began in Osh spread to Jalal Abad and other parts of southern Kyrgyzstan. Hundreds were killed and a massive displacement crisis ensued in which several hundred thousand people fled the two cities. The riots were sparked by a brawl outside a casino in Osh between youth. Rumors about the brawl spread like wildfire around the country, spreading false news that Kyrgyz female university students had been raped by Uzbek males. Large groups of ethnic Kyrgyz from the Alai mountains of southern Kyrgyzstan, from the country's north, and from a number of male sports clubs with criminal ties, descended upon the city to defend their co-ethnics. While many of them were already armed, they easily seized weapon storage facilities from the Kyrgyz military. There was also violence between neighbors, but many neighbors and friends went to heroic lengths to protect members of the opposite ethnic group as well. At the peak of the conflict, 111,000 Uzbek refugees fled to Uzbekistan and 300,000 more people were displaced within Kyrgyzstan. An estimated 13,440 Uzbeks were left without a permanent shelter. In all, some 420 people (of which three-quarters were Uzbek) were killed, more than 2,000

Uzbek homes burned and looted, and numerous Uzbek businesses and cultural centers destroyed, including the only Uzbek-language University in the country (in Jalal-Abad). Large parts of Osh's central bazaar were also looted and burned (International Crisis Group 2010).

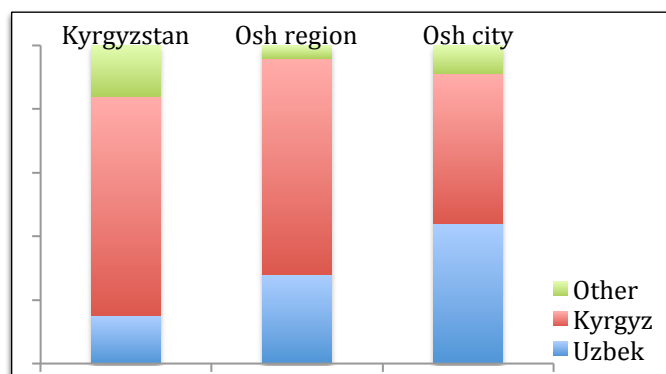
The police were unable or unwilling to intervene, and the mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakhmatov, who was a widely popular ethnic Kyrgyz leader appointed by the ex-President, also did little to prevent the violence from spreading. Uzbeks and Uzbek-owned properties and businesses suffered most during the violence, although both groups were engaged in crimes of looting, rape and sexual violence, and torture and murder. No ethnic Kyrgyz have been prosecuted for any crimes committed during this time, while several prominent Uzbeks are currently in jail for allegedly "inciting ethnic hatred," and a number of other prominent Uzbek businessmen are now living in exile. The violence echoed an earlier episode of ethnic violence in 1990, which began in Osh and spread to the nearby city of Uzgen, where most of the destruction and fighting took place. While the two episodes of violence have a number of important similarities, the significant differences are almost always neglected in the literature.³ Because the 2010 violence took place almost exactly 20 years to the month after the 1990 violence, there is a presumed relationship between the two, hinting that ethnic animosity is a quite natural phenomenon in Osh, and that violence is predestined to occur again.

Ethnic Uzbeks are a minority within Kyrgyzstan, but they are concentrated in the southern provinces of Osh and Jalal Abad. They are viewed as historically rooted in the settled agricultural areas of the Fergana Valley, including its numerous small cities and towns, while ethnic Kyrgyz take pride in a cultural heritage that ties them to the mountains, where they lived

³ Chapter 3 elaborates on this point.

as pastoralists and nomadic herders.⁴ Today, after several decades of rural-to-urban migration, the city of Osh is roughly half Uzbek and half Kyrgyz, while the densely populated countryside around the city is made up of small villages of both groups, often living in ethnically-mixed but dense rural communities. Due to the complex history of Soviet nation-building and rising nationalism in newly independent Kyrgyzstan, there is an ethnicized division of labor in the south today. Kyrgyz make up the majority of the political and business elite, as well as the majority of the poor and unemployed, while Uzbeks occupy a “middle niche of economic activity” as shopkeepers, businessmen and skilled craftsmen (Megoran 2013). This ethnicized division of labor in the city also means that Kyrgyz occupy a large number of jobs in public administration, civil service and the police force. Corruption persists across all sectors of society in Kyrgyzstan. If the police and politicians, who tend to be Kyrgyz, are highly corrupt, then successful businessmen—many of whom are Uzbek—also benefit from and participate in the system.

Figure 1.1: 2009 ethnic composition of Osh city, Osh region, and Kyrgyzstan, as a share of total (data from Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, 2011).



The riots took place a few months after Kyrgyzstan’s second revolution, which overthrew President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Many people attribute the 2010 riots to the power struggle

⁴ However, this neat division of ethnicity and settled/nomadic spaces is a problematic simplification, as discussed in Chapter 4.

between pro-Bakiyev groups, and those who supported opposition politicians such as Interim President Roza Otunbayeva.

In the months after the riots a fragile peace held over the city of Osh. Ethnic Uzbeks were targeted and harassed by the police as a form of retribution. Many young Uzbek men went abroad to work and escape the harassment, while rates of marriage among young Uzbek women increased as a coping strategy for the uncertainty and threat of sexual violence (Ismailbekova 2013). Humanitarian groups responded to these developments by expanding funding to local NGOs involved in legal aid, protection and human rights.

Humanitarian groups mobilized quickly to help Uzbeks rebuild their homes and businesses, but reconstruction efforts were complicated by the same national issues that contributed to the riots. This led to a deep politicization of the aid. The majority of funds for reconstruction benefitted Uzbeks, a fact that did not go unnoticed by many Kyrgyz in the south. Interim President Roza Otunbayeva set up a “State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development for Osh and Jalal-Abad Cities,” led by then-Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldiev. The Directorate explicitly bypassed the authority of Mayor Melis Myrzakhmatov over the reconstruction of his city, but Myrzakhmatov found other ways to foil the reconstruction work. His administration refused to issue new property registration and ownership documents to the many Uzbeks whose homes and business were destroyed. Humanitarian groups feared that without property titles, which had either burned or never been formally issued, their investments to rebuild would quickly be seized from the intended beneficiaries by future urban development initiatives. These fears were not unfounded. In the months after the violence, Myrzakhmatov embarked on a number of large-scale projects—the first concerted effort to upgrade the city’s urban infrastructure since Kyrgyzstan’s independence. The Master Plan of the city hung over

these tensions about aid and urban redevelopment. While the plan had been drawn up but never approved by Parliament or made public, Myrzakhmatov's administration frequently referred to it in order to justify road expansions that displaced more Uzbeks from their homes. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine how any major urban development projects might be undertaken without threatening Uzbek mahallas in the city. Osh is plagued with traffic jams and the road network is indeed in need of some modernization.

Overall, nearly everyone I asked—Kyrgyz and Uzbek—told me that the biggest change to the city since the 2010 riots has been positive. The city has become more beautiful and less full of trash, many parks have been cleaned up, new benches installed and grounds cleaned, bus stops improved and street lighting installed. Eventually, and despite his enduring popularity, Myrzakhmatov, was removed from office in early 2015. He was simply too powerful for authorities in Bishkek to tolerate. The mayor of Osh is appointed by an elected city council, and Myrzakhmatov's removal was coordinated via a series of shady deals involving the sudden switch in allegiance of a single city council deputy from one party to another just before the vote to reconfirm his position.

Meanwhile, the international community has condemned the 2010 riots as a “pogrom” carried out against Uzbek residents, an interpretation that authorities vociferously reject. They blame the West for focusing on just one side of the conflict (Uzbeks) and ignoring the deaths of the other group (Megoran 2013). Meanwhile the West, especially the United States, has pushed for greater protection of human rights and for a more just process of truth and reconciliation that would hold responsible parties to account for the crimes committed in 2010. These differences have caused significant diplomatic tensions. In 2015, just before I began my fieldwork, the US gave an award to an Uzbek human rights activist from Jalal Abad, Azimjon Azimov, *in absentia*.

Azimov is serving a life sentence for allegedly “inciting ethnic hatred” during the 2010 riots. In response to the award, the Kyrgyzstani government unilaterally withdrew from the treaty that served as the basis of diplomatic relations with the United States. The US Embassy in Bishkek remains open as of late 2018, but the relationship is still tenuous. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan has also declared a number of westerners associated with prominent human rights groups *persona non grata*, including Dr. Kinno Kiljumen, the Finnish head of the “Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010,” as well as Mihra Rittman, former head of Human Rights Watch’s Central Asia bureau.

3. *Thinking with the urban*

While it is clear that urban space is highly contested in Osh, the dynamics of this contestation are not straightforwardly based on ethnicity. Chapter 5 demonstrates that Uzbeks are overwhelmingly in favor of infrastructural improvements to the city, even if this means the destruction of some mahallas and the displacement of their residents. In his research with Uzbek communities in Osh, Morgan Liu (2012) argues that an urban identity is essential to Uzbek conceptions of self and belonging in Kyrgyzstan more broadly. His study, based on a decade of ethnographic fieldwork in Osh that was conducted before the 2010 riots, demonstrates that for Uzbek residents of Osh’s mahallas, “Urban place was something to *think* with.” Noting that Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan have not been welcomed by the Uzbekistani state and that they face increasing ethno-nationalist discrimination at home, Liu observes:

Uzbeks living in Osh treat urban places as frameworks for making sense of the world and potentially for acting on it. They *think with their city* in certain moments to make sense of their perplexing post-Soviet situation, characterized by their uncertain place in the world. They interpret their predicament through the concrete spaces of everyday urban life... In other words, how we dwell in space matters in how we conceive of the world (p. 13).

Liu's work opens up an important set of questions about the relationship between space and identity in Osh. Both ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Kyrgyz residents of Osh make claims about their right to the city—specifically, their right to housing and property—by pointing to Soviet-era developmentalist policies that excluded or displaced their group. The majority of Osh's Kyrgyz citizens settled in the city's *mikrorayons*⁵ (self-contained, standardized housing estates) and *novostroikas* (new private homes) after independence, arriving from the mountainous countryside. If, as Liu argues, Uzbek identity in Osh is related to the material form of the mahalla, then we must ask how other identities in the city are related to material forms of urban space, such as *novostroikas* and *mikrorayons*. By building on Liu's insights about mahallas, this dissertation seeks to broaden our understanding of the interplay between space and identity, to consider the experiences of dwelling for Osh's Uzbek and Kyrgyz residents, and to think about the relationships between different urban forms over time.

Understanding these processes in Osh will have broader relevance for understanding urbanization across the globe, and especially in the global south. The UN projects that the world's urban population will grow from 55 percent in 2018 to 68 percent by 2050, and 90 percent of that growth will take place in Asia and Africa. While megacities (those with over 10 million inhabitants) will increase in number and size, half of urban dwellers today live in cities under 500,000—that is, roughly the same size as Osh today (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2018).

⁵ Literally meaning “micro-region”, *mikrorayons* were standardized housing estates characteristic of the Khrushchev era (1950s) best described as self-contained neighborhoods where housing consisted of apartment high-rises – see Gentile, et al 2012.

4. *Postcolonial and postsocialist approaches in urban geography*

This dissertation draws on the intersection of postcolonial studies, critical urban geographies, and postsocialism. Noting several gaps in the representation of non-capital cities in postsocialist urban scholarship, and a tendency in that field to think through urban change in terms of hybridity that fails to overcome the problem of legacy and transition, I turn to Henri Lefebvre's critique of everyday life, which draws our attention to historical processes of industrialization and urbanization through which urban and rural relations were remade.

Postcolonial geographies address ongoing struggles “over geography as both discourse and discipline, and investigate the intersections of place, politics and identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Blunt and McEwan 2002).” In urban geography, this has led to a focus on understanding *who* produces knowledge about the city, as well as how the right to knowing and thinking about the city creates conceptual and physical spaces. For example, Jacobs' (1996) study of contemporary conflicts over space in London and Australia challenges the idea that the “edge” of Empire is always on the physical margins of cities and regions, and argues that space and place are discursive sites where power is contested in postcolonial as well as colonial times. Postcolonial urban scholars are also committed to a political project that elevates the voices of the marginalized and subaltern, although Ong (2011a) warns that this is not as straightforward as it we might hope. Privileging resistance and subaltern agency often fails to acknowledge the ambivalences, contingencies and complications of urbanization processes. Recognizing this ambivalence, Roy (2011) calls for more studies that illustrate how narratives are crafted, worlds made and futures imagined *across* uneven geographies and multiple temporalities.

This dissertation is inspired by, and seeks to build from, this body of literature. It does so by tracing the narratives about violence, identity and history that are produced by western development and humanitarian groups in thinking about conflict and identity in Osh, and by bringing attention to the ways that ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Kyrgyz populations in the city have been differently excluded from the benefits of urban development. There is no single “subaltern” group in Osh today; there are many. This dissertation traces the “uneven geographies and multiple temporalities” through which everyday urban life is experienced.

Postcolonial studies have had a far-reaching influence across contemporary scholarship, including on two fields of immanent significance to this dissertation: postsocialist and Central Asian studies (see Kandiyoti 2002; Buyandelgeriyn 2008; Chari and Verdery 2008), and critical urban geographies (see Jacobs 1996; Robinson 2006; Ong 2011b; Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti 2013; Roy 2016). Postcolonial approaches within critical urban studies seek to look beyond the prototypical western city as the *source of theory* and to elevate stories of urbanism in Asia, Africa and Latin America as more than just empirical evidence that fits into a theory made from elsewhere (Robinson and Roy 2016). However, a number of scholars have observed that stories from post-socialist cities are not a significant part of these new attempts to think from the margins (Grubbauer and Kusiak 2012; Gentile 2018). Moreover, within the relatively small number of studies about urbanism in Central Asia, the vast majority is focused on transformations of capitals and megacities. Secondary cities are almost entirely absent from the collective set of case studies about postsocialist urban transformations. I suspect this is because secondary cities in most of the former Soviet Republics are viewed in terms of decay and economic stagnation. While these descriptions might help us understand the situation of many

cities immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, everyday urban life in many postsocialist cities is much more complex than the decay and stagnation paradigm.

The geographical focus of postsocialist urban studies has in recent years migrated east and south: there is now a burgeoning genre of work by geographers, anthropologists and urban planners about cities of the Caucasus and Central Asia.⁶ While many of them engage with postcolonial theories, almost none of these studies have investigated urban life outside of the highly-planned megacities and capitals of the region—Bishkek, Tashkent, Dushanbe, Almaty (now Nursultan) and Astana. In their notable and frequently cited volume on urban life in post-Soviet Asia, Alexander, et al. (2007) claim to center their focus on what they call “pivotal points of the provincial structure” instead of metropolitan centers, but the only non-capital city discussed in their book is a study of Ulan-Ude in Siberia.⁷ Among what we might call this newer genre of South Caucasus and Central Asian urban studies, I could identify *only one* study that is focused on a smaller or provincial city: a 2006 study of housing segregation in the Kazakh city of Ust'-Kamenogorsk (Gentile and Tammaru 2006). This dissertation therefore contributes a much-needed case study to that body of work.

Much of the early scholarly work on postsocialist cities published in the first years after the events of 1989/1991 was heavily influenced by the transition paradigm, a lens that plagued scholarship on other topics as well, especially economics and governance. The now much-derided concept of “transitology” was a reaction among a small but influential group of scholars and policy makers to the massive changes of the post-Cold War world. In addition to the collapse

⁶ They include: Gentile and Tammaru 2006; Alexander et al. 2007; Gentile, Tammaru, and van Kempen 2012; Koch 2013, 2014; Golubchikov, Badyina, and Makhrova 2014; Golubchikov 2016; Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016; Nasritdinov and Schroder 2015; Nasritdinov, Gareyeva, and Efremenko 2015; C. Hatcher and Thieme 2016; Craig Hatcher 2015, 2017; Osmonova 2016; Schröder 2016b, 2016a; Irnazarov and Kayumova 2017.

⁷ The other cities included in this volume are Almaty, Astana and Tashkent.

of communism, political movements in Latin America and Africa ushered in a cacophony of new regimes and governments. The bipolar world order was undone. The science of transitology interpreted these changes as a natural and inevitable movement towards democratic institutions and free market capitalism. Within American foreign policy, democracy became “democratized,” available to any country regardless of its particular social and political structures, or its historical experiences (Carothers 2002). Elections were the hallmark of democratic political systems, while the Washington Consensus’ mantra, “stabilize, liberalize, privatize,” guided foreign assistance for economic reform. Thus, transitology was a moral and ideological perspective as well as a set of policy prescriptions. In the postsocialist countries of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, this set of beliefs translated into the IMF’s infamous shock therapy programs, whereby the wholesale privatizations of industry, property and social services had horrific, and predictable, outcomes: increasing inequality and the concentration of wealth, destruction of social safety nets, economic stagnation and contraction.⁸

In the wake of the massive changes brought on by 1989/1991, citizens responded in various ways that represented their particular experiences with socialist and capitalist everyday practice. As Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery argue, “The collapse of the party state did not eliminate economic and social forms of society, e.g. civil society, black market, second economy, extended kinship ties, private agricultural plots, barter networks. These existed within the socialist system and flourished afterward” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Nevertheless, the story of postsocialist change continues to be told through the metaphor of the “enduring legacy” of the socialist past, a normative phrase that is code for the leftover baggage—political and social

⁸ In cities, transitology and shock therapy had several important and specific consequences: the speed of change itself was immense, resulting in a dramatic redistribution and concentration of wealth. It also had profound consequences on the geographies of everyday life in cities, altering nearly everything associated with urban life: where one lived, worked, how one moved around and recreated, and how one was cared for (Grubbauer and Kusiak 2012).

institutions, as well as individual behavior and attitudes—that impedes so-called properly functioning political and economic systems. These two narratives (socialism as baggage, and postsocialism as transition to democratic, free market societies) combine to produce an enduring image of postsocialist countries as located on a progressive spectrum somewhere between authoritarianism and democracy, command economy and the free market. In this understanding, the factors hindering progress along the developmental ladder are rooted in the socialist past. Of course, this view does little to explain much that is particular to the immense diversity of actually-existing postsocialisms (emphasis on the plural). Scholars re-framing the postsocialist transformation do so with close readings of microprocesses, a refusal to see the socialist experience as monolithic or to view the subjects of socialism as indoctrinated lemmings who have been uncritically liberated from past oppression. This literature limns an understanding of the socialist era that emphasizes how the systems and logics of the past have been brought to bear on the present.

However, transition is a sticky analytic and has stubbornly remained within urban studies of the region. For example, in Andrusz, Harloe and Szelenyi (Eds), *Cities after socialism: urban and regional change and conflict in post-socialist societies* (1996), the term “transition” appears on nearly one in four pages, while the introductory chapter, titled “Cities in Transition,” deals with questions about how (not if) transition to capitalism and democracy will take place. Most scholarship published in the first years after the events of 1989/1991 was heavily influenced by the transition paradigm, but despite a sustained critique of that paradigm it continues to frame more recent studies of the postsocialist urban. For example, Tsenokva, et al 2006 situate their edited volume, *The urban mosaic of post-socialist Europe: Space, institutions and policy*, as an

examination of trends emerging “during the transition to markets and democracy” (Nedović-Budić, Tsenkova, and Marcuse 2006, p. 4).

Recognizing the problems with the transition paradigm, in the 2000s Eurasian urban studies began to grapple with the dual challenge of acknowledging the legacy of physical and social infrastructures from the socialist past while recognizing that new logics of capitalism have altered space and social relations. Studies investigated neoliberal transformations of markets and state institutions, privatization and changing property rights, socioeconomic disparities and their uneven geographies, the commodification of public spaces, the expansion of mega malls and the proliferation of gated communities (see: Andrusz, Harloe, and Szelényi 1996; Humphrey 2002; Nedović-Budić, Tsenkova, and Marcuse 2006; A. Smith 2007; Stanilov 2007).

Most recently, scholars of postsocialist cities are now turning towards the language of hybridity and heterogeneity in a bid to tackle the socialist legacy issue. Gentile, et al (2012) view urbanism as a process rather than a static state, but one that can move along a two-dimensional spectrum where each is defined by an ideal-type model of the city—the homopolis and the heteropolis. The two ideal types are roughly synonymous with the ideological goals of socialism (absolute equality and homogeneity of space) or capitalism (where creativity, connectivity and competitiveness result in diverse and highly uneven urban spaces). The authors then seek to locate cities along the spectrum and to identify which direction they may be moving towards: are processes of homopolization or heteropolitization more dominant? While it is an interesting exercise that helps to avoid the legacy issue and that rejects a static characterization of urban type, the models themselves reproduce the ideological framework of a bipolar world. Another hybridity approach has been offered by Golubchikov, et al (2014). In their study of uneven development across Russian cities, the authors attempt to deal with the legacy and path-

dependency problems by focusing on what they call “hybrid spatialities of transition.” They argue that while it seems logical that the economic success of Russian cities should hinge on their inheritance of socialist infrastructures (e.g. cities that hosted factories with shorter production chains should do better after the end of socialism), in reality the transition to capitalism is much more complicated. They argue that economic outcomes for Russian cities today are determined by the particular ways that inherited infrastructures have articulated with particular neoliberal policies promoted at the national level.⁹ Hatcher and Thieme take up this “hybrid spatialities” framework in their study of Bishkek and the *propiska* system, a Soviet institution that regulated internal migration between cities and the countryside. By considering the *propiska* system in Bishkek as it has survived today, the authors seek to understand “how official policies are ‘domesticated’ in neoliberal contexts,” and to trace the impacts of those policies on urban space (Hatcher and Thieme 2016, p. 2187).

Several studies document the unique elements of socialist urban form. Patterns of political and economic development led to unique features that set socialist cities apart from capitalist cities in the West. For example, socialist city centers typically date to the pre-war period and consist of low-rise buildings with monumental public spaces. Both the verticality and density of the city grew at urban edges, reflecting the investment into high-rise housing estates (*mikrorayons*) on greenfield sites. Socialist cities avoided the suburbanization that characterized many cities in the West. This development pattern also resulted in denser public transportation networks. Housing promoted ethnic segregation, especially between Russian and non-Russian populations (ethnic segregation between non-Russian groups is poorly documented, however). At the same time, state-allocated housing contributed to a certain degree of social or class mixing

⁹ The authors give the example of national-level policies that encourage competition between cities for state funding.

associated with the seizure of bourgeois properties, although Party officials usually received priority housing.¹⁰ In terms of both employment and land use, socialist cities tended to have a greater concentration of industrial enterprises, in part because one explicit goal of the Party tied to socialist ideology was to maintain the working class population as an urban majority. While retail and services were concentrated in the centers of socialist cities, they were also spread across the city in a hierarchical pattern that prioritized equal access to services for all parts of the city, and reflected planning that emphasized economies of scale. Public and cultural institutions were also concentrated at the center: libraries, museums, opera houses, theaters, and universities (Sykora 2009; Gentile, Tammaru, and van Kempen 2012).

However, it is difficult to generalize too broadly about the socialist city, since transformation processes articulated with local conditions and structures. Actually-existing socialism was a wide set of state and economic practices, and many of the characteristics of socialist cities, such as large housing estates, are also found in so-called capitalist societies (Hirt, in Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene 2016).¹¹ More importantly, even when the features of socialist and capitalist cities are the same, in the socialist city they are still treated as somehow lagging under the weight of their socialist legacy, resistant to change. This “fetishism of legacy” effectively overemphasizes the continuities between past and present, and results in a mystified historicity of the post-socialist legacy (Golubchikov 2016, p. 616). Gentile warns that the post-socialist label is so sticky that, “Before we know it, post-socialism in the former Soviet satellite states will have outlived socialism” (Gentile 2018, p. 1143).

¹⁰ In Osh, where the majority of public officials were either Russian/“European” or ethnically Kyrgyz, the promotion of Party members within the housing allocation scheme also led to a segregation of Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations by housing type.

¹¹ Henri Lefebvre’s study of the French industrial city of Mureaux is a perfect example of a large housing estate in a western (capitalist) country, an observation that I will return to in the following section.

These problems in defining the socialist urban form are now animating a fundamental questioning of the basis for the hybridity/heterogeneity literature: are postsocialist cities truly different from other kinds of cities in the world? In essence, the question drives at a deeper debate about history and the spatial legacies of previous economic orders. If there was no single socialist urban formation, then the utility of a *postsocialist* analytic for urban studies is equally fraught, premised on an imagined more than a real form, and on a socio-economic abstraction (Hirt, in Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene 2016). Rather than taking the socialist city as a given ontological reality, Ferenčuhová interrogates the history and origins of the concept “socialist city” Noting that the term was already in widespread use during the Cold War, by both East and West, Ferenčuhová argues that both the “socialist city” and its counterpart “capitalist city” are ideological concepts used to denote the Other. Furthermore, the *representation* of the socialist past continues to animate heated debates in postsocialist societies today. Ferenčuhová argues, “This searching for variety from existing theoretical models without recognizing their historical, political, and geographical embeddedness has actually trapped the idea of the post-socialist city in a transitory discourse and a forever-indefinite story” (in Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene 2016, p. 506). The solution to avoiding these traps is in a more systematic strengthening of the historical perspective in urban studies, and a recognition that the term postsocialist is not neutral; it does real moral and ideological work. While Golubchikov also wants us to understand the historically- and ideologically-embedded nature of the so-called “post-socialist city,” he still wants to adhere to an analytical framework that presupposes that capitalist and socialist have wholly separate histories; a claim that I believe deserves serious questioning. Golubchikov rightly argues that the transition paradigm has itself become a totalizing narrative, but he also suggests that “socialist legacy is subsumed by capitalism and is alienated from its own history to

become conducive to the capitalist processes themselves” (Golubchikov 2016, p. 616). If the histories of actually-existing socialism and capitalism are similar, then this alienation of socialist history and subsequent incorporation into capitalist processes makes little sense.

The socialist city did differ substantially from the capitalist city in one important respect: it was an ideological tool of the state. Urban development in the Soviet period was not just about modernization and a re-orientation of the economic sphere; urban development was *the primary means* through which the Party sought to create a new and progressive kind of society. The urban was at once seen as an undesirable product of capitalist and even feudal relations, and it held out the possibility for a new spatial arrangement of society. Thus, Soviet ideology was materialized through investments into cities, and Soviet planners were inspired by Marx’s views of the city as the locus of revolution and radical political and social change. A Soviet city’s General Plan was therefore as much an ideological tool for achieving a desired social outcome as it was an economic plan. Moreover, this was broadly understood by Soviet citizens and city residents, who viewed themselves as urban dwellers participating in a great transformation of life and politics. The city was viewed as an expression of the legitimate social relation between people and the state, expressed through its physical infrastructure (Alexander et al. 2007). These were hotly debated topics in the 1920s and 1930s, when city planners aimed at creating an “antiurban” that would mirror anti-capitalist society (Ruble 1990), and these theories were applied equally to Soviet policies in Central Asia’s capital cities (Alexander et al. 2007; Stronski 2010) as they were in metropolises like Moscow, Leningrad (Ruble 1990), Sevastapol (Qualls 2009), Warsaw (Grubbauer and Kusiak 2012), or new utopian industrial towns built from scratch, like Magnitogorsk (Kotkin 1997).

On the other hand, there was an explicit tension in socialist urban life between ideology and the realities of actually-existing urbanization. Moreover, Soviet urban dwellers did not uncritically accept the changes happening in cities, and while overarching ideologies of Soviet development and progress were tied to the experience of living in the city, housing shortages were common and communal living a source of endless frustration (Utekhin et al. 2006-2008). Moreover, the General Plans were almost never fully realized, and by the 1930s most cities in the Soviet Union were declared *de facto* “socialist cities” even if they had not fully attained the goals set forth in their General Plans. So-called “second cities” in the union republics (large, non-capital cities) were no less the subject of Soviet development and transformation projects than “first cities,” competing with them for resources, but secondary cities also had more freedom to maneuver outside of officially sanctioned plans (Shagoyan 2011).

5. *Beyond hybridity: Urbanism and the critique of everyday life*

Henri Lefebvre, a one-time member of the French communist party but a fierce critic of Soviet-style socialism, observed that Lenin and Stalin were unable to transform the city, a failure that signaled the failure of Soviet socialism itself:

Change life! Change Society! These ideas lose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from Soviet constructivists from the 1920s and 30s, and of their failure, is that new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa. (Lefebvre 1992, p. 59)

For Lefebvre, the communist’s goal of radically changing society required a fundamental change to everyday life that would have explicit consequences for the organization of the material and human elements of the city. Yet in practice, urbanization under Soviet-style socialism did not differ much from urbanization under capitalism, and so urban form remained unchanged in fundamental ways. I suggest that Lefebvre’s observations, and in particular his critique of

everyday life and urbanism, might help us to address the problems with hybridity, legacy and transition that are reviewed above. Lefebvre drives us towards a different set of questions about the ways that industrialization transformed the relationship between city and country, questions that are particularly salient for understanding urban change and conflict in Osh.

Lefebvre observed that by the end of WWII industrial society in Europe had radically changed urban life into a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption,” an extreme form of alienation that seeped into every aspect of life, not just the economic but also cultural and social spheres, especially leisure time and people’s private lives. This critique of everyday life reworks Marx’s notion of alienation and applies it outside the economic sphere (Elden 2004). While Marx viewed *the factory* as the key site of political struggle that would change the world capitalist system, Lefebvre viewed *everyday life and the urban* as the principle sites of social struggle and possibility. Lefebvre excuses Marx for failing to take account of the urban in his work because during Marx’s time industrialization had not yet resulted in the mass urbanization of society. Lefebvre believed that future social struggle would happen in and over control for urban space.

Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life begins with a historical analysis of the relationship between town and country, a relationship that is radically altered by industrialization. Prior to industrialization, Lefebvre describes the city as a parasite of the rural countryside, where the majority of work and production took place. Industrialization reversed that relationship, putting the urban at the forefront of productive work and creating a countryside dependent on the urban for consumption and higher standards of living. In Lefebvre’s view from western Europe, industrialization not only produced commodities for consumption, it contributed to the proletarianization of the entire workforce, a process that Lefebvre says affected both “fields and

factories.” Lefebvre notes that this resulted in the disappearance of the countryside in two senses: village life disappeared as it was previously known, and it also caused large-scale environmental destruction (Elden 2004).

Importantly, the focus on the urban-rural relationship under industrialization “has important methodological issues, because it means that ‘urban space cannot be defined differently in socialist countries than in other countries’. Again we see Lefebvre’s insistence that not all things are conditioned by the mode of production” (Elden 2004, p. 131). Indeed, Lefebvre sees everyday life under both socialism and capitalism as equally impoverished. Merrifield explains:

On the one side, state socialism bureaucratized daily life, planned and impoverished it, converted it into a giant factory intent on productive growth; on the other side, state capitalism ripped off everyday life and sponsored monopoly enterprises to mass produce commodities and lifestyles, dreams and desires. One system transformed the realm of freedom into the drudge of necessity; the other turned a repetitive necessity into a supposed freedom. (Merrifield 2006, pp. 9-10)

As discussed in the previous section, postsocialist urban scholars assume that socialist and capitalist modes of production have different spatial expressions, and therefore the post-socialist or post-Soviet city is treated as a unique form deserving of unique questions and theories. Lefebvre’s argument about the town and country under industrialization should cause us to question this treatment. Rather than debating to what extent the socialist legacy has mixed and melded with post-1991 neoliberal institutions and state policies,¹² or to what extent Osh was actually a socialist and post-socialist city, Lefebvre prompts us to ask, “How has industrialization, common to both systems, changed urban-rural relations and everyday life?”

In a contribution to the tome *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanizations* (Brenner, ed. 2014), which is a collection of engagements with Lefebvre’s

¹² It is also worth reminding the reader that there are many neoliberalisms (Ferguson 2010).

theories, Goonewardena argues that urban scholars have not done enough to understand the transition from feudalism to capitalism outside of western Europe. While Roy's call to provincialize geographical theory was taken seriously in agrarian studies (see Roy 2009), Goonewardena laments the "conspicuous non-consumption of the transition debate in the field of urban studies" (Goonewardena 2014, p. 227). The transition from feudalism in England was brutal and violent, but it "pales in comparison" with the transition to capitalism in other parts of the world. For example, in India today farmer suicides are a response to the corporatization of farming. The violent process of primitive accumulation is turning the countryside into the "crime-scene" of production and capital. Goonewardena wants urban scholars to better understand the process of primitive accumulation, by which land and property relations have been transformed, and how the moment of dispossession is connected, even essential to, the process of development and urbanization.

In *The Urban Revolution* (2003), Lefebvre argues that there is now a new process that is as essential to capitalism as industrialization once was: *urbanization*. The industrial city has been replaced by the technocratic and ideological aspects of town planning and architecture. According to Elden, it "portrays the space it creates as objective, scientific and neutral." Changes to urban space are supposedly based on technologically-informed decisions, even though "administrators rarely use much actual technology." This, according to Lefebvre, is the myth of technocracy. Urbanism thus "confuses the social relations and practice of the urban with the ideology and institutions of the urban" (Elden). Importantly, the new problematic requires that we consider political struggles as struggles over urban space, not as class struggles over the means of production. Industrialization created a particular form of relations between workers and elite, between rural and urban dwellers, but today urbanism—and its constituent new forms of

urban relations—is reworking class as a relation that is expressed spatially. As Goonewardena explains, “Urbanization is a sociospatial process, the dialectic of sociospatial implosion and explosion that has produced an urban society” (Goonewardena 2014).

This dissertation will argue that in looking at the urbanization of Osh across the 20th century we can trace the processes through which multiple forms of dispossession, and the changing rural-urban relationship, have produced specific geographies of urban segregation in the city today. While Lefebvre was highly critical of the global spread of urbanization—so-called “planetary urbanization”—he also saw in it the political possibility for a new socio-spatial ordering. It is in the spirit of such hope for a better future, in Osh as elsewhere, that I believe we should attend to the questions raised by the critique of everyday life and urbanism.

6. Research questions

This dissertation seeks to understand how historical processes of urban transformation are related to contemporary conflicts in and over urban space. It adopts a historical approach that considers history as (1) an abstracting discourse and form of representation, (2) a spatial process that produces particular social relations, and (3) as a lived reality that is embedded in urban space. Specifically, the dissertation asks,

1. Can a reorientation of Osh’s history around questions of urban transformation help re-frame understandings of ethnic conflict in ways that are more helpful for development intervention?
2. What would that history of urban transformation actually look like? Specifically, can we identify moments of primitive accumulation? Did industrialization transform the

- relationship between urban and rural spaces? How did these processes intersect with the invention of ethnic identities?
3. How are such histories experienced, lived and understood by Osh's residents today? In what ways are such histories embedded within neighborhood spaces?

7. *Research methods and data collection*

I collected data for this dissertation over three separate trips to Kyrgyzstan, totaling 16 months of fieldwork. On my first research visit (May-August 2013) I was a research assistant on an NSF-funded project, collecting oral histories among ethnic Chechen communities in northern Kyrgyzstan.¹³ During that summer I briefly explored Osh and Jalal Abad, the two largest cities of the south. At the time, they were still visibly recovering from the scars of the 2010 violence, and the post-conflict humanitarian apparatus still maintained a conspicuous presence on the streets of Osh. White Land Rovers with their signature antennas commanded the city's small streets, otherwise sleepy in the hot summer when the student population was away. Tarps bearing the insignia of humanitarian aid groups were also still prominent in several of the hardest-hit areas of town. I hoped to build a comparative research project that would connect the post-conflict humanitarian and reconstruction programs in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia, since the latter was the focus of my early graduate studies. Realizing that a comparative project was not feasible, I reoriented my dissertation project from Georgia to Kyrgyzstan and made a second research trip to Kyrgyzstan in summer 2014 dedicated entirely to preliminary dissertation work in Osh. That visit was funded by two short-term travel grants from CU Boulder: the Geography Department's

¹³ I was in Kyrgyzstan as a Research Assistant funded by an NSF RAPID grant with Dr. Elizabeth Dunn (PI) and Austin Cowley (graduate RA). We collected oral histories about exile, forced displacement and resettlement among Chechens deported to Central Asia by Stalin in the 1930s, and we researched the relationship between state law and violence, and mafia law and violence (see Cowley, Ryan, and Dunn 2015). Our work was based in the northern Chui valley, primarily in Tokmok and Bishkek.

Dinaburg Memorial Travel Grant, and a graduate fellowship from the Center to Advance Research in Social Science (CARTSS). I spent the summer living with two separate Uzbek households in different neighborhoods of Osh, interviewing my host families, their friends and neighbors, NGOs and international aid groups about the post-conflict reconstruction process. My third research visit to Osh, funded through a US student Fulbright fellowship, was a ten-month period between September 2015 and August 2016. The majority of the data presented in this dissertation was collected during that time. The main research activities of that period include: 1) a partnership with a local NGO and participant observation of their activities, 2) participant observation of NGO, government and international aid group events, 3) semi-structured interviews with residents and key informants, 4) neighborhood walk-throughs, 5) participant-led city tours, and 6) archival, library and web-based research. In all, I conducted more than 230 interviews with residents of Osh, including:

- 14 participant-led city tours;
- 25 extended, semi-structured interviews with Osh residents;
- more than 150 encounters of varying depth and length with residents during 27 neighborhood walk-throughs, and covering all 13 of the city's administrative districts (*TerSoviets*); and
- 35 interviews with key informants representing civil society, government, universities, international aid agencies.

In addition, I took notes and collected documents from 11 events and conferences held by NGO, government and aid agency group, I digitized 100s of pages of history books and primary and secondary source material, collected dozens of NGO and aid agency reports, took several hundred pages of written and typed notes, and contributed to the daily office life of my NGO host by helping them with strategic planning, program evaluation and proposal writing.

I maintained a daily field journal consisting of various media, including typed notes, hand-written notebooks and personal "voice memos" recorded on my phone to myself and later

transcribed. I found that voice memos were an effective means of recording information when time was short and writing by hand or on a computer was impossible, difficult or awkward. I collected hundreds of pages of primary source material, including reports and promotional materials from government, civil society and international aid groups as well as digital copies of local history books. These materials are mostly in Russian and English.

I conducted the majority of my meetings and interviews in Russian and English. I am highly proficient in Russian and I studied beginning Kyrgyz language, but these skills were not sufficient to include all members of Kyrgyzstan's multiethnic and multilingual population into my study. For research activities in Kyrgyz and Uzbek I relied heavily on three research assistants (RAs), whom I recruited from the Foreign Languages Institute (InFak) of Osh State University. Between them I had assistants of both genders, as well as native speakers of Kyrgyz and Uzbek. All three were highly proficient in both English and Russian as well.

Beyond bridging language barriers, my RAs were essential to the feasibility of the project in other ways. Having a local student by my side helped depoliticize my project and greatly facilitated introductions to strangers. In other words, my RAs were highly effective social crutches! Their labor was inexpensive, even at locally competitive market rates. All three expressed aspirations to continue their education abroad and were motivated to work with me for a combination of reasons in addition to the hourly salary, including the professional development opportunities tied to working in English and on a research project, and their own intellectual curiosity about the world around them. None of them were trained in research methods, the social sciences or formal translation or interpretation, but in their own ways each of these students was a local leader in his/her own right. Thus they were more than just RAs, they were

also research participants and key informants whose own opinions and experiences were of considerable value to this project.

I transcribed all recorded English-language interviews myself, and on a few occasions I worked with my RAs to translate and transcribe interviews in Kyrgyz or Uzbek together, working side-by-side to interpret and translate. Doing so was a time-consuming process but it was extremely valuable because it gave me a much more nuanced understanding of the material than a disembodied and decontextualized transcript by a third party, and it allowed me to collect additional information in the form of my RA's opinions, reactions and interpretations of the content. However, most recorded interviews were transcribed by a semi-professional translator based in Bishkek, whom I hired to transcribe the majority of the recorded interviews that were done in Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian languages. The transcriber converted all recordings into Russian text (like many professionals in Kyrgyzstan, she was quicker and more accurate converting local languages to Russian than to English). When the speaker used Kyrgyz or Uzbek, the transcriber simultaneously translated and transcribed the material. The transcriptions were not edited and contain some mistakes, and occasionally I have gone back to the original recordings (when in Russian) to verify and correct the text. This process resulted in several dozen interview transcripts in Russian language, which I used for the main analytical sections of this thesis. The translation of those Russian transcripts into English for quotation in this dissertation is my own work.

8. Participant-led Tours: Theory and Practice

The majority of the methods that I relied on during my fieldwork are fairly common elements of doing qualitative research and they do not require extensive elaboration.¹⁴ However, participant-led tours are a less typical research strategy. While I am not the first to use this technique and they represent only a small portion of my overall data, participant-led tours are premised on a certain understanding of the relationship between people, place and knowledge production that underlies the research questions and approach of this project. This includes the assumption that we must understand our world through more than just talk—what people do, and where they do those things, is equally important. It also includes a desire to decolonize research by placing greater control in the hands of participants.

David Lees (2003) calls on the “new urban geography”¹⁵ to do a better job explaining its methods, which he observes have become mere inconveniences for some scholars. My aim here is to draw the theory and practice of participant-led tours, as I conceived of and used them, into greater relief. Since the critical feminist and post-structural turns in social science in the 1970s, scholars have recognized that interviews are not just about collecting information that exists “out there,” external to the researcher and simply lying in wait of discovery. Interviews represent a co-production and negotiation of knowledge that is partial, and time- and place-dependent. The information gathered through interviews depends as much on the researcher’s identity, the location of the interview, and the personal relationship between interviewer and participant, as it does on the specific questions asked or the identity of the participant alone (Elwood and Martin 2000; Kobayashi 2001). Commenting on the role of interviews in geographic research, Linda McDowell observes that “words, stories, narratives matter” (2010, p. 156). McDowell is nodding

¹⁴ Participant observation of NGO life, semi-structured interviews with experts and residents, neighborhood walk-throughs or “transect walks”, and analysis of discourse in primary texts collected online and in hard copy.

¹⁵ That which is mainly qualitative and influenced by the discursive and the representational turns.

to the importance of discourse as more than information mining: discourse attributes meaning to action and therefore, it is a way that we can access everyday life.

In his study of the “new urban culture” of Ponsonby Road, Latham (2003) uses the diary, diary-interview method (DDIM), but with a twist. Rather than viewing the interview and the diary as objective recording, in which the diarist is a proxy-observer who cannot be entirely trusted (and so the data needs to be confirmed through an interview), Latham sees the DDIM as a re-performance of the daily experience. The DDIM asks the participant to re-narrate events that are in their diary. For Latham, performance is like discourse, in that it allows the researcher to access everyday life. Performance is also more than just discourse: it is an embodied way of understanding everyday life that goes beyond the cognitive and discursive. In theory, as I employed the method, participant-led tours are a similar act of embodied performance. Participant guides choose where to go and what to show me (or not), and our bodies moved, sometimes quite conspicuously, through urban spaces together. Admittedly, the decision of where to go was almost always made on the spot rather than through careful and studied forethought, but it was usually made jointly and it was not predetermined. For Susan Smith, performance is an interesting tool of qualitative research methods, “not (only) for what it represents, but for what it is—a recognition that there is much that can only be known through the doing [...] It is as much about what is done as about what is said; it is a way of recognizing that ways of being include the unknowable and the unsayable” (Smith 2001, p. 35). Smith suggests that performance has an element of representation and interpretation to it, lending it to the “old” techniques (and associated problems) of interpretation.¹⁶ In addition, though, we can think of performance as Judith Butler conceives of it: as tied to the very way that identities and

¹⁶ E.g. Geertz (1973) on the problem of “turtles on the backs of turtles, by which he means to signal the problem of interpreting the participant's interpretation of something, and so on.

spaces are made and remade through individual acts, which can be conscious, unconscious, material or psychological. In my use of participant-led tours, I came to better know and understand urban space in Osh not only through what my participants told me about it as we walked, drove and rode through it, but also through the physical and embodied experience of the tour itself. In the discussion of those tours in the following sections of this paper, I have attempted to bring some of my own embodied understandings of urban space to the reader through thick description and an attention to ethnographic detail, but ultimately the representation of them is discursive and literary.

While interviews enable researchers to explore a topic jointly and in-depth with a research participant, geographers have long been interested in finding ways to move beyond the table-and-chairs of the sedentary interview and into the “real world.” Shadowing, go-alongs, mobile ethnography, the walking interview, and combinations thereof, are now frequently used. While there are many variations of mobile and walking interview methods, I refer to those that I conducted as “participant-led city tours” and to my interlocutors as “participant guides” to highlight the diversity of ways that we traveled the city together (several were conducted by car or taxi, so not all were “walking tours”), and to hint at the instructions that I gave to my participants (which, among other things, encouraged my participants to take me somewhere they had never been or to show me something that a normal tourist might not see). The full guidelines that I gave to participants in advance are contained in the Appendix. DeLyser and Sui suggest that mobile and participatory interview methods are useful primarily because they, “help reveal some of the place- and practice-based insights of participant observation without the intensity and time commitment ethnography demands” (2013, p. 197), but I believe that they are far more than just a short-cut. For urban geographers thinking explicitly about neighborhood or city space,

movement through those spaces generates richer conversations and spontaneous encounters with human and non-human actors (Jon Anderson 2004; Evans and Jones 2011). This richness results from a combination of spontaneity, mobility, encounter, unpredictability and the explicit handing over of control to participants, all of which belies a fundamental assumption that doing so might enable the researcher to capture a sense for the ongoing co-production not just of knowledge, but of space (Sheller and Urry 2006; Leon and Cohen 2005).

In my use of participant-led tours, I had four specific goals in mind. First, while interview questions may cover the topics of space and place, mobile methods and walking interviews *transform the way that space and place feature in the interview itself*. Space and place go from an implicitly recognized but often unacknowledged element of data collection, to the explicit core of an embodied practice. Space and place become prominent elements to both researcher *and participant* in a very physical and material sense. For example, I conducted most of my tours in the late spring and early summer, when temperatures soared. Several were conducted with young Muslim men who were fasting for Ramadan, but who nevertheless made the time to walk and talk in the dust and heat with me. Their fasting drew my attention to elements of city space that I had not noticed before: the “pop-up” bazaar in On Adir selling imported goods from Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, and other Ramadan specialties, and to the gendered dynamics of fasting during the longest and hottest period of the year.

Second, by placing the researcher and participant in the landscape under study together, moving in and through it while talking about it, and interacting with people and places along the way, the walking interview method acknowledges and encourages the co-production of both space and knowledge. During one of my tours with a historian, our taxi driver’s curiosity eventually got the better of him and he became a second de facto tour guide. The driver was

ethnically Kyrgyz and spoke excellent Russian, while the tour guide was ethnically Russian and spoke broken Kyrgyz. The conversation between my two guides showcased the politics of language, ethnicity and class in Kyrgyzstan.

Third, the approach gives the participant a more active role in driving the interview, placing the decision of where to go (or not), and what to say about it, in the participant's hands. While this can feel a bit odd for the participant at first, walking or moving through space is also a more natural way to have a conversation about that space. One of my would-be participant guides agreed to give me a tour, but he was so interested in the guidelines I had written that we simply sat on a bench in the city center eating ice cream, talking about research methods and the American presidential primaries. As we sat, various people approached us. One overheard my friend Erkin speaking English with me and stopped to inquire about English teachers: he was building a foreign language school and needed staff. I learned a lot from this "failed tour" about the incessant demand for English-language instruction, and I built a friendship. Another participant guide interpreted his role as a kind of research assistant and proceeded to knock on doors in an Uzbek mahalla to ask residents directly about the topics that I had been asking him about. Meanwhile, one of my paid research assistants shared many personal stories, opinions and gossip with me as we wandered through various neighborhoods on our neighborhood walk-throughs. Because he was explicitly leading me through areas of the city that he knew well and thought that I should see, I consider those in-between moments that took place during another research method as a kind of "participant-led tour" as well.

Finally, mobile interviews are particularly interesting for geographers who are concerned with the association between knowledge, identity and being *in* a decidedly material (not an

imaginary) world. As the rest of the chapter seeks to illustrate, questions of history, identity and belonging were at the forefront of many of the tours that I took.

The numbers: I conducted a total of 16 tours with 14 different participant-guides (one Krygyz man and one Tatar woman each gave two separate tours). The tours ranged from one to four hours; nine were conducted on foot, three tour guides (all male) used their private cars, and one used a combination of private car, minibus and walking to show me around. My participant guides ranged fairly substantially in age, ethnicity and gender, although it was harder to find Uzbek women who were willing to give me a tour. In general, it was harder to get women to give me a tour because many had young children, while men with young children more easily found the time to get away. The tours by car were for obvious reasons more wide ranging, and while I did visit many different neighborhoods with my participant-guides, the geographical coverage was not necessarily equally representative of the entire city. It is highly likely that people who have more recently moved to Osh felt that they might not have anything to say to a researcher about the city, and so they were self-selecting in opting out, which of course introduces a bias into the study. The majority of my participant guides were people I had already met and interviewed, and many of them were social acquaintances as well. This is one reason that I conducted relatively few tours, and mostly at the end of my 10-month study: finding participants required a longer-term investment in relationship-building. However, two participant guides responded to an advertisement that I placed in a local newspaper and so I did not know them before hand. One of those two strangers turned into a regular and highly informative contact; the other stranger was more interested in speaking about differences in the traditions of marriage among Americans and Kyrgyz. Here are the numbers:

Figure 1.2: Participant-led tours, by the numbers

	Kyrgyz	Uzbek	Russian or Tatar	<i>Total</i>
Men	4	4	0	8
Women	2	1	3	6
<i>Total</i>	6	5	3	14

9. *Plan of the dissertation*

Chapter 2 begins by describing the heightened and politicized nature of doing research about ethnicity and conflict under the Kyrgyzstani surveillance state. I trace the vicissitudes and evolution of my own awareness of state surveillance, and how that impacted my research activities and relationships with research participants. Drawing on a framework of intimate geopolitics, the chapter illustrates how geopolitical tensions about the 2010 riots and the contested politics of national identity in Kyrgyzstan impact the mundane and everyday practices of doing research, especially of establishing trust and rapport with participants and collaborators. It does so through a grounded and embodied description of my attempts to navigate state surveillance and to reduce the risks of my research activities to others. In my well-founded paranoia, the Kyrgyzstani state itself became legible: through my self-disciplining behavior, I inadvertently called the state into being. Using the lenses of governmentality and intimate geopolitics, I argue that the surveillance state operates in and through differently-positioned

political subjects, acting upon the intimate lives of researcher and participants through an assemblage of biopolitical and sovereign power.

The chapter embeds the dissertation in the realities and constraints of doing research in post-conflict Osh, where the state is heavily invested in controlling the narrative about the 2010 riots and therefore attempts to keep a close watch on the activities of western journalists and researchers. It therefore points to the ongoing contestations over space and identity in Kyrgyzstan that are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Portions of the ethnography in this chapter have been accepted to a special issue of the journal *Geographical Review*, in co-authorship with my colleague Sarah Tynen, on “fieldwork in the digital age.”

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 advance the main arguments of the dissertation. Chapter 3 focuses on the work of mainstream development and humanitarian groups, which have been working on post-conflict reconstruction, long-term peace building, and conflict prevention in southern Kyrgyzstan since the early 1990s. A growing body of evidence suggests that such interventions have largely failed to achieve their objectives. Nevertheless, discursive constructions of the Fergana Valley as a hotspot of radicalism, traditionalism and ethnic animosity continue to motivate large sums of international aid money flowing into the region. I suggest that in order to understand the paradox of these failures and the still-persistent flow of money to the region, we should evaluate how mainstream aid groups implicitly grapple with the region’s history. I do so by looking at a set of influential reports by major think tanks about the causes and consequences of the 2010 riots that serve as a foundation for much peace-building and conflict prevention work in the region. I argue that mainstream aid groups tend to view the 1990 riots as a precursor to the 2010 riots, which obscures the historical, structural and spatial context of the 1990 riots and rewrites them simply as an “ethnic” conflict that erupted again in 2010. Ethnicity then becomes

the major thing that needs to be solved, overcome or intervened upon through aid projects that seek to “build bridges” and “bring people together.” These projects are premised on normative understandings of cosmopolitan identity as an antidote to a vilified localism. The major intellectual contribution of the second chapter is to suggest that international aid groups are deeply involved in a kind of memory work. This memory work is useful because it constructs the problem of conflict in terms upon which aid groups are able to intervene. I therefore borrow from the insights of critical development scholars, who have drawn our attention to the processes through which underdevelopment is “rendered technical” (Li 2007) and discursively reconstructed in terms that are amenable to aid groups’ limited “toolboxes” of possible intervention (Ferguson 1994a). Chapter 3 therefore makes a call for a better understanding of the historical processes that have contributed to conflict over space.

Chapter 4 advances that project through a survey of secondary sources about the history of the region over the last 150 years. It traces the impact of Russian imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet state policies on the relationship between urban and rural populations, and on the making of ethnic identities in Central Asia during those times. The 20th century has been one of almost unimaginable change and upheaval across Central Asia that is barely grasped or well understood in the west. New practices and technologies of modernization, industrialization, development, state-making and ideology reconfigured the region in ways that are coming to be better understood by historians in recent years, but which are not usually brought to bear on understanding the 1990 and 2010 conflicts. The chapter argues that in the Fergana Valley the production of (1) urban and rural spaces, and (2) ethnic identities *took place in parallel* and that they are *interrelated processes*. We can trace the different populations of Osh, which is a mixed but increasingly segregated city, to specific historical processes of modernization and

development. In other words, historical and contemporary development processes are literally reflected in the material spaces of residential neighborhoods and housing types in Osh today. The second half of the chapter takes a deeper look at the growing housing crisis, land grabs and protests over a right to the city that immediately preceded the 1990 conflict.

Chapter 5 asks how these varied histories are understood by residents of Osh themselves. Drawing on data produced through 14 different participant-led tours that I conducted with Osh residents, as well as semi-structured interviews and participant observation, the chapter describes how urban residents themselves think about the relationship between history, memory and space. If Chapter 4 demonstrates the macro processes through which populations came to settle in different urban spaces in Osh, Chapter 5 drills down to the individual experiences, histories and memories of those changes. I focus on four main themes that emerged from the data: (1) the spatialized politics of language, (2) histories of neighborhood segregation, (3) contested histories of urban space, and (4) the politics of urban infrastructure.

CHAPTER 2

FIELDWORK: NEGOTIATING (IN)SECURITY AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

The Kyrgyzstani state and many citizens actively reject the Western version of the 2010 riots, which casts Uzbeks as victims and Kyrgyz as the unpunished perpetrators. The state seeks to control the narrative about the riots by threatening and arresting local journalists, censoring and evicting Western human rights groups, pressuring local civil society organizations, and threatening to unilaterally withdraw from diplomatic relations foreign countries. The state also monitors Internet and social media use. However, surveillance is fragmented and uncoordinated across many different agencies and their local branches. While it is sometimes clumsy, conspicuous or ad hoc, Kyrgyzstani state surveillance can also be terrifyingly efficient and targeted. The particular kinds of fear and self-disciplining behavior, on the one hand, and constant questioning of one's wariness, on the other, arises from this strange mix of impotency and capability.

This chapter begins by considering the less-than-straightforward path that brought me to Osh, Kyrgyzstan and that led me to focus on urban transformations rather than post-conflict reconstruction. The chapter also discusses the challenge of negotiating and continuously re-evaluating levels of risk and insecurity in the context of a surveillance state that seeks to control the narrative about the 2010 conflict. In telling the story of the project's evolution before and

during fieldwork, I draw attention to the geopolitical forces at work in the issues surrounding my subject position and corporeal presence in day-to-day fieldwork. Furthermore, the issues necessitated that I decenter the topic of ethnicity from my research, a strategy that allowed the topic to be driven by participants and, as chapter 4 demonstrates, facilitated a more nuanced understanding of how ethnicity interacts with other categories of social difference and historical experience. I discuss the process of negotiating the surveillance threat in order to demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationship between the global and the intimate, which became legible through my efforts to depoliticize my project and avoid surveillance. The intersection of geopolitics with the personal, embodied and intimate experiences of doing research is most legible in the ongoing negotiation of risk, insecurity and neutrality that I faced in the field, an issue that I discuss towards the end of the chapter through the lens of governmentality.

1. Knowledge production, representation and the self

This chapter takes seriously the idea that the embodied and intimate aspects of conducting research are central to the kinds of knowledge claims that are possible. Indeed, concealing the intimate from the research production process aids researchers to elide responsibility for their work. In wishing to honor my own responsibility towards my research subjects, participants and readers, I self-consciously write myself into the chapter through a discussion of the project's evolution, which closely mirrors my own evolution as a scholar and the kinds of knowledge claims that I am willing to make.

Scientific inquiry has been accused of performing a “god-trick,” removing the messy and contingent processes that go into knowledge production from its presentation. The god-trick is accomplished in many ways. For example, the standard format of academic publication and

writing imposes order *ex post facto* upon the research process, misrepresenting the true nature of data collection and analysis processes. This serves to mask the more complex ways in which knowledge is actually produced by projecting a false sense of order and logic onto scientific inquiry. Feminist scholars argue in favor of “situated knowledges”—ways of representing the research process (not just the findings) and the researcher to reveal, rather than conceal, the political and circuitous process of knowledge production (Harding 1991; Haraway 1988). This chapter uses the messiness and uncertainty surrounding surveillance and the permissibility of research activities as an analytical point of departure to discuss the operation of power.

Knowledge production is also rendered “scientific” through the academic style and language of written representation. In particular, the third person voice imbues a study with an air of authority, legitimacy and skill; and detaching it from the personal, the uncertain, and the luck that equally make up knowledge production. Significantly, these separations (of researcher from subject) and concealments (of process) fail to interrogate how claims come to be made. Building on these observations, feminist geographers note the homogenizing and universalizing effects of the royal scholarly “we,” and they argue that putting the personal and autobiographical back into the written form puts the relationship between the author and the author’s human subjects at the center, rather than the periphery, of scholarship (Miller 1991). In refusing to conceal the relationship between research subjects and author, claims can be viewed within the wider social context in which they were developed. Ultimately, this can lend those claims greater authority by holding the author more accountable for her words and by giving the reader a deeper sense of how the knowledge claims were produced (Pratt and Rosner 2012). The ideal standard for scholarly rigor is frequently viewed in terms of reproducibility, a controversial issue that has rocked the political science academy and some parts of geography as well (see: Buthe and Jacobs

2015, O'Loughlin et al. 2015). However, extensive scholarship in geography, anthropology and related disciplines has interrogated questions of representation, emphasized the importance of situatedness, subjectivity and critical reflexivity (Kobayashi 2001; Ley and Mountz 2001; Crang 2002; Dowling 2005). As these authors point out, reproducibility is simply at odds with qualitative and ethnographic research approaches, where data collection takes place through the personal and intimate, and where findings are time- and place-dependent. In light of these debates and the tendency for qualitative researchers to continue relying on “verificational realism” (Crang 2002, p. 652), I am committed to unveiling the human relationships in which my knowledge claims are grounded as a way to hold myself accountable for my words (see: Pratt and Rosner 2012). There is an additional exigency for this kind of transparency in the current “post-truth” political climate, where even the most widely-accepted knowledge claims are now subjected to conspiracy theories and renewed debate of their veracity.

Nevertheless, inserting a personal voice into scholarship can veer towards an overly indulgent focus on oneself rather than research topics. Furthermore, some geographers have warned that reflexivity “has become something of a shibboleth” (Crang 2002, p. 651), a practice that qualitative researchers regularly employ as a mark of their critical training, but which itself has come under critique as insufficient and unattainable. Rose (1997) asks, how can one be fully transparent when one’s own motives are not even entirely clear to oneself? With these caveats and understandings in mind, I aim to use reflexive writing and representation when knowing more about me and my experience as a scholar adds something to the understanding of the broader material in question.

Finally, using the personal voice and making myself a visible part of the research process helps to further one of the main goals of this project, which is to re-consider identity politics. The

first person voice is an epistemological tool that can help call into question pre-given categories of analysis, identity and knowledge, and it brings the subject-positions of the multiple knowledge producers into relief (Katz 2001; Pratt and Rosner 2012). This writing strategy explicitly counters the reporting of a subject's identity according to standard attribute lists, which is a common tactic in third person writing. Within that kind of framework, identities are typically expressed as simple binaries such as male/female, urban/rural, Kyrgyz/Uzbek, foreigner/local, privileged scholar/subaltern research subject, etc. Such reporting renders subjectivities flat, uni-dimensional and fixed in place and time. Thick(er) personal descriptions of myself and my research participants aims to avoid such reductions. Following Pratt and Rosner (2012), I see this as a “highly specified epistemological approach” that complicates the presumed boundary between the intimate or personal, and the global. In resisting a flat rendering of subjectivity I hope to make room for an understanding that can move between scales, resist implicit hierarchies between global and local, and acknowledge the politics inherent in the production of space.

2. Urban Turns

My research interests in Osh are rooted in my professional experience working with local civil society and western donor organizations in the South Caucasus between 2005-2011. In early 2009, I began monitoring humanitarian aid in the post-conflict housing sector, for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) uprooted by the Russian-Georgian conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The project focused on increasing transparency and accountability of international aid projects, exposing me to the practices and discourses, as well as the dilemmas and contradictions, of international humanitarian assistance. It also raised questions about humanitarian aid and its relationship to property regimes, housing and the reconstruction of

home after a civil conflict, all of which were bound up with Georgia's ongoing project of nation-building, developmentalism, and the construction of ethno-political identities. Seeing these issues as endemic to many state-humanitarian relationships, I transported this set of questions to Osh on my first visit to Kyrgyzstan in summer 2013. I was curious to understand how the reconstruction of housing after the 2010 riots compared to housing for IDPs in post-war Georgia, and so I met with a handful of representatives from NGO and international aid groups, including my future NGO partner. I found many similarities between the two cases, including examples of corruption and poor donor coordination. For example, a construction expert who was hired to help with the post-conflict rebuilding in Osh told me about significant tensions within the foreign donor community in coordinating their activities. I also stumbled upon a series of articles to a well-respected academic blog, written under a pseudonym, that explicitly linked property regimes and urban planning in Osh with post-conflict reconstruction controversies (see Kaigyluu 2011, 2012a, 2012b). I also found similarities in the personal stories I heard about the violence. During my first visit to Osh, the memory of the conflict was still raw and this came through in unexpected ways. For example, after a long hike with a young Uzbek mountain guide from Jalal Abad, my new friend suddenly described the killing of a neighbor in his neighborhood that he had witnessed.

Encouraged by my early access to so many sides of the humanitarian response in Osh, in the third year of my graduate studies I switched gear and pursued research in a new field site. During preliminary dissertation fieldwork in summer 2014 my primary research questions centered on how ethnic Uzbeks in the city were rebuilding their homes, lives and communities after the riots, alongside the actions of the state and international humanitarian groups. Morgan Liu's study of Osh's Uzbek mahallas, based on extended ethnographic research between 1993

and 2011 (a period that mostly preceded the 2010 destruction) argues that Uzbek residents explicitly link the unique material form of their neighborhoods (*mahallas*) with their identity and sense of belonging in the world. For Osh's Uzbeks, who have not always been welcome in their titular homeland of Uzbekistan nor in their the actual homeland of Kyrgyzstan, Liu (2012) argues that the affective and symbolic characteristics of mahalla space are tools for thinking about broader geopolitical questions. I sought to bring Liu's pre-2010 insights together with my own expertise in humanitarian/state responses to ethnic conflict. In particular, I wanted to understand how this nuanced understanding of urban space—the mahalla as both material culture and as a conceptual tool for thinking about one's place and position in the world—was affected by community rebuilding processes, which were driven by a contentious relationship between foreign aid agencies and the government of Kyrgyzstan.

Three limitations unfolded as I tried to build a new research agenda and conduct preliminary fieldwork. They illustrate the complicated terrain of place and identity politics in Osh. The first concerns the definition of “mahalla” and its presumed correspondence with ethnic Uzbek populations. As I discuss in further detail in Chapter 4, the meaning of “mahalla” is highly contextual, although in Osh it is equated with ethnic-Uzbek neighborhoods. Second, there is no neat one-to-one mapping of ethnicity onto urban form in Osh. Uzbek mahallas in the city are quite diverse, reflecting different periods in the development and socio-economic transformation of the city, and therefore reflecting different populations, different waves of forced and voluntary migration, and different standards of living. There are also many non-mahalla neighborhoods in the city, but most of them resist categorization as “mono-ethnic” Kyrgyz neighborhoods there is no single term or material form that describes them all. Chapter 4 discusses the particular histories of Osh's mahallas, mikrorayons and novostroiki in more depth.

Finally, a third issue with seeking to map ethnicity onto urban form is the fairly obvious observation that ethnicity and identity are neither static nor easily identifiable in Osh (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Many people in Kyrgyzstan are of mixed ethnicity and scholars have shown that ethnic identity, like other forms of social difference, is a fluid and shifting concept in Osh and Central Asia more widely (Tishkov 1992; Slezkine 1994; D. Abramson 2001; Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005; Ilkhamov 2006). The result is that “telltale” clues about identity, such as physical appearance, dress, family name, language, accent and neighborhood do not always add up to a definitive recognition of someone’s ethnic identity in Osh today.

These three problems rendered several aspects of my early research questions problematic—the assumption of easily identifiable ethnic categories, the assumption of monolithic, fixed and unchanging urban forms, and the assumption that the two could easily be mapped onto each other. In other words, my inquiry was premised on a false association between ethnicity and material culture. A recognition of these complex issues drove my project towards urban and historical analytical frames, and they drove my selection of research methods as well. If Liu’s project draws our attention to one highly specialized form of residential area in Osh, I wanted to understand how that functioned within a larger city (and national) system. The methods of neighborhood walk-throughs and participant-guided tours sought to capture this kind of information. Suddenly the entire city of Osh was my research subject.

Expanding the project beyond an inquiry into rebuilding Uzbek neighborhoods required a return to more fundamental questions about the city’s history. This meant trying to understand what patterns of development, settlement and migration led to the city’s contemporary patterns of ethnic segregation and neighborhood layout. In many accounts, Osh is described as an

“originally Uzbek” city, although in the ongoing debates about Kyrgyz ethnogenesis,¹⁷ many local historians are recasting the city as “originally Kyrgyz” (Reeves 2010; Liu 2013). As a geopolitical trope that suggests a spatial fixity to ethnicity and territory, “originality” lays claim to space through identity politics. Rather, I hoped to add a historical dimension to understanding recent urban changes, many of which are closely tied to inter-ethnic relations, state-building, and the conflicts of 1990 and 2010. Furthermore, in addition to the destruction of homes during the June 2010 riots, the post-2010 period ushered in many significant and controversial changes to the urban infrastructure. I hoped that in asking residents what they thought about such changes, I would better understand how their own sense of belonging and identity was associated with their physical and spatial worlds. Finally, I sought to identify how the relative reach, power and rationalities of the state and international actors could be understood through physical changes to urban space.

3. Negotiating (in)security and the surveillance state

While the problems with my first go at research in Osh led me conceptually towards a focus on urban transformations, my full embrace of this approach has more pragmatic origins tied to the necessity of feigning distance from politics, an endeavor that was perhaps both necessary and futile in the political context of the time. Identifying myself as an urban geographer was perceived by officials and research participants as less threatening than identifying myself as a researcher of post-conflict change in the city. (As an academic discipline

¹⁷ Ethnogenesis is a project begun by the young Soviet state to simultaneously establish national identities where they did not exist, as in much of 19th and early 20th century Central Asia, and theoretically/ideologically subordinate those identities to the morally and developmentally higher identity category of Soviet man/woman. While the purpose of this intellectual project has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the project of ethnogenesis—of searching for the roots of a nationality and projecting that into the future purpose of a political territory—continues to be a major concern of many politicians, historians and ethnographers in Kyrgyzstan today (Gullette 2010).

in most of the former Soviet states, human geography is still largely uncritical and concerned with documenting and recording populations, more akin to the Euro-Atlantic discipline of demography.) Despite these efforts, the political risks tied to my presence as a foreign, and especially American, researcher in Osh unfolded over the months leading up to the start of my Fulbright and carried into my daily research activities and relationships with participants.

In August 2015, a month before I was set to depart for 10 months of fieldwork, my future NGO partner wrote with some worrisome news about the political climate and suggested that it was not an appropriate time for them to host me. The email was written in the collective voice of My NGO host's governing board, and it described four concerns in bullet points, each containing links to news sources elaborating on the issues. None of these issues were new information to me, echoing information I had heard from other trusted sources. Yet, in putting all of the information together succinctly and with the authority of links to respected media outlets, the email synthesized disparate bits of data into a single narrative that I had not yet fully grasped. This narrative suggested that research led by an American in the south of the country, related to the topics of conflict and ethnicity, would be likely to attract the unwanted attention of the country's security apparatus, and that this could have repercussions for the researcher and her participants and contacts.

The issues appeared to be a culmination of geopolitical events that had very little to do with me. In Kyrgyzstan, the surveillance apparatus operates as much on an inherited rationale of Cold War geopolitics and a deep suspicion of the outsider, as on contemporary geopolitical machinations between Russia, China and the politicization of American aid. These rationales manifest differently at sub-national scales. In southern Kyrgyzstan, where western aid primarily for ethnic Uzbeks after riots in 2010 is widely seen by the Kyrgyz population as one-sided, all

western and especially American actors are tainted with an association of bias against ethnic Kyrgyz. Western positionality in northern Kyrgyzstan, where there are few ethnic Uzbeks, carries a different set of meanings. In Kyrgyzstan, state surveillance is fragmented across multiple agencies and driven as much by local context as by a national mandate.

In July 2015 Kyrgyzstan unilaterally rescinded the bilateral agreement establishing diplomatic relations with the United States, in place since 1993. The agreement was the primary mechanism through which all economic and humanitarian assistance flowed from the US to Kyrgyzstan (Russell and Abdoubaetova 2018). This was a retaliatory move against the U.S. Department of State, which had recently given the jailed Uzbek activist, Azimjan Askarov, a prestigious human rights award. Askarov is currently serving a lifetime jail sentence in Kyrgyzstan, convicted of using his informal authority among Uzbeks to incite violence that led to the death of an ethnic-Kyrgyz policeman during the 2010 riots (Dzyubenko, Solovyov, and MacSwan 2015). The human rights award was made for Askarov's stand against police brutality and against the government's treatment of ethnic minorities. The diplomatic row replayed a scenario that has characterized the US-Russia relationship for over a decade. While American NGOs, media, think tanks and authorities regularly deride Russian human rights abuses, the Russian state accuses of them of hypocrisy, pointing to, for example, the unlawful detention of prisoners at Guantanamo or the structural violence, segregation and racism that persist in American society. By constructing accusations of human rights abuses as hypocritical, the Russian state undermines the validity of the original claims. As the region's most open nation,¹⁸ Kyrgyzstan occupies an ambiguous middle between the great powers around it (Russia, China

¹⁸ There are many debates about how to characterize the Kyrgyzstani state. In the early 1990s it was considered a "beacon of democracy" in Central Asia, but this term is no longer appropriate or widely used. While it is true that Kyrgyzstan is the only country in Central Asia where election outcomes are not pre-determined, corruption levels are high and elections are not the only measure of political representation. The terms "open" and "closed" help avoid the associations of the liberal/illiberal binary (Koch 2013b).

and the United States; American interest has been driven primarily by the war in Afghanistan and concerns about Islamist extremism in the south.) Thus, Kyrgyzstan is able to draw on different global and regional narratives and networks in order to support the most pressing domestic issues of the day.

The scandal created over the Askarov award was in some ways the continuation of an even longer game of geopolitical maneuvering by Kyrgyzstan between Russia and the West. In 2001 Kyrgyzstan agreed to lease the Manas airbase and transit center near Bishkek to the US to support “Operation Enduring Freedom,” the American invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁹ The airbase was leased at a hefty fee in and it was a key logistical hub supplying equipment and transferring NATO-ISAF personnel to and from Afghanistan. The financial benefit to Kyrgyzstan was immense, as it secured not only the lease fees but also exclusive rights to supply the base with fuel and other services. The terms for the leasing of the airbase essentially gave the United States an autonomous exclave in Kyrgyzstan from which it could operate free of oversight. Because the airbase was previously used by the Soviet airforce, the agreement also had symbolic weight as a marker of Kyrgyzstan’s geopolitical orientation towards the west. Two years after the Manas transit center opened, Russia opened its own airbase in Kant, also not far from Bishkek and on the former training site of the Soviet airforce. This made Kyrgyzstan the only country in the world to host the military of both Russia and the United States at the same time (Akiner 2016). In 2014, under mounting internal pressure related to corrupt Kyrgyzstani elites and Russian pressure, President Bakiyevy canceled the treaty and evicted the US from Manas. The 2015 cancellation of the bilateral diplomatic agreement was only the latest high-

¹⁹ The recent trial of President Trump’s former election campaign manager Paul Manafort revealed that in 2005 Manafort apparently traveled to Kyrgyzstan to lobby the government to close the airbase. Manafort was working on behalf of a Russian oil tycoon with close ties to the Kremlin (Rickleton 2018).

profile incident in these geopolitical maneuverings. The Fulbright fellowship provided me with some U.S. embassy support for my visa, but I learned later that my class of Fulbrighters were guinea pigs in the U.S. Embassy's attempts to work around stricter visa rules that the Kyrgyzstani government had newly imposed on all Peace Corps Volunteers, who are also a deeply politicized group across Eurasia.

Around the same time as the Askarov affair, a new draft "Law on Foreign Agents" was making its way through Parliament. Under the proposal any NGO that received funding from foreign sources and that engaged in "political activities" (a purposely vague term) would be required to register as a "foreign agent" in Kyrgyzstan. In addition to the stigma and politicization of civil society that would result from the label "foreign agent," the law also had more practical implications. It would allow authorities to interfere in the internal affairs of NGOs and subject NGO representatives to a new category of criminal offense. In Russia, similar legislation effectively resulted in a witch-hunt of civil society. My NGO host was a frequent recipient of funding from western donors such as USAID, and the proposed law put both NGOs and their donors in a precarious limbo throughout the Fall of 2015, just as I was starting my fieldwork. Ultimately the legislation was voted down in Parliament, but at the time it cast a shadow over all relationships with western, and especially American, visitors.

By way of demonstrating the very real consequences of this political climate, My NGO host drew my attention to the March 2015 arrest of Umar Farook, a freelance American journalist conducting interviews in conflict-affected Uzbek neighborhoods of Osh. For unclear reasons, the journalist came under the surveillance of the GKNB (pronounced according to its Russian acronym, "Gay-Kay-En-Bay"), the State Committee for National Security, which is the successor to the KGB. Farook was accused of "provoking people" and promoting the agenda of

an outlawed radical Islamic group that functions across the Fergana Valley, Hizb ut-Tahrir (Джумашева 2015). During his visit, Farook met with the Osh branch of the legal rights advocacy NGO “Bir Duino” (One World), whose work included the defense of accused radical extremists.²⁰ The GKNB used documents and materials collected by Farook from Bir Duino’s staff as evidence of his intent to spread a radical message. Farook was evicted from the country, and the offices and private homes of Bir Duino’s staff were raided by police (Уралиев 2015; Джумашева 2015). The case made my NGO host nervous about what they described as the “high risk of closing the hosting organization” that foreign, and especially American, researchers working on conflict issues posed to NGOs in the country. The draft of the foreign agents law made NGOs particularly vulnerable at this time, and my NGO host noted that upcoming Parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2015, one month after my planned arrival, made everything “a bit more in tense [sic].”

Research by western scholars has become a heavily politicized activity in southern Kyrgyzstan. After the 2010 riots, the Kyrgyzstani government rejected the final report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 (Megoran 2013), which was led by a group of highly respected scholars from Russia and Europe. The government accuses western scholars and think tanks of misrepresenting the nature of the 2010 conflict by focusing too much on the impact—the widespread destruction of mostly Uzbek lives and property—rather than focusing on longer-term grievances that it sees as the causes of the conflict. These are rooted in the perceived threat that Uzbek separatism poses to territorial integrity, as well as longer-term structural and institutional marginalization of ethnic

²⁰ In southern Kyrgyzstan, where the police are dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks are seen as more pious Muslims and more likely to join a violent extremist group, the issue of inter-ethnic relations, post-conflict and radicalism are intertwined (Zenn and Kuehnast 2014).

Kyrgyz from the benefits of Soviet development. Surveillance over western researchers in southern Kyrgyzstan is meant to control the narrative about the conflict.²¹ Implicitly, such surveillance pivots on the geopolitics of a new world order in which human rights has become a centerpiece of diplomacy.

My NGO host's email was not the only warning sign that research activities in Osh might draw the unwanted attention of the security state. I also had a series of conversations with senior scholars of Central Asia about increased surveillance. One scholar who regularly travels to Kyrgyzstan had just returned from a summer research trip and described being followed through Bishkek by a government-plated SUV, something that she had not encountered before. A person with a large telephoto lens photographed her from the SUV as she went to and from meetings with key informants. A British diplomat described the same kind of poorly-hidden surveillance efforts whenever he traveled to southern Kyrgyzstan, and since I have left Kyrgyzstan similar stories have continued to accumulate. The aim of these efforts is clearly not to collect information secretly, but to make the state's presence known and, ultimately, to intimidate. Another scholar and expert on the region summarized these concerns, asking me bluntly just before the start of my Fulbright fellowship, "How will you position yourself and your research when there is no such thing as neutrality in the post-conflict environment in Osh?" Indeed, I found that maintaining neutrality turned out to be nearly impossible. Towards the end of my fieldwork I had a series of encounters with a Kyrgyzstani scholar in Osh who had trouble understanding my research aims and began to suspect that I was not who I claimed to be. The confusion was a consequence of my own difficulties articulating a still highly theoretical project

²¹ In February 2015, Kyrgyzstan also banned the head of Human Rights Watch ("HRW's Bishkek Chief Barred Reentry" 2015), and in 2017 an ethnic Kyrgyz journalist was forced to flee the country after writing an article to draw attention to social media posts that were inciting violence against ethnic Uzbeks in the southern region of Jalal Abad (Pannier 2017).

in Russian language, differences in scholarly tradition between the Kyrgyzstani and American social science traditions, and of course the politics of western researchers working in southern Kyrgyzstan. Urban geography was not enough of an explanation—my curious new friend wanted to know the details of my research project, and when I stumbled through an explanation, the scholar cocked his head to the side and asked me directly, “You aren’t one of *those* researchers, are you?” He was referring to researchers who allegedly promoted the pro-Uzbek (anti-Kyrgyz) version of the 2010 riots. Thus, I unwittingly contributed to further mistrust because of the difficulty I had explaining my overly theoretical research goals, which were difficult to translate for a non-academic audience. When in rare situations I met with a local scholar equipped to discuss academic pursuits, I created even more uncertainty over my position and purpose by stumbling through an explanation in Russian. Everyday language proficiency is clearly not the same as proficiency in scholarly syntax.

The word “research” in Russian (*issledovaniye*) carries a connotation of suspicious or illicit activity, and sometimes it is a euphemism for undercover sleuthing. In discussing how to present myself to my local contacts, one of my RAs recommended that I use the title, “kandidat nauk,” which roughly translates as PhD Candidate, and avoid the word “issledovaniye” (исследование, or research, in Russian) at all cost. This strategy of positioning helped some, but it was not always sufficient to escape an association with espionage: I was accused outright of being a spy once by prospective research participants, and treated with high degrees of suspicion on numerous other occasions. These longstanding suspicions of Americans as spies are nothing new (Wright 2007; Driscoll and Schuster 2018; Verdery 2018), but they are perpetuated by the contemporary geopolitical landscape, which continues to pit Russian and American interests as a

zero-sum game in Central Asia. I unavoidably carried these macro political relationships into many of my research activities.

In her discussion of the secret police files that the Romanian government collected over the period of her ethnographic fieldwork in the 1980s, Katherine Verdery (2018) argues that Cold War geopolitics was an inescapable analytic through which everyone, American and Romanian, viewed her activities. She uses the secret police files on her activities, which she attained through a recent government transparency program, “to bring global power relations into the intimacy of the field encounter” (p. 19). While it is true that Cold War politics and accusations of being a “spy” followed me into my fieldwork, these were overshadowed by the effects of new geopolitical developments between the US and Russia. The idea of a universal commitment to human rights, which many closed/illiberal states view with great suspicion, is the unavoidable baggage that western scholars carry with them into closed contexts.

For methodological and practical reasons described earlier in this chapter, I had already substantially altered my research project away from the initial focus on the post-conflict reconstruction of Uzbek neighborhoods. The new incarnation of my research took a broader lens, looking at processes of urban development for all city residents, rather than putting a single ethnic group at the center of inquiry. This is not a dramatic shift, since the major story of urban development in Osh is about state policies that have led to ethnic segregation, and so it still relates directly to issues of identity, difference, conflict and violence. Nevertheless, this widening of the project was more palatable to my NGO host at the time. Not only did it appear less politicized and sensitive, but urban development had become a new and exciting project area for my NGO host that I was not aware of when I first met them in 2014. In the end, our mutual support for one another was renewed and I spent the first few months of my dissertation

fieldwork keeping a low profile: getting to know the staff and NGO office life, and pursuing Kyrgyz language training. Parliamentary elections came and went without much incident, and by the early winter I felt brave enough to begin some of the core elements of my research. Because my NGO host is a majority-Kyrgyz group of women, I was eager to meet more Uzbeks.

Compared to most civil society groups, my NGO host enjoyed an unusually strong relationship with local government. They were quite proud of this, and in particular of the hard work that some of their founding members had put in over the previous year to establish a strong relationship with the mayor's office. This partnership with the mayor's office was part of the NGO's work to hold the "Osh Urban Forum," project, which was modeled off a similar event conceived and organized the previous year by Urban Initiative, an upstart activist group in Bishkek. The Soros Foundation provided funding for the Bishkek activists to help my NGO host run a similar event in the southern capital. The project commissioned a study of social capital and urban space in Osh by a Russian consulting group (Akishin, Korobeynikov, and Korobeynikov 2015), and the project's culmination was a day-long conference in April 2015 on urban development where the results of the study were presented alongside presentations from the Mayor's office on the until-then secret Master Plan of Osh, and other urbanization experts from near and abroad. As a group of young women, it was not easy for my NGO host's senior staff to be taken seriously by the male-dominated world of politics in Kyrgyzstan, and several staff members spent months persistently visiting the mayor's office in order to arrange the Urban Forum. My NGO host took their hard-earned relationship with the Mayor's office as a sign of their persistence and professionalism. Yet not everyone interpreted it in this light. My NGO host's relationship with the mayor's office also raised red flags among activists for minority rights in the country and sometimes complicated the way that I was perceived by others in the

same community. This was the impossible trade-off I had to make, created by a state seeking to control the narrative about conflict in Osh .

In February 2016, I was introduced to Nilufar, a prominent Uzbek woman who worked for an international aid group in the city. I had tried to contact Nilufar several times myself, but it was only after a reference from a mutual friend that she responded to my inquiries. We met for lunch and discussed my research over hushed tones in a private nook of the restaurant. Immediately, Nilufar asked about my institutional affiliation, and understanding that My NGO host was not an ethnically diverse group, I mentioned it in passing and tried to emphasize my affiliation with the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, hoping that the distance and prestige of the latter would outweigh the appearance of pro-Kyrgyz bias that the former gave me. Nilufar picked up on this immediately. According to a passage in my fieldnotes,

Nilufar said it's very good for me to be affiliated with my NGO host for my own protection. They are one of the only NGOs in town that has a good relationship with the mayor's office. They work very closely with them [...] At the end of our lunch, Nilufar mentioned that she was initially a bit nervous to meet with me. [...] She reiterated that it is really, really good that I am partnered with my NGO host, as this will be seen as positive for the way that the authorities perceive me. We ended on a bit of a nerve-shaking tone. She said that even she feels pressure and that she is being watched. I delicately asked her to clarify what she meant – how did she feel such pressure? Nilufar didn't answer.

Nilufar's caution and sense of fear were palpable and infectious, and they stuck with me for quite a long time, reinvigorating the sense of precarity that my NGO host's email had first aroused. The vague and unspecified nature of the threat was particularly worrisome.

After a few more incident-free months during which I cautiously conducted the most benign of my research goals, I began to wonder if I was being too conservative. I discussed my fears over dinner with a western scholar on her first short-term research visit to Osh, and with Gulnara, one of my research assistants. Both agreed that, as long my activities were not illegal or unethical, I was not putting anyone in danger. We went one-by-one through the many pieces of

“evidence” that I had collected, and they pointed out the mistakes made by the persons involved in each episode or the ways that they did not apply to me and my work. The conversation left me feeling confused about what I “knew” about the nature of the Kyrgyzstani state, and somewhat embarrassed that I was being overly paranoid about government surveillance. I wrote about this discussion in my field notes under the title, “How ‘real’ is the perceived threat of doing conflict-related research?” The entry for that day includes a long list of first and second-hand accounts told to me of surveillance.

Two days after this conversation I met one of my research assistants to conduct a neighborhood transect walk. Chynara, who is ethnically Kyrgyz but volunteered with an NGO that brought Uzbek and Kyrgyz youth together, was spooked by an event that took place the previous evening. Chynara volunteered with a small NGO in Osh that worked to bring Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth together. An intern from one of the NGO’s European donors was in town to collect some interviews from the donor’s local partners. He was staying alone at the NGO’s office, which doubled as a guesthouse. At about 10pm the previous night the visiting intern called Chynara in a panic, explaining that there were guys banging on the office door and asking what to do. Banging on doors late at night is apparently a common police strategy; another western scholar working in southern Kyrgyzstan reported a similarly terrifying experience of late-night visits from men involved with the security apparatus. The intern had taken photos of a police exercise on the central square earlier in the day, where he likely drew the attention of the MVD (pronounced “Em-Vay-Day,” Ministry of Internal Affairs) and was then followed back to the office. The authorities apparently watched the office for some time before deciding to knock, and they saw Chynara and several other staff come and go during this time. When questioned, the intern told the MVD that he was doing research with Chynara’s NGO. This was not entirely

accurate. While the European donor has supported the NGO in the past, the research project only involves them as a participant, and otherwise the NGO did not know anything about the research project. Chynara worried that the whole situation had established her NGO on a watch list because of affiliation with a so-called “conflict researcher” who was also breaking visa rules (the intern was on a tourist visa and later fined for it). As I discussed above, the story highlights the politicization of the term “research,” in part due to its imprecise and wide usage by foreigners, and the negative connotation that “research” carries for authorities. Because they were working on sensitive inter-ethnic youth issues, her concerns were grounded in the understanding that these topics were located in a grey zone, not illegal but also not tolerated by authorities, who were known to abuse their power. She later reflected in some frustration that the donor had put them in a very awkward situation by not sending their people on the right visas. As Chynara relayed this story to me in the middle of a main street, she shifted uneasily from side to side, clearly uncomfortable that she might be under surveillance herself and not wanting to be seen with me. This was the end of our neighborhood walk-throughs together, although Chynara still joined me for pre-arranged interviews and other research work.

My fear of putting myself and others at risk ballooned. I began to hide my laptop and hard drive in a hole in the tiles underneath my bathtub, and I did very little open research work in the weeks following the incident. At times I was so paranoid about security that I was nearly paralyzed into inaction, fearing that the authorities were watching my every movement and meeting. At other times my fear seemed like ridiculous paranoia to others, as when I tried to explain my extreme caution to another western scholar on her first visit to Kyrgyzstan. Conspicuous surveillance is a highly effective method for creating an image of authority and power, rather than exercising it outright. The feeling of being watched prompted me and other

researchers to self-regulate and discipline our movement and behaviors, and as we shared our stories of being watched with others, we helped them self-discipline as well. It is a classic example of the operation of Foucauldian biopower. In conducting its report on “fieldwork safety,” the Central Eurasia Studies Society (CESS) also contributes to this kind of self-regulation (Borbieva et al. 2016).

Looking back on the situation, it could be cause for comfort rather than worry. The intern made some obvious mistakes that I would not have done, so in one sense, this story could be interpreted as an example of my comparative level of security, which was premised on making good decisions based on understanding of local society and politics. This is exactly the kind of logic that Gulnara would use in a disagreement later, which I tell below. On the other hand, the story contributed to a general feeling of insecurity and underscored that surveillance was commonplace and highly undesirable (no one wants security figures knocking on their door in the middle of the night). Chynara was also confused by the situation and whether or not she should be concerned. On the one hand, she said, she felt sure that she had not done anything wrong, and that we were not doing anything wrong on our neighborhood walk-throughs. On the other hand she worried that there was a real possibility that she was under surveillance. The case demonstrates how effective uneven and unclear surveillance and police action can be in effecting self-disciplinary behavior. One lesson to take away is that it is important to interrogate the data points that lead to paranoia under surveillance, although they may not always paint a clear picture. However it is important to ask, Are these examples applicable to one’s own situation, or is this a case of apples and oranges? And what measures does one use to decide? The CESS fieldwork safety report suggests that the difference between risks borne out of naiveté, and risks tied to geopolitical events, is a divisive one within their membership community: “A small

minority [of scholars surveyed] blamed researchers for recent incidents of risk. Several responses focused on ‘particular researchers' disregard for local norms and political boundaries’ (see para. 12) and implied that certain research topics are not advisable and that researchers should know better than to pursue them. On the other end of the spectrum, researchers were presented as victims of “anti-Western sentiment.”

A few days after the incident with Chynara’s NGO, Jason, an American professor trying to conduct a survey on ethnicity and conflict in Osh, reported the following experience, which he has kindly given me permission to tell here. Upon arriving to Osh, the first thing Jason did was wander over to the government offices to get approval for his survey, knowing that it was politically sensitive. The Mayor’s office called the GKNB, who took Jason to their offices. Jason was questioned by the GKNB for an hour before being handed off to the regular police, where he spent another hour answering the same questions before being released with a warning not to run the survey without official approval. Ironically, while no one would confirm that approval had been officially denied, no one seemed interested in giving it either. In truth, this perplexing scenario is probably the result of there being no real mechanism for researchers to seek, and receive, approval for their work in Kyrgyzstan, and a lack of coordination between different power agencies (police, security, etc). Jason and I decided it was best not to meet up for a meal, as he was likely now being watched. He commented, “the looking over your shoulder and constantly worrying about every little thing is a bit taxing [...] this lady came to my door yesterday asking about a trash bill, something called "Osh Tazalyk" and I was groggy and didn't pay much attention and opened the door -- immediately I thought, a ploy to get my definite address!” In fact, Osh Tazalyk is the municipal trash service, and like many other public and

private utilities, they employ an army of foot soldiers who go door-to-door reminding people of their overdue bills and collecting payment.

Jason's paranoia can give us a good chuckle, but it is indicative of the way that uncertainty associated with research in a surveillance state has specific and embodied ramifications, causing the researcher to self-regulate their own actions and live in fear (Jason and I did not call each other or meet up for a meal, as planned.) Jason and I faced similar issues, which were multiply determined by (1) the geography of the research site—a post-conflict and multi-ethnic setting in which competing narratives history and memory have explicit political consequences; (2) our national identities; and (3) the timing of research activities. I also battled with the question of whether to seek official approval for my research, which is not required by law and for which there is no official mechanism. Having approval from state or local authorities could have been useful if I ran into trouble, but it was also not a guarantee. Furthermore, I reasoned, asking for permission signals that one's research activities are in need of monitoring and that they are potentially subversive. Yet I was also torn by the obvious advice, given by a scholar surveyed by the Central Eurasian Studies Society in 2015, that one should, "not be misled by the perception that everything can be done 'informally' in this region. Formal ways are slower, but safer. This way you prove that your intentions are purely academic and you have no 'hidden affiliations' (which may be found suspicious by the security services) (Borbieva et al. 2016, p. 10)." In the end, I elected not to seek permission. However, the constant fear that authorities might be watching permeated every step and every human interaction that I had, waxing and waning as more news of state surveillance surfaced and was then slowly forgotten.

4. *"Working at the margin of what you don't understand"*

The email from my NGO host and the related news of researcher surveillance in Kyrgyzstan had several important consequences, both for the practical aspects of my research and the conceptual framing. I decided to study Kyrgyz language instead of Uzbek language. I resolved never to raise the topic of the 2010 riots or ethnic tension in interviews, although I would eagerly listen and engage if a research participant raised the topic. I scrubbed any reference to conflict or to Uzbek mahallas from my questionnaires and online descriptions of my research project, and I did not organize any explicit research activities until November 2015, after the Parliamentary elections. Finally, I renewed my nascent commitment to more neutral and inclusive questions of urban transformation across multiple lines of difference, diluting a focus on ethnic identity by listing it among many other forms of social difference, including gender, age, language, education, geographic region, urban/rural, etc. While many of these changes were driven by a security prerogative, they also reflect my realization of the problematic nature of my early research questions and a desire to investigate questions that went beyond an understanding of the aftermath of the 2010 riots.

This evolution of my research topic, research questions and opportunities exemplifies the “taught rubber band” that Herbert (2009) insists is an essential, if arduous, process of conducting field work in human geography. Stretched between theory and empirics, “tacking back and forth” between them, the effective qualitative researcher refuses to abide by the false distinction between deductive reasoning and grounded theory, realizing that what matters is only “the ability to connect insightfully our abstract generalizations with our particular observations” (Herbert 2009, 79). The starting point for Herbert, whether theory or data, is irrelevant as long as interesting insights result. But Herbert’s observation can also be refined, for he does not address the element of time or the role of intimate geopolitics in considering the relationship between

theory and empirics. Herbert's sailing metaphor suggests that the tacking and the jibing are frequent and occur in close temporal proximity, but the unfolding of this particular dissertation suggests otherwise. "The field" is no longer a distinct and separate place; the global spread of digital communications technologies stretches the location of fieldwork across large distances and time-spaces. Through e-mail and social media technology we can "go back and forth" to the field quite frequently. At other times, the unfolding happens slowly, imperceptibly or in tension with the researcher's obstinacy. Perhaps to insist on doing things as they were initially designed, for reasons long-ago abandoned, and slowly embracing the new is the only way forward in qualitative research. Burawoy, quoted in Herbert's piece, advocates for just such an approach: "We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction" (Burawoy 1998, 20).

5. Ethics and Agency under State Surveillance

Security, or more accurately, how to do research without attracting unwanted attention, was an ongoing topic of discussion between myself and Gulnara, a multi-lingual Research Assistant who is ethnically Kyrgyz. In May 2016 I went to the telecom office with Gulnara to set up home Internet service. The customer service employee balked when presented with an American passport and told us she would need to call a senior administrator to handle the issue. Instinctively, Gulnara volunteered to provide her own phone number and passport information. Gulnara and I frequently lamented the red tape involved in doing many basic administrative tasks in Kyrgyzstan, and so the simple act of registering the Internet service in Gulnara's name was a no-brainer that we did not question right away. As we left the office, I worried out loud to

Gulnara that my online activities might be traced to her. I knew this was possible, even likely: an American acquaintance of mine in Bishkek had her phone tapped and her apartment was under police surveillance for a few weeks after a friend used her computer to do an online search about the FBI. Gulnara laughed and said that she could not believe her government was capable of following people. “Most people think the government is a joke,” she said to diffuse the tension.

This was not the first time Gulnara and I talked about security related to state surveillance and research. We had discussed how to negotiate certain sensitive research questions and topics in depth. It was Gulnara who recommended that I avoid using the word “issledovaniye” (исследование, or research, in Russian) to represent my activities, and when it came to judging when a sensitive topic (ethnicity and conflict, in particular) could be raised with a research participant, Gulnara’s awareness of social and cross-cultural issues was profound and I relied on her heavily to take the lead. Yet, I struggled to comprehend her nonchalance about the broader landscape of risk and insecurity that we often faced and negotiated together. We had access to very different but equally authoritative sets of knowledge about state surveillance and the risk that it posed to us as researchers—mine collected over dozens of conversations and hers over dozens of years living in Kyrgyzstani society. Gulnara told me yet another story about foreign researchers drawing the GKNB’s attention to a young Uzbek male and his family, and I jumped on the story as a way to illustrate my point: it was proof that we should be extra vigilant and careful. However, Gulnara saw it in an opposite light—certainly it was not license to be cavalier, but it was proof that everything would turn out okay. Her point turned on her own positionality within southern Kyrgyzstani society: in her calculations, she was not taking any risk because she was not Uzbek, and also because she had relatives who worked for the police. In an unlikely event that she was in trouble, they would bail her out. I thought she was naïve about her

country's police system, level of political corruption and the state's willingness to abuse basic human rights. The corrupt and predatory system that I knew and feared was in fact a source of security for Gulnara because she knew how to make it work for her. Moreover, even when presented with the same information, we interpreted it in different ways, in part because we were very differently positioned within Kyrgyzstani society. Without a strong local network of contacts to call upon, perhaps I was the more vulnerable one. Our differential diagnoses of the security situation upended the simple dichotomy of privileged westerner and vulnerable local participant, even if these categories were meaningful in the context of, for example, our differential wealth, employment opportunities or healthcare access. This reversed the expected subject positions that are attached to geopolitical identities (the passport-protected one-third world and the two-thirds world).

Our differential diagnoses of the security situation upended the simple dichotomy of privileged westerner and vulnerable local that I had come to expect, and our discussions about the risk of surveillance cemented itself around the question of whose knowledge was more authoritative, mine—"the boss" as Gulnara often jokingly referred to me, knowing that she was often the true boss in our activities together—or hers, the young student who had lived all her life in southern Kyrgyzstan. The disagreement hinged on the question of agency: Gulnara interpreted my motivations as rooted in a distrust of her ability to make her own decisions about her safety, and as a dismissal of the knowledge that she relied on to make those decisions. Raised intellectually on postcolonial studies and feminist geographies, I constructed myself as the privileged, white foreigner on the insured side of the life-chance divide (Duffield 2010), and Gulnara as a brilliant but perhaps still naïve young woman struggling to make her way in a world that we both knew was deeply unfair.

How should a researcher balance the ethical and moral imperative to do no harm with the equally important imperative, which comes out of the powerful postcolonial critique of knowledge production, to give research subjects power and agency over the research process? Gulnara assured me that she was safe making decisions herself about participation in my research project, but I still felt that I had ethical responsibilities towards her that overrode her own choices. As the CESS Fieldwork Safety report noted,

Some survey respondents felt that the role of local research assistants and associates in research projects must be reduced to protect them. One responded: “I am not willing to put assistants at risk for research.” [...] However, respondents’ concerns about collaborative research design and co-authored publications highlight countervailing ethical imperatives. For researchers – foreign and local – committed to co-producing knowledge with long-standing colleagues the idea that certain individuals would be unacknowledged is ethically distasteful. Ethical imperatives may work at cross-purposes in some cases. (Borbieva et al. 2016, p. 11; emphasis added)

My experience demonstrates the limits of what it means to decolonize knowledge production, especially when the research project is driven from the outside. Our participants have their own agency and should be empowered to make their own choices, but a commitment to maintain that kind of agency clashes with normal standards in research ethics, especially across individuals with uneven vulnerabilities.

6. *Authoritarian governmentality: Getting to know the surveillance state*

Quite a few recently published volumes address questions of risk, insecurity and the threat of state violence while conducting fieldwork in Central Eurasia. The authors and editors of these volumes take different strategies as they grapple with the problem of defining the scope, scale and nature of the threat. Thus, they variously situate their discussions in terms of working in “authoritarian contexts” (Glasius et al. 2018), under the threat of both state and non-state persecution and violence (Borbieva et al. 2016), in so-called “difficult environments” (Wall and

Mollinga 2008), in “hybrid regimes” (Goode 2016) or “closed contexts” (Koch 2013b). Implicitly, then, these pieces, which tend towards the empirical and descriptive, are also dealing with the problem of state and territory: how should one think of the state in the context of one’s own fieldwork difficulties?

Furthermore, these pieces tend to be limited to descriptions of ethical dilemmas and practical challenges to participant and researcher safety. While such conversations are important and, I believe, should occur regularly, there is quite a large literature dedicated to them already. As far as stories of risk and insecurity during fieldwork go, those I have described throughout this chapter are relatively tame, a far cry from the “extreme fieldwork” that poses a quite different set of challenges to the academy (Driscoll and Schuster 2018). Yet Rose (1997) reminds us that the mundane and everyday aspects of conducting research are themselves sites through which power operates. Recognizing that the researcher cannot evade the dynamics of power that operate in a particular place, a number of feminist geographers have sought “to connect what they understand as the microlevel of everyday experience to the macrolevel of power relations,” (Rose 1997, p. 310). For example, Lentz (2014) draws on his experience negotiating access to Vietnamese villages as a way to “map power” by positioning himself “analytically in the same webbed relations under study.” I propose that my encounters with the ethical dilemmas and personal safety threats during fieldwork can tell us something about the way that power operates in Kyrgyzstan. Implicitly, then, I reject the idea of power as located only at the level of the state or government, and the state as separate from society or individuals (T. Mitchell 2006), and I seek to move beyond the normative liberal/illiberal binary that is often used to characterize the state (Koch 2013b; Mawdsley 2016). Instead of trying to characterize or classify what *kind* of state Kyrgyzstan is, I follow Koch’s (2013) call to think through these

stories of state surveillance using the lens of governmentality. Doing so draws attention away from a focus on state or regime typology and emphasizes the productive, generative, multi-directional and capillary nature of power relations. It also moves us away from seeing power as an external force “weighing down” on society to a closer reading of how individual subjects are co-implicated in power relations that also have something to do with the state.

Mitchell Dean asks whether the concept of governmentality can be useful “in thinking about the technologies and rationalities of authoritarian forms of rule in [...] Nazi Germany or [...] contemporary China?” (2010, p. 154). He finds that authoritarian and liberal-democratic forms of governmentality are two sides of the same coin. All modern states, Dean argues, rely on a *unique assemblage of sovereign and biopolitical technologies of rule*. Foucault (1978, 2009) describes a historical shift from sovereign to biopolitical modes of power over the course of the 19th century: *sovereignty* is a kind of political power that operates over individuals in a territory, while *biopolitical* power operates through the self-conduct of a population as a whole, without the use of direct force. “Conduct” describes how certain actions become thinkable or unthinkable, and behavior deemed normal or abnormal. In biopolitical power, the *population* as a whole, rather than territory or the individual body, is the scale at which power operates, and the population is no longer bound to the limits of sovereign (national) space. Biopolitics is also a productive power of giving life (bios) or letting die, while sovereignty is a mode of power characterized by the sovereign’s right to take life or let live. Foucault traces an evolution of different modes of power over time, from disciplinary to sovereign to biopolitical rule, but one does not simply replace the other. Rather, while one mode of power may be dominant, the other modes of power also operate in contemporary societies. Thus, Dean reminds us that the difference between “liberal” and “illiberal” states is in the particular mix of sovereign and

biopolitical technologies and rationalities. It is not simply that liberal rule is marked by time-spaces of despotism (see Opitz 2011), and that authoritarian rule is marked by occasional spaces of freedom, but that both liberal and illiberal rule draw on the same set of available tools, discourses, technologies and rationalities. For example, Tikly (2003) shows how a plurality of rationalities of governance has arisen in post-Apartheid South African educational policies, including disciplinary, biopolitical and neoliberal rationalities of governance.

My stories of surveillance during fieldwork make legible the particular assemblage of biopolitics and sovereignty that work in and through the bodies of myself and my research participants. National security is a rationality or discourse that functions in both biopolitical and sovereign forms of rule to maintain control over a population through a logic of care or safety. In the exercise of sovereign power, security functions to maintain borders and territorial control, while in biopolitical rule, individuals are persuaded to conduct themselves in the name of security. (As we have seen since 9/11, for example, many states have invoked a discourse of security in order to control their populations, and that security discourse is itself invoked by individuals to justify racist and xenophobic views.)

This framework gives us as a way of understanding how the surveillance state acts upon the intimate lives of the researcher and participants through an assemblage of biopolitical and sovereign power. In particular, the disagreement between myself and Gulnara about surveillance and risk can be framed in how we each came to know and understand the state and the operation of state power, what Mitchell (2006) refers to as the “state effect.” He argues that the abstract and ideological forms of the state cannot be separated from the mundane and micro practices that produce it (T. Mitchell 1999). Yet, through the technology of surveillance, the state materialized to me, Gulnara, Chynara and Nilufar in different ways and forms. One way to view these

materializations is through the lens of governmentality, and in particular, to ask how forms of political rule operate over and through differently-positioned political subjects. As an American researcher funded through a US-government Fulbright fellowship, I am a political subject whose rights as a citizen of a sovereign western country exceed the boundaries of the state that grants them. Fluri (2009) characterizes those in such a position as the “citizens of sovereignty,” in contrast to “citizens of exception.” Thus, it is not simply that the fear of surveillance caused me to engage in a kind of biopolitical self-discipline of my own research activities, including avoiding important but sensitive topics and figures, and canceling research plans. Rather, I could feel a certain measure of protection through my American national identity *even when* the American Embassy was paralyzed. The operation of Kyrgyzstani state power over me, which took the form of my self-disciplining behavior, was established through a rationality of ethical self-conduct and obligation that is stimulated by the uneven effects of surveillance and the threat of state violence over others. This is the essence of biopolitical power—power over subjects through the cultivation of an ethical rationality through which individuals govern themselves. Furthermore, my own ethical self-conduct worked in the service of Kyrgyzstani—not American or European—state interests. This example sheds light on the interaction of different modes of power through the situated body of a political subject, and it complicates the notion that political authority is exerted over a finite territory. In other words, the Kyrgyzstani government exercises power and authority over the subjects of “liberal” states in part through their own political subjectivities, which are tied to other territorialized and sovereign states. It does so by creating a credible threat over populations who lie outside of its care (e.g., Uzbeks), because their existence does not conform with the Kyrgyzstani state’s own notions of civic mindedness and participation in national life. The credibility of the Kyrgyzstani state threat to me as an American researcher is

based in part on my own field of specialized technical knowledge and commitment to rights-centered notions of personhood and subjectivity. It also does so by cultivating a lack of clarity over the question of whether certain research activities are illegal or not. These operate together with a fairly clumsy surveillance apparatus that appears juvenile and “a joke” to some, while creating real fear among others who are actually protected.

The technology of surveillance operates through a different mechanism over ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz citizens of Kyrgyzstan. As Gulnara brought to my attention, ethnic Kyrgyz understand that they are not the targets of the surveillance state in the south and that their ethnicity protects them. They are able to operate more or less freely with respect to politically sensitive research topics, although there is still a line of intolerance related to anything concerning ethnic relations or conflict, and Chynara’s fear upon meeting me in public suggests that this is not a blanket truth. Thus, many Kyrgyz journalists are able to write freely about ethnic tensions while Uzbek journalists frequently write under pseudonyms. The differential threat and its intersection with ethnic difference is illustrated by an Uzbek journalist I knew in Osh, who had been encouraged to write an inflammatory article under his true name in order to gain asylum in the west. Uzbeks are convinced to act (or not to act) through a form of sovereign power that operates through a threat to imprison, and a negation of rights within a certain territory, but that cannot function beyond it.

This threat, furthermore, operates on the ethically-motivated researcher as well. In southern Kyrgyzstan, digital surveillance is an imperfect tool of security that intersects with differently-positioned political and juridical subjects. It persuades some (i.e. Caitlin) to engage in self-censorship and self-discipline, while it works through a rationality of subjecthood and care over ethnic Kyrgyz that allows them to operate as if state power is impotent. Of course it is not,

however, as the responses of Uzbeks to surveillance suggests. Yet in the multi-ethnic society of southern Kyrgyzstan, where ethnic identity is not always straightforwardly obvious, the subjects through which these biopolitical and pastoral powers operate do not exist in silos; they interact with each other, as Caitlin and Gulnara did; and as Chynara did with Uzbek youth at her NGO. The different effects of the surveillance tool in Caitlin's fieldwork led to substantially different understandings of personal risk and responsibility, leading to individual choices based on considerations of ethical and moral personhood as well as on questions of agency and independence. The disagreement about whether surveillance was a concern or not ultimately boiled down to a question of human agency.

The challenges that I have described in negotiating state surveillance point to the mutually constitutive nature of geopolitics and the intimate. They forced me to understand, in a more visceral way, how the surveillance state operates in and through the differently-positioned political subjects of myself and my participants and collaborators. Globalization, capitalism, and the nation-state are often represented as the most powerful actors shaping the world today, rendering individuals powerless and unable to act independently in the face of such universalizing forces. Feminist geographers have fought against such top-down views, arguing that different scales are co-constitutive of one another and that, rather than doing away with scale as an analytical category, it is important to challenge the hierarchy and presumed flow of power between different scales. Mountz and Hyndman argue for "embodied epistemologies" as both a way of holding scholars accountable for their representations of globalization and the relationships between different scales (2006, p. 458). A focus on the intimate is a strategy for making the global seem more familiar, rendering the abstract in human terms, and as a tool for challenging the presumed hierarchies of scale (Marston 2000; D. Massey 1993). I have tried to

bring my intimate struggles and disagreements about the surveillance state into this chapter. In our ongoing conversations about surveillance, Gulnara and I cultivated what Mitchell describes as a “state effect”—attributing to the ambiguously-defined state a certain power and purpose that it did not, perhaps, always actually have, or always actually exercise. The limits of the surveillance state—what was inside and what was outside—were hard to discern. Ambiguity about the limits of the state caused the anxiety and disagreement described in this chapter—processes only visible at the level of personal interaction and intimate relationships. The boundaries of inside and outside were drawn through the macro geopolitical, with specific effects on different populations—American, Kyrgyz, Uzbek—who in turn (and this is the mutually constitutive process described above) “produced” very different visions and manifestations of the Kyrgyzstani state: from an impotent state that everyone treats as a “joke” to one that is so feared that a conversation begins with questions about safety, security and affiliation, to one that is a wild card, whose power and ability to harm shifts over time. Mitchell suggests that we cannot separate the material and ideological forms of the state; rather, that they both arise from the same process: “the phenomenon we name ‘the state’ arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, nonmaterial form (Mitchell 2006, p. 170).” The mundane, material practices of clumsy and conspicuous surveillance operate within, through and between the individuals involved in ethnographic research and knowledge production.

7. Conclusion

A major question dominating my fieldwork was: how *competent* is the government? What was its true intention? The fear and questions created by surveillance caused me to “effect”

the state – to attribute a sense of intention, top-down order and coherence that do not actually exist. Sorting this out created tension, and challenged me to think hard about what “agency” and privilege mean. In my 10 months of fieldwork I was cautiously testing the limits of what Kyrgyz state surveillance would permit me to do, and what it would not. This was a back-and-forth. It took time to understand the abilities/capabilities of the state. The Kyrgyzstani state is not an all-powerful monolith with nuanced capabilities. After placing an ad in a newspaper for research participations, my paranoia levels were quite high. I worried about the three languages of the ad (in Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian, which was highly unusual) drawing attention to me as a researcher of ethnicity and conflict. I also worried about who would respond, what their motives might be, whether it would be easy to follow us since the ad listed phone numbers registered under my name, and simply about meeting up with complete strangers. But after having an on-the-record interview explicitly about ethnicity and conflict, my paranoia levels went down. It was in this back-and-forth that I learned something about where the extent/reach of Kyrgyzstani state power. The state became known to me through the vicissitudes of my security-related fears.

CHAPTER 3

PEACE-BUILDING, COSMOPOLITANISM AND MEMORY WORK

1. Introduction

This chapter considers the field of expert knowledge produced about the 2010 riots by the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), two influential actors in international humanitarian and development circles. Specifically, I consider how these groups' highly influential analytical reports about the 2010 conflict, which are broadly representative of their field, engage in historical analysis. Historiography is just one among many possible representations of event-time (much like a map is only one of many possible representations of space). It is therefore important to consider how particular readings of history are recruited into the service of mainstream development and humanitarian interventions. This is an area of critical development geographies that has not been sufficiently considered. Here, I show that the ICG and HRW reports construct a particular version of Osh's recent history through which to understand and contextualize the violence of 2010. The reports' narratives draw attention to, and naturalize, the recurrence of violence in Osh by selecting a historical starting point in 1990 (but not before), and drawing attention to similarities between the 1990 and 2010 conflicts. Certainly, these conflicts have many commonalities, but their significant differences are erased. In part, this

erasure happens because of the very limited discussion of the details of the 1990 conflict, and the elimination of historical context from that discussion.

Chapter 3 traced the changing ontologies of ethnic identity in Central Asia, documenting how a category of social difference that did not exist as we know it in Central Asia just 150 years ago has taken on definite forms and meanings through, in part, processes of state- and boundary-making. The categories of ethno-national identity that seem so natural and that offer such easy explanatory power today are in fact living, changing and contested histories and identities in the making. These histories are used by elite and non-elite alike in making claims to resources and political representation, and in negotiating the possibilities and realities of everyday life. Yet, as this chapter will show, the process of reinventing Kyrgyzstan's history and politics of belonging is not only the purview of domestic actors: international development and humanitarian groups are also involved in the process of memory work. Mainstream development interventions are predicated on certain readings of history and identity. This chapter builds on the story of how social differences have been produced and contested within Kyrgyzstan by looking beyond Kyrgyzstani state and society to interrogate the way that the international development and humanitarian industry has engaged with history and ethnicity in its peace-building and conflict prevention programs. One result of this erasure is that social difference is flattened, molded into distinct and immutable categories of "Uzbek" and "Kyrgyz" that are seen to have always (at least, since 1990) existed as such. The flattening of identities is an effective strategy for western humanitarian interventions in the region because it enables a logic of multicultural cosmopolitanism to guide programmatic interventions.

This chapter considers the structuring practices of post-conflict aid by focusing on the discursive projects of international peace building and conflict prevention projects, looking at the

ways that ethnicity and conflict are framed as logics and rationales of intervention. Ferguson (1994) argues that the discourses of mainstream development initiatives are structuring practices that are replicated not because they succeed in their stated goals but because they enable the exercise of bureaucratic state power. Ferguson was interested in poverty alleviation, whereas here I focus on peace building and conflict prevention. I ask what the re-framing of history does for the development-humanitarian apparatus. By drawing on literature from critical geographies of development and humanitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and the anthropology of history and memory, I conclude that mainstream development actors use a reimagined version of history in order to maintain a static and binary view of difference that is amenable to the principles of liberal democracy and to the tools of peace building and conflict prevention that are at their disposal.

In order to make these arguments, I begin by looking at a set of formative and widely cited reports about the 2010 riots published three important knowledge-producing institutions of the international community: the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, and the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC). I show that the earlier conflict in 1990 has been recast as a conflict about ethnicity, and as a precursor to the 2010 riots, such that there is a sense of inevitability about the 2010 violence that justifies further foreign aid intervention. This is true despite strong evidence that peace building and preventative development in the Fergana Valley are misguided and ineffective (Megoran et al. 2014b, 2014a). Second, I discuss the “Peacefest,” one part of a larger project implemented by my NGO partner and funded by the European Commission’s Instrument for Stability. The Peacefest event illustrates many of the challenges inherent to peace building and conflict prevention, including the divergent ways that local and western actors understand conflict and go about building peace. The Peacefest example

highlights how ideals of cosmopolitanism are embedded in western interventions that result in misguided programs, and also how the financial resources for peacebuilding are often redirected by local actors in more productive ways.

Throughout the chapter I use the terms “mainstream development actor” and “development-humanitarian industry” interchangeably, and in a broad sense to include western and bilateral donors, NGOs and for-profit development groups, as well as international and multilateral humanitarian organizations. While expert practitioners differentiate between peace building and conflict prevention,²² both are specific kinds of intervention used by mainstream development actors, and the terms are often used interchangeably by non-expert practitioners (e.g., in the Peacefest project discussed later, the implementing agency, DVV International, does not appear to differentiate between the two terms). Therefore, I recognize the differences in theory, but I treat both categories of peace and conflict programming interchangeably because that is how they are generally practiced. Finally, stretching the definition of “mainstream development actor” a bit further, in the second part of this chapter I argue for including policy-oriented research groups and think tanks into the definition.

2. Memory work as a technique of peace-building

One of the enduring hopes of engaged and critical scholarship about Central Asia over the last 25 years has been to counter the mainstream narrative about the region as mired in

²² Galtung and Fischer (2013) distinguish between positive peace and negative peace. The latter is the lack of violence and exploitation, and the former is the presence of factors such as cooperation, equity and dialogue. These concepts clarify the conceptual distinction between peace-building and conflict prevention as the practice of foreign or external intervention. One further distinction may be that peace-building tends to be a project when conflict has been fairly recent, while conflict prevention tends to be a project initiated when a past conflict is fairly distant but many tensions in a society are still unresolved. Ultimately, though, these typologies are not of particular significance here because both peace building and conflict prevention involve similar types of activities (e.g. training community mediators), and they have both been part of “preventative development” programming in southern Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere around the world since the late 1990s.

“ancient ethnic hatreds” (Schoberlein-Engel 1994; Megoran 2000; Karagulova and Megoran 2011; Heathershaw and Megoran 2011b; Morrison 2017). Unfortunately, this project is as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. For example, *The Economist’s* headline about the 2010 riots in Osh read, “Stalin’s Harvest: The latest outbreak of violence in the ethnic boiling pot of Central Asia will take generations to heal (*The Economist* 2010).” The article reproduces two erroneous and, ironically, somewhat contradictory tropes about the region. The first is that Stalin sought to create ethnic conflict in a bid to divide and conquer Central Asia.²³ The story of Stalin’s so-called strategy of dividing in order to conquer continues to shape outside expert knowledge of the region. For example, a member of the international aid industry who was involved in the post-2010 humanitarian response authored a number of blog posts, published under a pseudonym, that were critical of the Kyrgyz government’s handling of the reconstruction efforts. In them, the author explains that, “the legacy of the USSR was to add arbitrary and tortuous borders between the republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Kaigyluu 2012a).” The second trope suggested by the Economist article is that the 2010 riots are *yet another* example of the presumed reliability of ethnic conflict to recur in the region. This language renders conflict between ethnic groups at once timeless and cyclical; the use of the words “the latest” suggests that the recurrence of violence is almost predetermined. The analyses and reports of international aid groups are, thankfully, more nuanced and refrain from such outrightly essentializing representations of violence and tragedy. Still, mainstream development groups enact a similar set of problems in the way they frame conflict and history in Central Asia. These, I argue, are related to the production and circulation of expert knowledge about the region.

²³ This myth has been debunked by some of the most important historians of Soviet Central Asia. See: Tishkov 2002; Hirsch 2005; Morrison 2017.

As I began my research on the 2010 violence in Osh, I turned to the work of the standard “expert” intuitions to gain my first in-depth understanding of the crisis. Two reports from the International Crisis Group (ICG) were especially influential: “The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan (2010)” and “Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South (2012).” While there are many reports about the 2010 riots, these merit particular scrutiny because they are “nodal points” within a very large collection of analytical material about the conflict. As seminal texts that are referenced by many others, nodal points do not “merely report what has happened, but script, spin and frame events in a certain way” (Lemon, in Montgomery et al. 2016, p. 10). The reports and analyses of this small but influential group of policy-oriented research groups and think tanks is widely read within donor and development circles.²⁴

It is not just that policy research groups are influential in international development work. I argue that they should be considered as part of the humanitarian-development industry itself. As the imperative for evidence-based decision-making has worked its way from the glass and marble hallways of donor offices and into the tea houses, drama theaters and training halls of development practice, public policy research groups are increasingly involved directly in mainstream development programs. The tight link between donors and think tanks in conflict prevention and peace building in Kyrgyzstan is easily illustrated. For example, in 2012 the World Bank provided a USD 2 million grant to advance “social cohesion” in Kyrgyzstan, a project designed to respond to the underlying ethnic tensions that led to the 2010 violence. The program was managed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the

²⁴ The KIC represents the work of the international human rights community. After pressure from many sources to conduct a thorough investigation into the 2010 violence, the interim government of Kyrgyzstan led by President Roza Otunbaeva formally requested the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Special Representative for Central Asia to coordinate an independent body with a mandate “to investigate the facts and circumstances of these events.” The work received technical and financial support from the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Institute of Public Policy and Administration, part of the US-sponsored University of Central Asia (located in Bishkek).²⁵ One of the SIPRI program components is a Social Cohesion Summer School, run every year in Bishkek. According to the summer school's 2017 call for applications, the aim is to train young professors in Central Asia in data-driven and statistical methods for measuring social cohesion and conducting impact evaluations. Precisely because such projects are common, we should interrogate the kinds of knowledge produced and consumed through such initiatives.

The ICG's first report (2010) explicitly frames the 2010 violence in Osh around a narrative about history repeating itself. The Executive Summary states: "Many features of the 2010 violence strongly resemble the last round of bloody ethnic clashes, in 1990," and the main body of the report begins:

It is little coincidence that the latest outburst of inter-communal violence took place at a time when Kyrgyzstan's central government was seriously weakened. History was in fact repeating itself. In 1990, when at least 600 died in ethnic violence according to official estimates, the Soviet Union was moving rapidly towards disintegration, and local political forces were manoeuvring to fill the power vacuum. *Twenty years on*, a weak and tentative provisional government was struggling to present a semblance of leadership and steer the country through to elections in October. [emphasis added]

Some of the language here mirrors the sensationalist style of The Economists' coverage, such as reference to the conflict being only the "latest outburst" of violence, lending the 2010 riots an aura of inevitability and imposing an almost teleological sense of predestined violence. As in many other reports, the repetition of the fact that the 2010 riots happened *almost exactly twenty years* after those in 1990 further contributes to these discourses. As the emphasis added to the original text above attempts to highlight, the ICG report also draws repeated comparisons between the 1990 and 2010 riots. For example, in the authors' interpretation, the Soviet state

²⁵ IPPA is an arm of the USAID-sponsored University of Central Asia, an elite University that

response to the riots in 1990 buried but did not resolve underlying factors. ICG writes: “All official studies of the 1990 ethnic violence were classified, and no attempt was made to address its root causes, *thus laying the groundwork* for the violence of 2010 [emphasis added].” However, no study has demonstrated that grievances from the 1990 violence played a role in 2010’s violence. The final paragraphs of a special section in the report about the 1990 riots offer a few specific details that are clearly meant to highlight further similarities. For example, the report mentions that in 1990 graffiti reading “UZB” or “KYG” appeared in many parts of the city,²⁶ and groups of villagers from the ethnic Kyrgyz region of Alai, located in the mountainous southeast of the country, came to the city to protect their co-ethnics in the fight. The graffiti in the city and the mobilization of ethnic Kyrgyz from other parts of the country were notable characteristics of the 2010 violence as well. The section ends by noting, “Most of the factors and features noted by the KGB in 1990 *were to resurface* in 2010 [emphasis added].” In short, the ICG report repeatedly argues that the conflict in 1990 was a precursor to the conflict in 2010.

It is surprisingly difficult to find a comprehensive discussion of the 1990 riots anywhere. Thus, in addition to drawing a seemingly indisputable connection between the two conflicts, the ICG report is also noteworthy because of the space dedicated to discussing those events – a full half page of text, heavily footnoted, which comprises the first main section of the report. This text situates the 1990 conflict within the impending collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting power vacuum, which, the report says, enabled the rise of local activists from Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities within both the Kyrgyz and Uzbek SSRs. These groups, the report explains, had “a strongly ethnic-based program.” The second paragraph continues:

Violence in June 1990 was *triggered by a land dispute* in Osh involving two such groups.

²⁶ It is not entirely clear whether this kind of graffiti was meant as a defensive or offensive strategy; most likely it was a combination of the two (Canning 2016).

Kyrgyz activists from Osh Aymagi demanded that authorities hand over land belonging to a *kolkhoz* (collective farm), whose workers and residents were predominantly Uzbek. The activists' aim, according to a contemporary KGB account, was to create a "purely Kyrgyz settlement". Uzbek activists protested, and after six demonstrators were killed, went on a rampage, attacking police and Kyrgyz communities. There was looting and depredation on both sides. Most accounts agree that during the first days of the unrest, the Uzbeks had the upper hand, then groups of Kyrgyz arrived from the surrounding countryside, inflicting serious casualties on them. [emphasis added]

The next two paragraphs describe how the violence ultimately ended (through the intervention of the Soviet airborne) and the commentary of a Russian Colonel-General who derides the Kyrgyzstani government's inability to control the situation in 2010. The last paragraph of this section draws more parallels between 1990 and 2010.

With the exception of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission's report (2011), *no other major report* about the 2010 riots provides a deeper or more comprehensive discussion of the 1990 riots than the 2010 ICG report. I include the key paragraph above in full to give a sense for the vagueness in one of the most detailed and widely-read discussions about 1990, and to draw attention to the exclusions and omissions from this text. The ICG text raises many more questions than it answers: Who was involved in the group *Osh Aymagi*? What were the groups' demands and rationales? What is the history of the group, and what happened to it after the 1990 riots? Which particular elements of their program and activism were "strongly ethnic-based" and how were they articulated? The same set of questions about Uzbek groups' demands also remain unanswered. Further, what was significant about the particular *kolkhoz* that Osh Aymagi was demanding? If many groups with "strongly ethnic-based programs" emerged from the power vacuum in the last days of the Soviet period, then why did the conflict take place where and when it did? In addition to these omissions, the historical context of the 1990 riots offered in the report makes reference to a late-Soviet power vacuum, but this calls for a more deeply textured understanding. How did a power vacuum allow for the rise of groups with explicitly ethnic goals

and claims? Why did these sorts of ethnic-based political agendas take such a violent turn? And why didn't we see similar eruptions of violence across the Soviet Union, especially in the very diverse areas of the north and south Caucasus? Such questions deserve further investigation.

However, the narrative that the ICG report adopts—that the 1990 riots were about a land dispute between two ethnic groups taking place within the power vacuum of the collapsing Soviet Union—is *the only way* that the events of 1990 are understood and interpreted. It is also worth noting that this report trivializes the “land dispute” as a “trigger” or immediate cause, implicitly suggesting that ethnicity is the true or root cause of violence. The narrative of the ICG report is ubiquitous, repeated nearly verbatim in dozens of texts analyzing the main factors of the conflict and planning peace-building initiatives. Take, for example, a 2011 report by Saferworld titled, “Looking back to look forward”:

There have been concerns about the potential for serious violent conflict in the Ferghana Valley for over 20 years. The violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 again demonstrated that these fears are not unfounded and raised the spectre of even more serious bloodshed in the near future. (Hiscock and Paasiaro 2011)

While I fully agree that one must “look back to look forward,” the Saferworld report does not do so in any serious way. Because it does not discuss the details of the 1990 riots, readers are left to draw conclusions about the causes of the 1990 violence through their understanding of the 2010 violence, which is paradoxically a strategy of “looking forward to look back.” In this problematic exercise, one must presume that the causes of violence have remained the same. The 2010 violence is widely understood as an “ethnic conflict,” and so readers are likely to assume that violence in 1990 was also primarily about ethnicity. Another effect of glossing over the details of the 1990 events is that they are rewritten in a singular framing that implicitly acknowledges *only* ethnically-motivated causes of violence. This is problematic for several reasons: (1) as Chapter 3 shows, ethnicity's role in Kyrgyzstani state and society was not static during the 20-year period

between the two conflicts; (2) as Chapters 3 and 4 show, ethnicity is not a flat, one-dimensional, either-or, trait; rather it is fluid, multiple, and time and place dependent; and (3) by framing the 1990 events as a precursor to the 2010 riots, the latter are also imbued with the narrow lens of ethnicity as the main culprit, the thing to be solved or overcome. In short, the generalized accounting of the 1990 events in reports about the 2010 violence *reinvent 1990 in purely ethnic terms*.

Even some of the most nuanced and rigorous scholarly reflections on the 2010 conflict gloss over the details of the 1990 events. One insightful working paper, “Peacebuilding and Reconciliation Projects in Southern Kyrgyzstan” identifies five common factors that influenced both the 1990 and 2010 riots (Megoran et al. 2014b, p. 33). These are: (1) resentments stemming from the structure of ethno-territorial settlement, (2) poverty and unemployment, disproportionately affecting rural Kyrgyz, (3) fears that Uzbeks are a threat to the territorial integrity of the state, (4) political instability and crisis, and (5) the inability of local and national authorities and institutions to de-escalate and respond to crisis. The authors argue that the humanitarian-development apparatus has largely failed to address any of these five common factors through their peace building programs. Yet even this important report reproduces a similarly generalized narrative about the 1990 riots, failing to discuss or contextualize them.

In the English-language literature, there are just two academic sources about the 1990 riots. In “Don't Kill Me, I'm a Kyrgyz!": An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict,” Tishkov (1995)²⁷ draws on the criminal court proceedings that took place after the 1990 riots and is concerned with documenting the nature of specific acts of violence, as well

²⁷ Tishkov was also one of the seven “eminent personalities and experts” who served on the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission. Among many other prestigious academic posts, he is Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and is the former Minister of Nationalities of the Russian Federation.

as the kind of justice that took place afterwards. The focus is on effects rather than causes. Nevertheless, to introduce the paper Tishkov lists the causes of conflict as, “inter alia increasing intergroup competition over resources (land lots), a struggle to gain control over power structures, social differentiation along ‘city-village’ lines, unemployment and lack of housing.”²⁸ It is unfortunate that Tishkov does not tell us more, as these issues closely mirror what I have attempted to describe as a forgotten history of 1990 (here, and see also Chapter 3), and none of these issues made Megoran, et al’s list of similarities between 1990 and 2010, although I would argue that they should be included. The mere listing of “inter alia” causes without explanation, and the relegation of a key issue to the obscurity of parentheses, makes it all too easy to read over. While this document is well-read and cited among development professionals and analysts, we can hardly blame them for missing a hidden message.

Asankanov’s piece, “Ethnic conflict in the Osh region in summer 1990: Reasons and lessons” (Asankanov 1996)²⁹ is a more comprehensive analysis of the factors leading to the 1990 violence. While it is loosely based on a May 1992 survey of 2,000 respondents from Osh oblast about their understandings of economic, social and political aspects of the 1990 violence, the paper is more appropriately viewed as a qualitative analysis. Unfortunately Asankanov does not publish the full survey results or methodology, instead selectively drawing on basic descriptive statistics to illustrate his analysis. Published six years after the 1990 violence, Asankavov nevertheless warns that “it is still early to draw any final conclusions” and he proposes that he can only “venture some preliminary remarks” (p. 117). While the paper is short

²⁸ Tishkov also adds that the incompetence of the oblast administration, nationalist Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups, and the “economic mafia” and unspecified “political changes brought about by perestroika” also played a role in causing the riots.

²⁹ Abilbek Asankanov was Chairman of the Ethnology Department of History at the Kyrgyz State University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from 2001-2005 and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic.

and touches on a wide number of issues, it was also the most comprehensive and nuanced English-language study of the processes that contributed to the 1990 violence.³⁰ Notably,

Asankanov writes:

The housing problem became one of the most important factors in the tragic events in Osh. Statistically, 47 per cent of the Kyrgyz, 49 per cent of the Russians, and 48.3 per cent of the Uzbeks surveyed thought that one of the main causes of the tragedy was the housing shortage. In Osh region nearly 60,000 families, or every sixth family, was on the waiting list for housing. In ethnic terms, the bulk of these still waiting were young native men. For years they have been waiting for dwellings and plots of land, while living in hostels. Among their actions, they formed the informal organization Osh Aimagi. (pp. 118-119)

Perhaps because Asankanov writes about many factors and does not seek to prioritize or highlight anything in particular, this statement has also gone unnoticed by those who have read his work. Notably, neither the Tishkov nor the Asankanov papers focus on ethnicity as a “root cause” of conflict in 1990, and both draw attention to questions of land, housing and urbanization. It seems that what was a clear and well-understood aspect of the conflict in the early 1990s has been forgotten in the aftermath of the 2010 violence.

On the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of Russian language news sources produced special multimedia projects and article series about the dissolution. The 1990 violence in Osh region played a major role in the trajectory of independent Kyrgyzstan, and it is therefore discussed in some depth in these sources. Two of these special projects provide important context and detail about the 1990 violence that does not feature in the sources about the 2010 violence described above. Lenta.ru’s project, *Days of the Eclipse: A Special Project Dedicated to the Events of 1991* (Lenta.Ru 2012), includes several articles about

³⁰ Shirin Akiner’s 2016 report, “Kyrgyzstan 2010: Conflict and Context,” published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, is a wonderful and detailed resource that contains excellent background information and detail about the 1990 riots. Because it was published only in 2016, I do not consider it a “key node” influencing mainstream humanitarian and development practice during the period that I write about here (e.g. during and before my fieldwork).

the period, including, “After Osh: How did Kyrgyzstan go [exit from the Union]?”³¹ RIA Novosti also published a series of retrospective pieces throughout 2016 on the 25th anniversary of the original event, including an article titled, “The Osh Events of 1990 in Kyrgyzstan” on June 4th, 2016 (*RIA Novosti* 2016). The Russian news pieces draw attention to several important but neglected elements of the 1990 riots, including:

- (1) An emphasis on the question of land distribution and the relationship between rural and urban populations, including information about land protests and land seizures in Frunze (Bishkek) in early 1990
- (2) More information on the political groups Adolat and Osh Aimagy, their demands and the response of authorities
- (3) A marked absence of “ethnicity” as an explanatory variable

While these reports do, to some extent, portray the 1990 violence in terms of ethnicity, they also provide additional context that is missing from the work of mainstream development and humanitarian groups, and from Tiskhov and Asankhanov’s work. Perhaps this is because the RIA Novosti and Lenta.ru pieces are not written with the purpose of diagnosing and treating an ingrained culture of violence—they do not seek to problematize the violence (in Mitchell’s terms, to render it calculable), and they do not offer corrective or predictive suggestions. Rather, the news articles place the 1990 riots within a broader understanding of regional and national politics, the ways in which political groups and elites were maneuvering for power and representation, and how the concerns of ordinary citizens were caught up in these processes.

Furthermore, the collapse of the Soviet Union is represented as a process in these pieces, rather

³¹ “On the ruins: Consequences of the Osh massacre in the eyes of Oleg Nikishin,” is the account of a Russian photographer who traveled to Osh oblast documenting the aftermath of the violence. “The Fergana Syndrome: How Uzbekistan separated” describes the political context of Uzbekistan in 1989-91, including the summer 1989 massacre of Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana Valley, and the “cotton affair,” a political scandal related to Uzbekistan’s primary export to the Union.

than as an absolute break as most mainstream western sources see it. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to write a complete history of the 1990 riots, I bring these Russian-language media reports into this discussion in order to show that alternative histories of 1990 are possible, and also to demonstrate how a different analytical framework can radically change the way that a particular historical event is understood.

The ICG and HRW analyses, and the international groups that draw on them to justify their own kinds of peacebuilding intervention, are a version of Trouillot's "historicity 2." In this sense, the development-humanitarian apparatus is explicitly engaged in a kind of memory work. Michel-Rolph Trouillot distinguishes between the role that "historiocity 1" and "historicity 2" play in producing knowledge about the past. The former is focused on facts and uncovering events as part of a linear sociohistorical process. By contrast, "historiocity 2" refers to the narrative of those facts, "that which is said to have happened," emphasizing the story and thus the way that knowledge is made from the ordering of those facts (Trouillot 1995). A historian must necessarily assemble and prioritize among the many pieces of evidence, selecting from what is available and imposing an order to form a coherent narrative (White 1980). These are not unlike the choices necessary in mapmaking or other forms of representation; such choices are never innocent. As facts are retold in different times and contexts—in different social frameworks—they take on new meanings and interpretations. The narrative reports of conflict in Osh made by the humanitarian-development industry are examples of historicity 2: they are particular narratives selected from among the available information, assembled and ordered to tell a particular story. The narratives are not crafted by expert historians attentive to the ways that power invisibly operates through representation; nor are the sets of knowledges that they produce based on exhaustive historical and archival research, or an imperative to decolonize history and

allow multiple voices to speak—all of which have dominated the field of critical history and subaltern studies for the last decade and more. It is therefore incumbent that scholars do a better job understanding the interplay of history and identity in Central Asia, and in particular that they are attentive to the uses of such histories by outside actors seeking to intervene. In particular, there is still a fairly poor understanding of the forces shaping Kyrgyzstani society in the mid- and late-Soviet periods, and these deserve further investigation, including, of course, events and processes leading up to the violence in 1990 (e.g. see Reeves 2014, p. 41).

As the next sections will show, the ability to engage in memory work is a technique of intervention that allows its authors to rationalize certain kinds of interventions that are premised on cosmopolitan ideals. Instead of promoting institutional and infrastructural projects related to housing policy, urban planning and land reform—which I have shown are some of the unrecognized “root causes” of the 1990 and 2010 conflicts—foreign interventions in conflict prevention and peace building are premised on a cosmopolitan ideal of equality and balance. As such, they allow western humanitarian and development actors to operate alongside other forms of intervention that are driven by security concerns. In the Fergana Valley, development-as-security initiatives have focused on “fixing” the porosity of international borders through financial and technical assistance from the OSCE and other bilateral donors, shaping Central Asian nation-states in ways that enable policing and anti-terrorism measures, but that also divide societies. It is these divided societies that are then the objects of “bridging” peace-building projects. A normative sense of cosmopolitanism requires subjects who are transnational, but local forms of transnationalism, such as the kind of familial and trade relationships that are used to be maintained across the boundaries of the Fergana Valley, are not considered transnational enough.

3. *Peacefest: Performing Peace, Combatting Normative Cosmopolitanism*

In October 2015 I attended an event organized by My NGO partner called “Peacefest.” The event took place in the Uzbek Theater³²—a grand but musty, late Soviet-era auditorium filled with worn, velvet-covered seats. Youth groups from several towns around southern Kyrgyzstan had come together for this event, in which they were supposed to showcase the performances they had been working on throughout the duration of the project to one another. The main goal of the project was to promote peace and ethnic equality. In the fountain square of Novoi park just outside the theater, a huddle of teenage women admired a freshly spray-painted pair of bird wings graffitied across two large pieces of plywood and propped up on chairs. The girls took turns posing and taking selfies with their mobile phones, positioning themselves with the wings above and behind them as if they were their own. Another group of youth practiced their break-dance routines next to a blaring speaker system. Eventually these audience-participants quit the warmth of the late fall sun and trickled into the theater, pulling on their coats to keep the theater’s deep chill at bay. When the show got underway, about forty-five minutes late, each youth group performed their rehearsed piece. A group of young women from Batken showcased a traditional Tajik folk dance; the troupe of young men from outside performed an athletic and crowd-pleasing breakdance; and a pair of young men from Jalal Abad put on a short comedy routine that they had written themselves, mimicking the style of a popular Kryrgyzstani television show. In all, there were about 20 performances and the show lasted nearly three hours. All the performances were done in Kyrgyz language. One of My NGO partner’s staff emceed the event in Russian, which is considered a neutral language of inter-ethnic communication (even

³² In keeping with Soviet ethnicities policy across the Union, which sought to give minorities representation and focused on cultural autonomy, Osh has both an Uzbek Theater and a Kyrgyz Drama Theater.

though large parts of Kyrgyzstani society, including many of the youth participants of Peacefest, have only limited knowledge of Russian). In between performances, the staff member made enthusiastic overtures to peace and tolerance, and valiantly tried to create an atmosphere of excitement by drawing the audience into a back-and-forth dialogue: “Why are we here?” she enthusiastically shouted into the amped-up microphone. “For peace!” the audience weakly, and then with a bit more vigor, called back. The staff member hinted to me later that she knew these were empty overtures, a performance of peace for the donor that the participants and my host NGO saw clearly through.

Peacefest was funded under the European Union’s Instrument for Stability, which launched a call for applications in 2012 to provide “support to in-country actors to prevent and respond to crisis in fragile and conflict-affected situations” of the Kyrgyz Republic. One of the winners of this funding pool was DVV International, a German group specializing in adult education and development cooperation around the world, according to their website. DVV’s winning project title was PEACE, which stands for: “Promotion of Ethnic Equality And Civic Engagement (emphasis in original).” My NGO partner was one of two youth-focused NGOs in Kyrgyzstan that was subcontracted by DVV to carry out the project’s activities; the second NGO was based in the country’s north, and the two would later co-host another Peacefest event in Bishkek. The total value of the project was 500,000 Euro, of which the European Union contributed eighty percent. Like many civil society strengthening projects, this one was designed with a twin set of goals in mind. According to the grant application outlining my NGO partner’s part in the project, written by DVV, these were (1) “involvement of young people is aimed at **changing the mind-set** of youth, understanding, attitudes, behaviors, culture of communication” (emphasis in original), and (2), to develop the capacity of the local partner institutions “to more

effectively promote peace-building and conflict prevention.” To meet the first goal, the program explicitly sought to create youth groups that “will be balanced from the point of view of gender, age, social status, ethnicity,” while the second goal targeted the institutional abilities of the two partner NGOs to act as a facilitator of such balance.

Given this impressive set of commitments to promoting peace and ethnic equality, I was surprised to learn that, of the one hundred or so participants that my NGO partner recruited into the Peacefest activities from Osh, Jalal Abad and Batken, there were only a handful of ethnic Uzbek participants.³³ Indeed, my NGO partner found it difficult to recruit young Uzbeks into all of their programs. The reasons for these difficulties are complex and cannot be reduced to a single factor, and they plague the more professionalized and westernized NGOs as much as the “grassroots” ones. The majority of my NGO partner’s staff, including the founding members, are ethnically Kyrgyz and they come from more secular families. While religious devotion does not neatly fall along ethnic lines (in fact, it is more generational), a large share of the more conservative and pious Muslim population of southern Kyrgyzstan is Uzbek, and so a connection to those communities would have helped facilitate recruitment of Uzbeks. The ethnic homogeneity of the NGO’s staff is not the only reason Uzbeks were not part of Peacefest, however. The difficulty recruiting Uzbeks into NGO programs also has a gendered dimension. Many Uzbek families do not want their daughters participating in mixed-gender programs that are not expressly educational. This has as much to do with religious custom as it does with the post-2010 environment. Sexual violence was a widespread weapon of violence during the 2010 riots, and unconfirmed rumors of ethnically-motivated rape played a key role in mobilizing

³³ Osh and Jalal Abad provinces both have significant Uzbek populations; Batken province has a significant Tajik minority.

members of each ethnic group to respond and protect their co-ethnic group.³⁴ This reality has contributed to heightened measures to protect young women since 2010. For example, young Uzbek women in Osh were getting married at younger ages after the riots, a strategy to cope with the insecurity of the time (Ismailbekova 2013).³⁵ In addition, because young Uzbek men were targeted and harassed by the majority-Kyrgyz police force after the 2010 riots, many of them left Osh to work abroad. As we were walking back to the university after a research planning meeting my 20-year old Uzbek research assistant Abubakr described the experience of young male Uzbeks after the 2010 riots (he was just a teenager at that time): “After the conflict we were devastated. It changed everything, absolutely everything in our lives. I was planning to be a writer. I was a member of the Uzbek writer's union. This opportunity is gone.³⁶ One of my friends was sick, depressed, for a long time after the riots. We went to Russia to rehabilitate our souls, but now we are back.” Many young Uzbek men traveled abroad after the 2010 violence to escape the harassment of both the police and local groups of young Kyrgyz men. In many ways, they sought to significantly reduce the possibilities of running into ethnic Kyrgyz as much as possible. Young Uzbek men frequently do not attend university in Osh either. As we conducted neighborhood walk-throughs together, Abubakr surprised one elder Uzbek resident when he

³⁴ Although gender-based violence is not the focus of this study, I want to draw attention to the lack of research and reporting on the role that gender based violence played in the 2010 riots. It was both a widespread form of violence itself, and it served as a rumor motivating ethnic-based participation and recruitment (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission 2011). Unfortunately the gendered dimensions of violence in Osh are rarely discussed and poorly understood. The stigma and political silence surrounding any discussion of the 2010 riots (which are euphemistically referred to as “the events”), and the stigma of sexual assault, work in tandem to conceal the gendered dimensions of the conflict.

³⁵ We do not know how Kyrgyz families responded to the same perceived threat, however.

³⁶ Many Uzbek cultural institutions were destroyed during the riots, such as the Uzbek University in Jalal Abad, a project financed by Kadyrjan Batyrov, one of the wealthiest Uzbeks in the country. Batyrov was a businessman and respected Uzbek community leader who used the political vacuum after the April 2010 revolution to advocate for greater Uzbek autonomy in Kyrgyzstan.

explained that he was a student at Osh State University. “Oh, Uzbeks study there too?” she exclaimed.

It is no surprise that my NGO partner found it difficult to recruit participants from Abubakr’s demographic—those who stayed in Osh were under extreme surveillance and threat of arbitrary arrest, while others simply left the city. These factors should not preclude my NGO partner from seeking to work with Uzbek communities, and in interviews and staff meetings the organization’s staff and leadership repeatedly expressed a deep and committed interest in working with Uzbek youth. The difficulties of involving ethnic Uzbek youth, male and female, are a combination of the identities and social positions of the NGO’s staff, cultural and religious conservatism, and behavioral changes in response to insecurity related to the political climate. My NGO partner is not the only group struggling with the challenge of incorporating Uzbek participants into peace building programs. For example, the local branch of Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), which has offices around the world including in Bishkek and Osh and a specific mandate for peace building, also struggles with recruitment of Uzbek youth. A report about one of FYI-s peace building projects in Osh after 2010 criticizes the ethnic makeup of the participants, only ten percent of whom were ethnically Uzbek (Megoran et al. 2014b). One of my research participants, Sultan (Kyrgyz man, 37) worked for an NGO in Osh that attempted to take Kyrgyz and Uzbek kids to an overnight summer camp after the 2010 riots. Reflecting on those days, he said, “Maybe it was not very wise idea. It was very hard to get to Uzbek villages. On Adir was blocked completely. Now I see that it was a very dangerous idea to take Uzbek children to a camp when everything was controlled by Kyrgyz police and gangs. If I was a parent, I wouldn’t let my children go to such a camp.”

Putting aside the practical difficulties of recruiting equal numbers of Uzbek and Kyrgyz youth into Peacefest, we should question why such equality is desirable and what such balance is expected to achieve in the first place. Seligman, Wasserfall and Montgomery (2016) have argued that in peace building and reconciliation, liberal democratic values have largely failed because difference is whitewashed. What divides us is chalked up to a matter of personal taste—in their words, this is the “aestheticization of difference”—or it trivialized as unimportant and undeserving of much attention, and so difference is accepted but simultaneously diminished in significance. Either way, the authors argue that the western liberal solutions to dealing with difference end up failing because, rather than confronting difference head on, they gloss over it by promoting “tolerance” or searching for “common ground.” Yet these goals are the gold standard of the peace making and conflict prevention industry, in Central Asia as elsewhere. Indeed, concepts of equality and balance are fundamental to mainstream peace-making initiatives in southern Kyrgyzstan, where the majority of foreign assistance for peacebuilding in Central Asia has been invested (Lewis 2016). In her studies of border communities in the Fergana Valley, Madeleine Reeves argues that cross-border conflict prevention projects rely on “a system of deliberate symmetry” (Reeves 2015, p. 80) that aim, above all, not to favor any group over another. Similarly, Megoran, et al. (2014b) draw attention to the “commendable but contextually inappropriate political correctness (p. 22)” that has driven peace-building projects in Osh to focus on the training of community mediators who are women or the elderly, and from ethnically-mixed areas, even while it is clear that the majority of the violence in 2010 was perpetrated by young men from ethnically homogenous towns and villages.

The desires for symmetry, equality, inclusion and tolerance are premised on a normative western ideal of cosmopolitanism and the assumption that it can act as an antidote to ethno-

national conflict. Put differently, conflict prevention programs presume that a broader sense of worldliness can combat a vilified localism. These ideas are rooted in an ideological commitment to creating a liberal-democratic world order, which is based on the Kantian philosophical belief that a common and universal, rather than a particular or state-based, notion of humanity is necessary for overcoming the natural state of war that would otherwise exist between nations.³⁷ Mainstream development groups put the ideals of cosmopolitan subjectivity into practice through their efforts to bridge opposing sides; in their commitments to uphold equality, parity, symmetry and tolerance; and in the implicit roles they might play as donor, facilitator and neutral broker.

Critical development scholars have been attentive to a similar phenomenon in mainstream development projects, highlighting the way that a development problem/gap/lack is discursively constructed such that the limited tools of intervention available to a western actor appear both appropriate and necessary. Complex local and global problems are rendered in terms that require the expertise or technical solutions only available in the west. In his poststructuralist study of development in Lesotho, Ferguson describes the repeated failures of the development industry as an “anti-politics machine”—the machine intervenes in the country’s poverty-stricken highlands with technical, expert-led infrastructure projects that fail again and again to bring development to the region. They fail because their tools of intervention are limited, but the development problem is defined by experts such that these tools can be put to use. To define the problem otherwise would be an admission of ineffectiveness. Ferguson is particularly interested in the effects of these failures, which he sees as enabling state power to be consolidated over a former opposition stronghold in the Lesotho highlands. For Ferguson, it is not the failures but the “side effects” of mainstream development that require attention. In her study of mainstream

³⁷ These Kantian ideas have been critiqued as a liberal-optimist misreading of Kant...
nationalinterest.org/feature/immanuel-kant-the-myth-perpetual-peace-22087?page=3

development projects in the Indonesian highlands, Tania Li is also interested in how outside experts “problematize” the region by looking for deficiencies and then “render technical” the solutions, enclosing the problem into a knowable circle. This enclosure creates new problems that need to be solved. But while Ferguson’s conclusion is that the “side effects” of development failures are the reinforcement of state power and expert, outside knowledge, Li resists such a simple explanation. The outcomes of development projects, in her view, are unpredictable and defy a single logical explanation because they intersect with local sets of power.

However, geographers and other critical development scholars have not used such critiques in thinking through the failures of peace-building and conflict prevention initiatives. Certainly, western actors involved in peace building and conflict prevention in Osh have a quite limited toolbox for meeting their goals—training conflict mediators, bringing members of different groups together for joint reconciliation activities, “building capacity” of local NGOs to promote peace (as in DVV’s project), or training already-sympathetic journalists in more nuanced reporting on conflict and ethnic issues. One of the most significant factors limiting the peace building toolbox is the annual funding cycle and time constraints. In Ferguson and Li’s readings, such activities might be interpreted as interventions that perpetuate the need for more intervention. However, “rendering technical” and related concepts do not fully capture the reasons that foreign aid groups continue to promote ineffective, and sometimes even detrimental or counter productive, peace building projects. Such programs are also driven by an ideological commitment to cosmopolitan ideals that are essential to the west’s own vision of itself. In this way, humanitarian and development aid in the Fergana Valley replicate an old form of colonial relationship between new actors—the making of western national identities on the humanitarian frontier. Moreover, even as a cosmopolitan approach aims to counteract the exclusionary

dynamics of ethnicity that are presumed to lead to violence, it may paradoxically reify differences in order to bridge them. Effective bridges require two clear sides; they are not necessary when the terrain (e.g., of ethnic difference) is multi-faceted and in a constant state of becoming.

We need not ditch the cosmopolitan ideal completely, though. Noting the problems with conventional views of cosmopolitanism, scholars have sought to reframe the cosmopolitan ideal in terms that are less universalizing, more practical and more attuned to the experiences of alterity among those in the two-thirds world. Thus, Robbins makes a case for more research to recognize “actually existing cosmopolitanism” (in Cheah, Robbins, and Social Text Collective 1998); while others have advocated to pluralize the concept in order to acknowledge that many different ways of being cosmopolitan and practicing cosmopolitanism can exist (Pollock et al. 2000; Horta and Appiah 2017; Robbins, Horta, and Appiah 2017). These approaches push against the universal by insisting that cosmopolitanisms are located and embodied, and that they must be read in their historical and geographical context. A critically constructive definition of cosmopolitanism that is attentive to these issues should, they argue, be based on “an acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates.” In seeking to reclaim the notion of cosmopolitanism as a positive force for social change, based on what actually exists, the presumed antagonism between cosmopolitanism and state-bounded nationalism is called into question. While an acute sense of one’s own place in the world can work hand-in-hand with state and national power, cosmopolitan localisms also have the possibility of transcending the state.

Back in my NGO partner's office a few days after the Peacefest, I spoke frankly with Ainagul, the Executive Director, about the lack of ethnic Uzbek involvement in Peacefest. As part of our hosting agreement, Ainagul had asked that I help design and run project evaluations and Peacefest was the first opportunity to do so. I consulted the original project documents written by DVV International. DVV specifically sought to create youth groups that "will be balanced from the point of view of gender, age, social status, ethnicity" and promised that, "Special efforts will be made to ensure participation of youth from risk groups and young people with disabilities." Broad commitments to inclusion and diversity were central to the kinds of benefits the project promised to bring to its youth participants, which included, "Working in multinational creative groups, which will remove ethnic, religious dividers in their understanding," "Encouragement to challenge stereotypes and generalizations held about those who are 'different' from them and learning, understanding what is diversity," and "Learning to share visions and conduct a dialogue about values of inclusion, respect, responsibility, honesty and caring in youth from diverse backgrounds and worldviews." In a meeting with Ainagul after the event, I wondered aloud how Peacefest had contributed to any of these goals? Ainagul was clearly frustrated with my focus on the question of equal ethnic participation. She pointed out that peace is not just about building ties between different ethnic groups. Equally important is the prerogative to provide youth (of all ethnicities) with opportunities for collaboration, learning and development. In this sense, Ainagul's understanding of the project, and peace-building, diverged substantially from those laid out in DVV's vision. Through the Peacefest and the other activities that led up to it, she believed that youth were benefitting from the space to let their creative, organizing and administrative talents loose. If those who were interested and available to participate in Peacefest were mostly ethnic Kyrgyz, this was evidence of the demand among a

particular demographic slice of southern Kyrgyzstan for such extracurricular activities. Ainagul's unapologetic embrace of asymmetry was not evidence of an inherent ethnic bias (as the NGO was sometimes accused of having—see chapter 2 for more on this), or a lack of equality or inclusion; it was a response to the reality of my NGO partner's expertise and position in southern Kyrgyzstani society, and to the very real needs of the ethnic Kyrgyz youth population.

The gap between the liberal and normative cosmopolitan goals of DVV, and my NGO partner's own interpretation of effective peace building, is a clear example of the ways that local actors capture and adapt western development and humanitarian aims to their own needs, capabilities and visions of social change. NGOs are by now a well-established part of the country's social and institutional landscape, although the NGO sector is frequently criticized for its dependence on donor funding, for advancing outside agendas instead of promoting grassroots or locally-set, community priorities, and for being a tool through which elite members of society are able to privately benefit from international development financing. Pétric (2005) shows that in the early 1990s, NGOs were promoted by international donors who viewed Kyrgyzstani independence as a victory of democratic institutions over communism, but rather than becoming a “third way” NGOs became a vehicle for neoliberal development work. Donors, intent on building civil society, refused to work with local authorities. NGOs became a conduit by which to channel development funding that bypassed the state, putting them in direct competition with local government and simultaneously subordinating their accountability to external donors, rather than to the local population. NGOs (and their donors) in Kyrgyzstan have in one sense “failed” at producing a broadly engaged, participatory and sustainable civil society, a normative kind of cosmopolitanism. But these critiques are the result of expectations set by mainstream development actors since the 1990s during the turn towards civil society promotion and

democratization abroad. The NGOicization of Kyrgyzstani society should not simply be written off as an “artificial” civil society, nor should we assume that NGOs blindly reenact the neoliberal development agendas of the west. Rather, in Kyrgyzstan, “the NGO sector is populated by innovative, socially minded individuals who have utilized the sector to pursue their own development agendas, which may benefit themselves and their community” (Paasiaro 2009, p. 71).

While she was too diplomatic to say so outright, Ainagul eventually led me to understand that she saw the expectations for Peacefest were outrageously unrealistic and inappropriate to begin with, and that the success of the project should not be judged by the criteria set out in project documentation. Her frustration should be understood as the struggle of capable local activists having to work within frameworks imposed externally, and only partly suited to actually-existing conditions. For My NGO partner the Peacefest was both an exercise in checking boxes for donors, *and* the reworking of ill-fitting western expectations for peace building into a project that was appropriate to a locally-relevant agenda for social change. As Ainagul’s explanation to me suggests, building peace need not be based on balancing or equalizing participation across ethnic lines. What I find interesting in the example of Peacefest is how the supposedly curative powers of cosmopolitanism contained within DVV’s vision of the project (e.g. to “change the mind-set” of youth) met with the particular constraints, embodied positionalities and internally-defined goals of my NGO partner to produce an outcome that did not strive for symmetry and equality in the sense that DVV and the EU intended.

4. Securitization and Discourses of Danger

If peace building in the Fergana Valley is predicated on cosmopolitan ideals, its sister concept, conflict prevention, is fueled by a “discourse of danger” that is endemic to western policy and media accounts and even to quite a bit of the academic work about Central Asia. This geopolitical discourse identifies the region as obscure, fractious and Oriental—characteristics that inherently render the region dangerous. Specific dangers include the threats of Islamism, border conflict and great power competition (Heathershaw and Megoran 2011a). These dangers are discursively located in the Fergana Valley, whose jagged but porous state borders, ethnically and linguistically diverse populations and greater concentration of Muslims fuel the discourse.

The discourse of danger has important effects for producing the state and its territory. For example, Reeves shows that the logic of danger deployed in conflict prevention programs discursively fixes and locates the possibility of future conflict within normative understandings of the proper correspondence of ethnicity, territory and citizenship; or, of what might happen when people are not in their proper places. In this framing, conflict prevention comes to mean preventing people from getting out of place by, for example, making sure we know who people are (imposing passport and citizenship regimes), where borders are (border delimitation activities), and what the rules are for crossing them (policing and border militarization). In the Fergana Valley, donors have invested heavily in all three of these areas. From this perspective, conflict prevention and peace building are bureaucratic practices that seek to regulate bodies and boundaries; they are the “attempt of states to ‘state’ the region” (Reeves 2005, p. 68). Both mainstream development actors and national governments also play a role in producing this stateness. Powerful outside states impose western notions of stateness onto Central Asia through their development and humanitarian interventions. Western donors have been crucial to this

project of producing the Central Asian state. Since 2001, for example, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has invested heavily in training police and border guards in Central Asia, and they have been most active in Kyrgyzstan and the Fergana Valley. Yet the police continue to be one of the most corrupt institutions in the country. They are frequently the perpetrators of human rights abuses, and they notoriously failed to contain the early signs of violence that developed into full-blown riots in 2010. The OSCE's police and border assistance programs, initiated in 2001 through a special unit in Vienna focused exclusively on Central Asia, have sought to address "transnational security threats" including terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime (Lewis 2011). Under the OSCE's watch, the formerly open and fuzzy state boundaries in the Fergana Valley have become more tightly regulated, restricting people's abilities to trade, to see family members, and further dividing societies in the region (Reeves 2014; Megoran 2017). In southern Kyrgyzstan, cosmopolitan peacebuilding and securitization have worked alongside one another. Securitization was a gross failure when it came to responding to the security needs of domestic populations during the 2010 conflict, but in the process of defining, marking and policing international boundaries in the Fergana Valley, securitization has also reinforced state-based divisions of southern Central Asian society. Bridging such social divisions then appears as a possible, and quite logical, field of intervention for the humanitarian-development industry.

External actors are not the only ones whose use of the discourse of danger has state-making effects; Central Asian states and political elites also deploy it in their own interests. In Kyrgyzstan, political leaders opposing the first President Akaev played on fears that the country's Uzbek population was a threat to the nation state (Megoran 2005),³⁸ and such fears

³⁸ These included the fear that Uzbeks agitating for greater autonomy were threatening the territorial integrity of the nation, that they were active in the underground Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which had staged attacks

were stoked again during the 2010 riots. Outside characterizations of the region as fragile, dangerous and as a tinderbox can have localized effects, and so it is important that we interrogate not only the use of danger discourses by local actors, but also how supposedly neutral international aid groups also use claims about instability, insecurity and a high potential to relapse into violence in the justifying logics of their own peace-building activities. The external framing of Central Asia as a place where ethnic conflict always has the potential to burst forth from the ragged seams of society is important to study because such logics have their way of working themselves into the fabric of daily life.

If in the early Soviet period populations enacted and adopted ethnic identities as a way to negotiate for resources and power vis-à-vis other groups, today western development institutions represent similar sets of resources, including monetary incentives (grants and salaries), as well as travel and training opportunities for the NGO and government elite. These resources, and the prestige associated with them, are predicated on the Kyrgyzstani elite using the language of liberal western ideology, such as equality, symmetry and other values tied to cosmopolitan ideals, to make their cases for grants, funding and travel opportunities. During my fieldwork in 2015-2016, the issue of violent extremism in Central Asia was brought into the spotlight through a number of high profile conferences. In the fall of 2015 the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) held a series of roundtable conferences across Central Asia to discuss the rising threat, including one held in Osh to which the main NGO and media representatives of the south were invited. Several of my NGO partner's staff were in attendance, and the event clearly made a big impact on them. Thereafter, in staff meetings my NGO partner began discussing how they could contribute to the anti-radicalization efforts, recognizing that disenfranchised youth

against Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, and that they were involved with Hizb-ut Tahrir, a pan-Islamist movement seeking to re-establish the Caliphate.

were particularly susceptible to recruitment into ISIS, the IMU and other local extremist groups. During a workshop I held for my NGO partner on grant proposal writing, I asked participants to identify the issues they thought were most pressing for youth in the south. It was universally agreed that combatting radical Islam and extremism should be a priority for the group's future work. The discourse of danger is not just a fear-mongering tactic of elite politicians; because it is so deeply engrained in western productions of knowledge about peace and conflict in the region, it is also a framework or language through which local actors participate and maneuver.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that conflict prevention and peace building (driven by international NGOs and donors) in Kyrgyzstan depend on a rereading of historical events. International development and humanitarian actors have produced an interpretive narrative about the causes of violence in 1990 that work in the service of a trope about history repeating itself, even while the causes of the 1990 events are poorly understood. A certain version of history has been reinvented through the international development and humanitarian projects of peace building in order to fit a narrative of ethicized violence that significantly downplays other explanations of history and society. In particular, I showed that the 1990 riots have been recast in terms of ethnicity rather than as a broader issue of land, housing and demographic change—processes that are more readily visible if urban transformation is the analytical framework for understanding socio-economic processes. A focus on ethnicity alone has the effect of localizing the conflict, making it seem more parochial, and effacing the connection between it and more broadly regional and historical processes. In the imagination of western development actors, the 1990 riots have come to be seen largely as a precursor to the 2010 riots.

The development-humanitarian apparatus' engagement with history helps it maintain a static view of ethnicity and difference that is amenable to the principles of liberal democracy (tolerance) and the tools of peace building or conflict prevention that are at its disposal. These are important elements of the ideological commitment to spreading democratic peace and security abroad, and they rest on normative assumptions about the lack of a cosmopolitan sentiment and the need for outside, neutral experts to build it. During an interview with the head representative of a western donor in Bishkek, I was told that that citizens of Osh were "not ready yet" for thinking creatively about urban space; that they did not have the cosmopolitan sensibilities that were, for example, sustaining the kind of right-to-the city initiatives in Bishkek that the donor deemed worthy of its investments. For this reason, the donor had decided against continued funding of creative, participatory urban planning projects in Osh. It is no small irony that the perceived lack of cosmopolitan identity is at the same time the basis for peace building and conflict prevention programs (programs that rely on problematic notions of ethnicity), *and* justification for withholding the very kinds of civic engagement projects that are taken as evidence of an indigenous cosmopolitanism.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION

Throughout the course of Central Asian history, it is a recurrent theme that wave upon wave of pastoral-nomadic peoples have periodically quit the steppe to take up residence in a neighboring sedentary society. Any of a number of factors in the everyday life of a nomadic people might precipitate these frequently violent migrations. These include: a rise in population pressures in the steppe brought about by naturally increasing populations and demands for grazing territory in times of plenty; shifting climatic patterns that periodically render entire portions of the steppe uninhabitable for years at a time; and, of course, displacement caused by the migrations of other peoples from elsewhere. Additionally, events as unpredictable as a sudden freeze or an epidemic disease can devastate an entire herd, the sum of a tribe's wealth and the basis of their lives. It is not difficult to understand how such circumstances might motivate nomadic peoples to expand their territory elsewhere at the expense of another nomadic group, or to invade a sedentary society and forcibly take what is needed to stay alive.

-- Scott Levi 2007, p. 16

The sedentary/nomadic culture and Turkic/Persian language distinctions are widely understood as predating Russian influence, while the nationalistic labels Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and Kazak are a product of the Soviet period. So when these terms are used in collusion to simplify explanations of Central Asian culture and identity, historically and culturally inappropriate interpretations result, adding yet another chapter to the mythological fiction that has come to be called the history of Central Asia.

-- Anthony Bichel 2002, p. 296.

1. Introduction

On Wednesday evenings during my fieldwork in Osh I played soccer with a group of local employees from the international organizations in town – the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, the OSCE, ACTED, among others. By 2016 the local employees at these organizations were a small group compared to a few years before: most had been employed immediately after the 2010 violence and had managed to hold onto their jobs, despite the

inevitable decline in funding for post-conflict recovery programs. In the winter we moved from the caged outdoor turf that we rented from one of the local universities to an indoor facility called Nursport. It wasn't heated or centrally located, and the hourly rental was nearly double our former site, but it was brand new and the facilities were immensely better. Each field was separated by new netting and equipped with sideline benches. The warehouse had a toilet and changing rooms, and six pothole-free fields available for rent, solving a supply-side issue that had forced us to play at unusual times at our previous site. Nursport was housed in a former factory warehouse, part of the vast landscape of defunct industrial buildings that occupy a large wedge of urban space between the railroad and apartments in the KhBK area of town. The soccer complex, as well as the adjacent bowling alley that opened in 2016, were rare examples of a market-driven conversion of Osh's former industrial infrastructure into profit-making enterprises in Osh.

To get to the warehouse, I took *marshrutka* (minibus) #34 almost to the end of Razzakova Street, formerly Yubileyniy Prospekt (Jubilee Prospect), which passes along the entire length of the KhBK neighborhood. Razzakova is a major urban artery leading like a spoke from the city center towards the nearby border town of Kara Suu. It marks a distinct border between residential and industrial areas. Here, perhaps more than in any other part of Osh, urban form is a telltale marker of ethnicity. The KhBK neighborhood of multi-story apartment blocks is considered to be a poorer and "mono-ethnic" Kyrgyz neighborhood. It sits like a thin slice of a pie abutting the industrial zone along one length and an ethnic Uzbek mahalla along the other. As one travels outwards along the KhBK/mahalla boundary, the archetypal windy streets of the mahalla give way to former agricultural fields that, in the last 15 years or so, have been transformed into wealthy suburbs of stand-alone private homes built on a grid. Graffiti, some left

over from the 2010 riots, marks these spaces: one finds “SOS,” “UZB,” “KYG” and “KhBK” on the boundaries of these neighborhoods.

KhBK stands for Khlopo-Bumazhniy Kombinat (Cotton-Paper Factory).³⁹ The neighborhood consists of row-upon-row of four-story apartment blocks built to house the factory’s employees. The cotton factory was one of the largest industrial enterprises in Kyrgyzstan in its heyday, employing up to 60,000 people, many of whom were bussed in from neighboring villages, including from Andijon in the nearby Uzbek SSR. The work was organized into three different shifts in each 24-hour period. But in 2015-16, the period when I frequently visited the area, I found that living conditions were far from ideal. Many apartment buildings were built as dormitories, constructed as communal areas with shared kitchens and toilets, and this set-up persisted with make-shift changes to give residents more autonomy and privacy. Most of those living in the apartments were renters and worked as traders in the local market. Many had recently moved to Osh from other parts of southern Kyrgyzstan, or they were students from the wider region. Conditions were crowded. I was never invited into someone’s apartment during my neighborhood walk-throughs of KhBK—my RAs and I typically encountered residents loitering outside as they watched children, dried laundry, washed their cars or socialized in communal courtyards. It was apparent that residents were not prepared, or perhaps embarrassed, to host guests. Apartment life in Central Asia can be full of amenities not found in private urban homes—the infrastructure of central heating, sewage systems, gas and electricity are standard. Yet such systems also require upkeep and collective action to maintain, and absentee landlords of older buildings who are themselves struggling to earn a living lack an incentive to contribute to the maintenance of this infrastructure. Thus, for many renters of older apartments in Osh, living conditions can be quite difficult. At one apartment block in KhBK we found people

³⁹ The HBK neighborhood is within the TerSoviets (Territorial Councils) of Alymbek Datka and Manas Ata, which also encompass mahalla neighborhoods.

waiting around an outdoor water pump, taking turns filling plastic containers to haul back up to their apartments.

Image 4.1: Multistory apartments in the KhBK neighborhood of Osh.



During the Soviet period, the apartment complexes of KhBK were inhabited by a diverse mix of Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars and Germans (the so-called European populations), in addition to Uzbek and Kyrgyz workers. Given the severe housing shortage that plagued the entire Soviet Union (discussed in more detail below), apartments were highly coveted, typically awarded to senior factory administrators who tended to be of Slavic or European origin, while domestic laborers rented small rooms from the local population while patiently waiting for their name to come up on extensive waiting lists for housing. By 1990, the official waiting list to receive housing in Osh oblast had 40-60,000 people on it.⁴⁰ In the early years of Kyrgyz independence, which were characterized by a chaotic economic situation, the state was unable to address the housing demands and so these issues were left unresolved. At the same time, with independence the country's Slavic and European populations suddenly found themselves minorities in a new country that sought to remake national identity by promoting the rights of non-colonial populations. Factories closed, unable to compete in a competitive global

⁴⁰ Asankanov (1996) puts the number at 60,000, while Megoran, et al (2014a, 2014b) cite 40,000 on the waiting list for housing.

marketplace, and the population of most major cities in Central Asia, which were majority-Russian, actually declined for a few years despite significant rural-to-urban migration, as the Slavic/European populations exited en masse. At the same time, rural-to-urban migration intensified in the 1990s, bringing new populations to urban areas from the predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz countryside. In Bishkek, which was a majority Russian city before 1991, these processes pitted ethnic Kyrgyz people from the countryside, who often spoke little Russian, against the city's majority population. In Osh, which was a majority ethnic Uzbek city until the 1990s, similar tension existed. These are just some of the processes that have produced the "mono-ethnic" Kyrgyz neighborhood of KhBK. The same processes can also help us understand why there are "mixed" and "mono-ethnic" Uzbek neighborhoods in Osh.

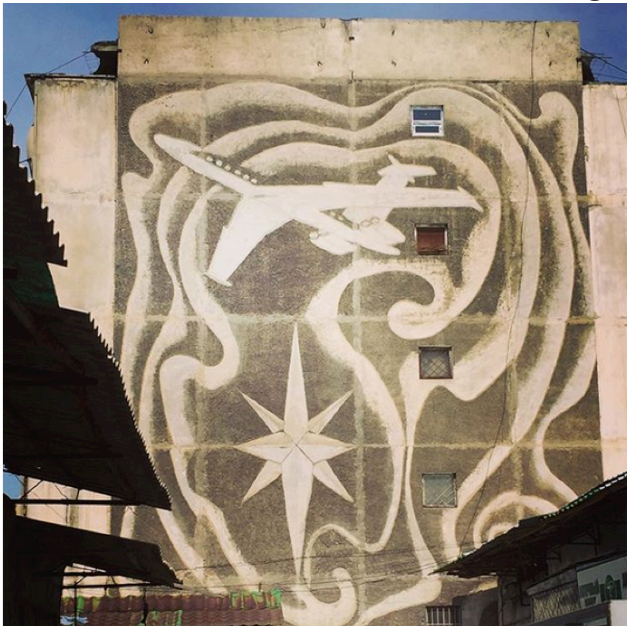
To get from the marshrutka (minibus) stop at the end of Razakova Street to the soccer fields, I had to walk through a landscape of vacant, swallow-infested warehouses and industrial buildings. In winter, the sun was just setting as I found my way to our early evening games. The pink sky illuminated an enormous outline of Lenin perched on one of the warehouse roofs, his unmistakable cheekbones, nose and cap molded from bars of steel like a delicate paper cutout. Later I learned that these facilities were not part of the eponymous KhBK factory. Rather, from the early 1960's the warehouse-turned-soccer complex began producing steel-reinforced cement blocks used in the construction of *panel'ki*: prefabricated apartment buildings (Ibraimov 1979), a ubiquitous element of post-Soviet urban landscapes. The reinforced concrete was also used in the construction of dams, which were critical for Soviet modernization of agriculture in Central Asia. A 1979 book on Osh oblast's socio-economic progress (full of grandiose pronouncements about meeting 5-year production quotas in less time), nevertheless provides some context for understanding the important role of the reinforced concrete plant in the industrialization of agriculture and urbanization. The author notes that, "The growth of the construction materials

industry in the last few years is related to the large scale of construction in industrial and residential areas, as well as the establishment of irrigation systems and hydroelectric projects” (Ibraimov 1979, p. 100). In other words, our new soccer complex was once part of the immense push to modernize, industrialize and bring the peoples of Central Asia more tightly into the Soviet development project. The reinforced concrete was central to the construction of new housing, hydropower, irrigation and agriculture—the major elements of economic development in the mid-to-late Soviet periods. These, in turn, had profound consequences for the distribution of populations and the relationships between different groups, driving resettlement policies, shaping the distribution and livelihood opportunities of different ethnic groups, and serving as the engine of Central Asia’s role as an agricultural powerhouse within the Union’s centralized economy.

Image 4.2: Lenin on the roof of a warehouse in the district of the steel-reinforced concrete plant, not far from the Nursport soccer complex.



Image 4.3: “Panelki” – pre-fabricated apartments in Osh bearing standard designs that can be found in other cities as well. Left: Aeroflot, Right: Yuri Gagarin.



2. *Towards a history of urban transformation*

Reeves observes that, “The wartime experience and postwar transformation of Central Asia remain significantly understudied in the historical literature on the region, although several scholars have hinted at the importance of this period for understanding both the relative stability of the postwar years and the sources of post-Soviet conflicts over territory and autochthony” (2014, p. 41). Indeed, scholars often signpost the importance of the economic and socio-political processes that affected the urban-rural relationship in Central Asia from the 1950s-90s, signaling the significance of this period to understanding contemporary social processes, yet a thorough accounting of these processes, especially as they relate to the transformation of human and physical landscapes of the Fergana Valley, has yet to be completed. There is thus a greater need for attention to the way that historical processes have *taken place*, radically and simultaneously transforming landscapes and people.

This chapter aims to tell the history of Osh’s transformation over the last century. While the city is well known as a divided, segregated and/or contested city, the modern processes that have re-shaped urban life and landscape in Osh are generally overlooked. In writing an urban historiography, I seek to unveil the curtains on the issue of segregation and to understand the forces that produced these spatialities of identity. The story is multi-pronged and so I trace it across two different themes, each in roughly chronological order. On the one hand, Russian influence (Tsarist and Soviet) introduced a new diversity of populations to Central Asia at the same time that it re-aligned urban space and redefined the relationship between urban and rural areas. The first part of this chapter tells those intertwined stories. On the other hand, identity itself was forged through the back-to-back colonial projects—the focus of the second part of this chapter. Third, the chapter reviews the histories of urbanization, housing shortages and land-grabbing in Kyrgyzstan over the last 30 years. This discussion concludes with a brief discussion

of the politics of post-conflict housing reconstruction in Osh. The broad argument of this chapter is that the construction of the built environment in Osh has depended on parallel productions of difference and inequality. In other words, the particular patterns of settlement and segregation in Osh today are the consequences of specific state-led policies of industrialization and modernization, which took place at the same time that ethnicity and national identity were assigned meaning. Distributions of inequality and difference in the city are the explicit result of spatial processes driven by state-making and modernizing projects. By turning attention towards the processes of urban transformation over the last century, we can begin to understand how urban space has been produced, inhabited, negotiated and contested. While a full history of industrialization, modernization and population dynamics in Osh is beyond the scope of this single chapter, what follows is an attempt to resituate studies of history, migration, industrialization, ideology and politics in Central Asia to show how local and global forces have shaped the relationships between people and place in Osh.

Throughout this dissertation I use the term “urban transformation” to avoid the transition/transitology framework that has dominated much work on post-socialist societies. The term also signals that there the multiple actors and authors, human and non-human, that have produced urban space. Chapter 4 attempts to capture some of the non-state perspectives on urban transformation, but this chapter is primarily concerned with the operation of state power in and through urban space, and I explicitly draw attention to the work of the state in making Osh. I trace different forms of state power, from Tsarist influence on people and territory in the Fergana Valley, to the impact of the Great Patriotic War (WWII), Stalin’s push for collectivization, dekulakization, and sedentarization; the modernization programs of the post-Stalin period and the gradual opening up of Soviet society under Brezhnev and Khrushchev; to the state’s role in Osh after independence under Presidents Akaev, Bakiyev and Atambaev. Throughout this discussion,

my aim is not to provide a full history but to draw attention to the processes of state-making and how they affected the relationship between different ethnic groups; how the Soviet state's developmentalist policies produced ethnicity and simultaneously tied it to certain kinds of urban spaces. To understand the impacts of these processes on urban space, we must step back and consider the nature of the colonial encounter between Tsarist Russia and Turkestan.

3. The Russian and Soviet Conquests of Central Asia

In the 1840s, following a century of relatively stable borders between the forested steppes of southern Russia and the arid deserts of modern-day Kazakhstan, Russia intensified its territorial expansion southwards into Central Asia.⁴¹ The area of Turkestan was controlled by three city-states based in Khiva, Bukhara and Khoqand. They were not a unified political entity, frequently in conflict with one other. From the early 18th to late 19th centuries the Khoqand khanate ruled a vast amount of territory stretching from its base in the settled agricultural plains of the Fergana valley all the way to the border of modern-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, including the Chui valley and the towns of Tokmok and Pishpek.⁴² To the east, the Khoqand khanate's territory stretched to Kashgar in what is today western China. Its subjects were a diverse mix of multilingual peoples speaking Persian (Tajik), Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages, adhering to different forms of Islam and to varying degrees, and engaging in a diverse array of economic activities, from the mobile pastoral groups of the mountains to the settled agricultural groups, skilled urban craftsmen and traders of the Fergana valley. The people of the Fergana

⁴¹ The Russian imperial conquest and annexation of Turkestan later came to be known in the 1940s as "prisoedinenie" (unification), and Lenin described the annexation in classic Marxist-Leninist terms that have continued to cloud a true understanding of the reasons for Russia's renewed push into Turkestan. Lenin argued that Moscow-based textile manufacturers and other big capitalists wanted to ensnare Central Asian cotton markets in an uneven colonial relationship, in which they would supply raw materials for Russian industry and in turn consume Russian goods. In fact, Morrison (2014) argues that no such fledgling industrial capitalists existed in Russia in the 1860s, so it is "inherently implausible" that economic interest was driving the military conquest.

⁴² Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital today, but just a small outpost in the 19th century.

valley, including citizens of Osh, likely felt the brunt of the khanate's taxation policies by dint of their proximity to the center of power, but these policies extended north to Tokmok and Pishpek as well. The khanate's heavy taxation and brutal exploitation of the Fergana valley's population led to massive popular resistance and rebellion. The northern population sought relief by aligning themselves with Russia as a protectorate, effectively paving the way for Russian forces to topple the khan and claim victory over his territories. The Russians launched a series of military campaigns against the khanates during the 1850s and-60s, establishing protectorates over Bukhara and Khiva. It did so by building and eventually uniting two lines of fortresses across the desert steppe and towards the oasis towns of the south. Tashkent, an important city of the Khoqand khanate, was occupied in 1865 and Khoqand itself fell to the Russians a decade later, in 1876.⁴³

In both Tsarist and Soviet times, non-sedentary populations⁴⁴ were perceived as a threat to state power, and the settled populations in the desert oases of southern Central Asia were crucial to the imperial conquest of Turkestan. This was because the massive quantity of resources needed to sustain a military fortress or to launch a military campaign—labor, food, pack animals—could only be raised from a fairly sizeable and settled population. The mobility of pastoral-nomadic peoples made them unreliable partners in the provision of such resources.

⁴³ Russian territorial expansion into the Caucasus and to the Far East took place 15 years later than the expansion south into Central Asia. In the Caucasus, the Russian conquest began in 1856, and the Far East was captured in 1858-60. Other events important to the Russian imperial expansion included devastating losses against a coalition of French, British and Ottoman troops during the Crimean War (1853-56) and the emancipation of the serfs in 1860, which resulted in a massive class of landless peasants, many of whom later traveled to the empire's periphery and further burdened the aims of the colonial administrators in Central Asia. See, for example, Sahadeo's account of poor Russian settlers in Tashkent during the 1892 cholera epidemic (Sahadeo 2005).

⁴⁴ The binary of sedentary and pastoral-nomadic is a false dualism that conceals a wide variety of socio-economic practices. Both pastoralism and nomadism encompass diverse practices that are specific to local physical geographies, as well as political and genealogical systems. As Rahimon (2012) points out, they do not exist in binary opposition to sedentary agriculturalism.

The populations of the Fergana Valley did not submit easily and peacefully to the new imperial authorities. To the very end of the 19th century, the Tsar's troops had to deal with a seemingly constant set of uprisings and rebellions related to all manner of colonial policy, including taxation as well as issues related to the occupation and seizure of land. The Russian occupiers increased taxes in one region of Fergana by 100 percent in 1884. The Russian campaign of pacification was conducted with "alarming brutality" (S. Abashin 2014), and between 1870-1900 in just the Fergana province, there were more than 200 anti-colonial uprisings (Abdullaev, Khotamov, and Kenensariiev 2012). Resistance was also strong from the populations of the Alai mountain range (east of Osh).⁴⁵ In conquering the Khoqand khanate the Russians may have overthrown a widely hated local leader, but they were not celebrated as liberators: "Instead, the Russians faced a committed national movement, which was by no means so easily crushed. Never before in Central Asia had the Tsar's troops been forced to endure so long and arduous a struggle" (Abdullaev, et al 2012, p. 52). The conquest of Turkestan was also accompanied by the large-scale settlement of Russian and European state administrators, soldiers, railway workers and farmers (Sahadeo 2003, 2007). In 1898 a local revolt against Russian imperial rule in Andijan, which is just a few miles across the border from Osh in Uzbekistan, prompted the Tsar to pre-emptively settle Russian peasants to the area. This led to further conflict as the new settlers took up residence on nomadic grazing lands (Uryadova 2012; Musgrave 2014).

One of the most significant uprisings against colonial rule in Central Asia, "The Great Urkun" took place in 1916 in an area called Semirechiye encompassing the borderlands of

⁴⁵ The center of resistance was in Gulcha, about an hour's drive into high foothills east of Osh, where a series of fierce battles against Russian General Skobelev took place. Skobelev was forced to make concessions to the leader of the area, a woman named Kurmanjan-Datka who is widely celebrated in Kyrgyzstan today as a ruler whose strength and wisdom brought peace and stability to the region. Today one of Osh's central streets is named after Kurmanjan-Datka. (The other two prominent streets are Lenin St. and Novoi St. The former requires no explanation; Novoi was one of the most popular Uzbek language poets in the Soviet period.)

contemporary Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The uprising tells us much about the nature of the imperial project in Central Asia, relations between northern and southern Kyrgyzstan, and the tensions over land and colonial settlement that existed throughout the region (they were not unique to the Fergana Valley or to the Osh region). In 1916, as the Russian Empire was engaged in WWI, the imperial administration called for the conscription of Central Asian men into labor battalions on the eastern front. The call broke the agreement negotiated with the region's leaders when they first sought the Tsar's protection from the Kokand khanate's punitive taxation. This agreement protected the local population from being drafted into Russian military service. Uprisings culminated in the massacre of 3,500 unarmed Russian settlers. The Tsar responded to the uprising with disproportionately brutal force, killing thousands and provoking a wintertime refugee crisis known as the "Great Urkun" (exodus), in which hundreds of thousands of people fled the recriminatory violence on foot across the Tien Shan mountain range to western China. In all, half a million Kyrgyz and Kazakh people are thought to have lost their lives. The episode has, controversially, come to be called a genocide by some nationalist-minded historians today (Morrison 2016), and in 2016 its 100-year anniversary was widely commemorated in Kyrgyzstan through a series of museum exhibits, media pieces, and academic conferences.

Underlying the issue of forced conscription, however, was a brewing tension over the presence of Russian settlers in Central Asia. The Tsar offered attractive incentives to Russians populating the region, and as a result many took up the most desirable plots of land. Between 1902 and 1913 the Russian population of Kyrgyzstan increased by ten percent while the population of indigenous groups, despite having higher birth rates, decreased by nine percent (Huskey 1995). Similar to the imperial policy in the south of Kyrgyzstan, pastoral groups in the Semirechiye area were pushed onto marginal grazing areas. Morrison (2016) notes that while the WWI conscription was a trigger for the violence,

[The revolt] had much deeper roots in tsarist colonization policies during the two decades leading up to 1916. That period saw thousands of hectares of the best land in Semirechie, as well as on the northern steppe, seized from the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz who farmed and pastured their animals on it, and handed over to Slavic peasant settlers from European Russia.

While the Great Urkun centered on tensions between Russian and nomadic peoples, they illustrate one of Levi's points at the top of this chapter: that the territories of nomadic and sedentary populations were a common cause for conflict and competition.

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution ushered in a brand new era for Central Asia. Within a year of the mass tragedy, the Bolshevik revolution would sweep Tsarist rule away and introduce a dramatically new relationship between Moscow and its hinterland. Soviet ideology sought to bring about the “modernization of culturally backward people” (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010), and, at least in the early days of Bolshevik rule, the push for modernization carried many important benefits for local populations. The revolutionaries embarked on ambitious modernization plans and delivered significant returns for many poor Central Asians, giving them land, animals and other forms of capital. Early advances in healthcare, education and literacy were also impressive: within the new Soviet empire, literacy in Kyrgyzstan increased faster than anywhere else (Lilley 2018). If in the Tsarist period Russian settlers consisted of administrators, soldiers and farmers, after the Bolshevik revolution a new group of teachers and technical experts settled in the region. In Osh, these processes have had a lasting impact on the urban landscape. In the empty fields on the southern side of the city, Russians built a “new city” with barracks, public parks and a prison. Today, the gridded streets of the new city host the modern institutions of the state—most of the city's universities, theaters, municipal offices, the now-privatized Intourist hotel, the stadium and numerous multi-story apartment blocks are collected along two main parallel streets (Kurmanjan Datka and Lenin Streets).

Image 4.4: The new Soviet city of Osh was built in empty fields on the city's south side (from: Umetbay uluu 2016).



Stalin's rise to power introduced terror and violence everywhere, Central Asia included. Policies of dekulakization, collectivization and forced resettlement throughout the 1920-30s were particularly violent, and they were also important drivers of rural-to-urban migration across the Soviet Union: from 1926-39, 18.7 million people migrated to urban areas (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010, p. 15). The mobility of pastoral groups came under renewed pressure during Stalin's reign. Soviet administrators considered nomads more difficult to control and more likely to flee (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010), and a number of policies aimed to exercise greater control over them, especially by curtailing their nomadic lifestyles. In 1925-26 an "agrarian revolution" aimed to remake pastoral communities into rural societies that would be more amenable to the project of socialist transformation (Edgar 2006). A "land-water reform" policy led to the confiscation of so-called "kulak" lands and their consolidation into state-owned farms. Kulaks were wealthy peasants in western Russia who owned land and were able to hire farm labor. This

was not a particularly meaningful category for most of Central Asia's pastoral communities, and the "dekulakization" of Central Asian nomads reflects the kinds of difficulties Soviet authorities faced in trying to turn their ideologically-driven aims into practice by imposing new categories onto a very different kind of socio-economic system. At the height of dekulakization, in 1930-32, Soviet authorities argued that pastoral-nomadic groups should be categorized as kulaks because only great wealth would afford someone the ability to move their entire home, extended family and livestock to the best pastures (Edgar 2006, p. 195). In southern Tajikistan, Soviet authorities used resettlement in the 1920s and 1930s as a means to secure and territorialize areas along the border with Afghanistan (Kassymbekova 2011).⁴⁶ Thus, both colonial and Soviet power depended on more than the conquest of territory; the control of bodies and restrictions on their mobility was also essential to the state's power. Similar policies in different periods were also recast through different ideological lenses: Soviet historians described the Tsarist-era resettlement policies as "a weapon of Russification," but they considered their own, quite similar, policies of resettlement as a means of "economic and cultural development" (Kassymbekova 2011, p. 351). In his landmark study detailing the logic of the socialist economic system, Kornai (1992) notes that collectivization was not just an economic institution, but also a political one that established a form of dependence on the bureaucratic state by robbing rural peasants of their means for subsistence. Kornai was not speaking specifically of nomadic groups, but the point may in fact be more relevant to understanding Soviet power in Central Asia than elsewhere.

⁴⁶ Kassymbekova notes that, "The resettlement was initially ethnically framed: it sought to resettle Persian-speaking sedentary groups (classified as 'Tajiks') to regions that were dominated by Turkic-speaking semi-nomadic, 'tribal' cattle breeders (classified as 'Uzbeks' and 'Lakais'). It is worth noting that this classification of Uzbeks as cattle-breeding and semi-nomadic is a complete reversal of the roles supposedly "assigned" on the basis of ethnicity to Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh, and it demonstrates the fluidity and location-dependency of ethnic categories.

Collectivization and sedentarization policies in Central Asia interacted with existing socio-political and economic systems in ways that render it difficult to quickly summarize the impacts. In some areas, pastoral-nomadic ways of life that had existed for millennia were destroyed, while in other areas nomadic groups managed to resist or hold onto their traditions, and even retreated back to them during periods of economic uncertainty. During the 1930s, many Kazakh and Kyrgyz pastoral-nomads destroyed their herds rather than submit to collectivization, choosing poverty and starvation over state control. At the same time, the destruction of the pastoral way of life and the enormous toll it took on local groups is probably one of the greatest untold stories of modern Central Asia. It led to mass starvation and famine across the region. In one of its most destructive episodes, between 1931-33 one quarter of the Kazakh SSR's population—more than 1.5 million people—perished (Cameron 2018). The affected area of Kazakhstan, later dubbed the “Hungry Steppe,” was repopulated with 1-2 million Slavic settlers through the Virgin Lands Campaign of the 1950s (M. Pohl 1999).⁴⁷ Famine was a typical consequence of Stalin's terror across the Soviet Union. In the Fergana Valley, famine due to collectivization (1932-33), war (1941-45) and the post-war period (1946-47) claimed tens of thousands of lives (Abdullaev and Nazarov 2012). Collectivization of the Fergana Valley's sedentary groups took place between 1927-33, incorporating more than 80 percent of farming households into sovkhoses and kolkhoses. Abdullaev and Azarov point out, however, that, “Amazingly, collectivization did not disrupt the traditional structure of the typical Ferghana Valley village. Those who traditionally had worked as tenant farmers on feudal lands had, by the early 1930s, become collective farmers who continued to work without rights, but for the state” (2012, p. 112).

⁴⁷ It was only in 1999 that Kazakhs in Kazakhstan regained the majority status in their titular homeland (Cameron 2016).

While there are no detailed studies of the impact of collectivization in southern Kyrgyzstan or on the mountainous populations surrounding the Fergana Valley, we can draw some further general conclusions from accounts of the collectivization process in other parts of Central Asia such as Turkmenistan (Edgar 2006), Tajikistan (Kassymbekova 2011; Ferrando 2011) and Kazakhstan (Rahimon 2012; Cameron 2016). Boyanin's oral history work in northern Kyrgyzstan, in the Talas region, has challenged previously-held assumptions that collectivization led to the permanent settlement of pastoral-nomadic groups (Boyanin, Tzaneva, and Akunov 2010; Boyanin 2011). For example, in the north-eastern region of Naryn, social and economic forces had already pushed local populations to adopt more sedentary and semi-nomadic lifestyles before forced collectivization of the 1930s, and after WWI many people returned to these semi-nomadic/semi-settled lifestyles because of the chaos and violence associated with the first few years of collectivization.

Stalin also brought the great push for industrialization to Central Asia, as elsewhere. The first five-year plan began in 1926, initiating a new wave of Russian and European migration. This was facilitated through *orgnabors*, organized recruitment systems meant to mobilize skilled labor unavailable where it was needed. Orgnabors quickened the pace of industrialization, since the recruitment of local laborers, who were unlikely to speak Russian or be familiar with the skilled trades, would require extensive training first. These migrants from western Russia worked in the new industrial plants, as well as in the mining, railway and road construction sectors. Thousands of others from the western parts of the Soviet Union were likewise sent in the decade after the Revolution via orgnabors to work as teachers and doctors (Shigabdinov and Nikitenko 2000, p. 104-5). The orgnabors functioned alongside strict migration control. Initially, residents of 25 cities across the USSR (Osh was not one of them), were issued internal passports that allowed them to travel longer distances; everywhere else, people were unable to receive

passports and had to register with district authorities, and could not leave their sovkhos or kolkhos without permission (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010). Everyone was in need of housing, of course, and the more skilled and highly valued received priority. Huskey (1995b) notes that “these workers became the labor aristocracy in Kyrgyzstan's Chu Valley and its newly industrializing cities [...] the share of Slavs in the republic rose from 30 in 1939 to 37 percent in 1959, this at a time when the birth rate of indigenous Central Asia far outpaced that of the Slavs.” Thus, urbanization was also a process of Russification and, as we shall see, the de-Russification of Central Asian cities was another significant stage of urban transformation.

The abandoned industrial landscapes and crowded housing of Osh's neighborhoods are a material testament to southern Kyrgyzstan's particular role in the Soviet Union's command economy, which was directed by central planners in Moscow. Osh oblast, although geographically isolated from the Kyrgyz SSR's political center in the north, was nevertheless an important industrial center. The three oblasts of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken produced one quarter of Kyrgyzstan's total industrial output and hosted nearly a third of industrial workers in the 1970s, and nearly all of Kyrgyzstan's oil, gas and coal production was located in the Fergana valley (Abdullaev and Nazarov 2012, p. 148). By 1989 Osh oblast accounted for one third of the Kyrgyz SSR's total industrial production (Asankanov 1996). The economies of all the Central Asian republics were oriented towards the production or extraction of raw products destined for the advanced industrialized center. In return, most of the republics relied heavily on subsidies from Moscow, as well as many basic consumer goods that were produced in the union's more advanced industrial base in the west.⁴⁸ The evolving agricultural landscape of cotton production and cultivation in the Fergana Valley is one of the defining features in the center-periphery relationship. Abdullaev and Nazarov argue, “The Stalin era left Central Asia as a poorly

⁴⁸ This system established a form of dependency between the center and that was particularly catastrophic for Kyrgyzstan and many other former republics after independence.

developed, agrarian, and subsidized region dependent on Russia for whatever economic well-being it enjoyed. This is all the more true of the Ferghana Valley, as a periphery of a periphery” (A&N 124). The Turkestan-Siberia railroad, built between 1926-1931 and terminating in Osh, was constructed with this relationship in mind. Because so much former agricultural land was devoted to cotton production, essential foodstuffs, including grain and bread, had to be imported to the Fergana Valley from Siberia (Abdullaev and Nazarov 2012).

After Stalin’s death in 1953 a period of relative stability followed the turbulence of his rule. In the Fergana Valley, Soviet rule was focused on increasing cotton production. This required the modernization and mechanization of monocrop agriculture, the expansion of irrigable land, the forced collectivization of former pasture land and the sedentarization of pastoral groups, as well as the harnessing of local populations into labor, processing and ancillary industries. Cotton came into fairly widespread cultivation in Central Asia in the late 1800s, when Russian settlers introduced long-grain hybrid varieties from the United States that required intensive irrigation (Ferrando 2011; Musgrave 2014), but it was not until Khrushchev renewed plans that were laid in the decades prior to the war to enlarge the total area of irrigable land for cotton production that cotton became the monocrop of the Fergana Valley. The push for increased cotton production required a vast system of dams, reservoirs, canals and pumping stations, and the taming and redirecting of enormous river systems.⁴⁹ Ferrando (2011, p. 39) reports that, in Tajikistan, the total amount of irrigated land nearly quadrupled between 1925-1960, and total cotton production went from 8,400 tons per year to nearly 400,000 during that time. Similar growth undoubtedly took place in southern Kyrgyzstan and other parts of the Fergana Valley. Because most of the available land that had not already been brought into cotton production was in the foothills, it could not be reached by gravity-fed canals. Thus pumps were

⁴⁹ These endeavors, and the water-hungry cotton that they were meant to supply, also resulted in the infamous social and environmental catastrophe that shrunk the Aral Sea.

necessary to feed new irrigation systems and to extend cultivated areas into previously arid regions (Bichsel 2012, p. 74). One of the more important industries in Osh was directed towards solving these issues. The Osh Pump Factory, which produced deep submersible pumps (Ibraimov 1979, p. 98), was established in the early post-war period and by 1977, Ibraimov claims that it exported its products to nine other countries across Asia and Africa, in addition to supplying domestic need, and that it was the largest enterprise in Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁰

Image 4.5: One of many large canals that tame and drain the Ak Bura river before it reaches the center of Osh, as seen from the ethnic Uzbek mahalla of On Adir, overlooking the Yugo-Vostok neighborhood below.



⁵⁰ Ibraimov's book is unabashedly full of grand statements about Osh oblast and its place within the Kyrgyz SSR and the Union overall, and I have not been able to verify this statement. Certainly, the pump factory was important. However, several of my research participants pointed out the former pump factory or mentioned it to me when I asked about the city's numerous industrial spaces. Other important factories included a tobacco processing plant, which survived on a much smaller scale under private ownership after 1991 and finally closed its doors in 2015, a grenade factory (opened in 1925) and a silk-weaving factory (opened in 1928).

Another important effect of the expansion in cotton production was the need for more labor. Rather than recruit and transfer seasonal workers during the sowing and harvest seasons, authorities chose to permanently resettle people to the newly irrigated cotton lowlands from other areas of the region. This process of forced resettlement was an ongoing process that took place for the better half of the 20th century, from roughly 1925 until the 1970s. It picked up steam during the 1950s with a particularly vigorous campaign to populate uninhabited and newly irrigated areas (Ferrando 2011; Bichsel 2012).⁵¹ In her work on southern Kyrgyzstan, Reeves notes that the innovations in water infrastructure, dams and canals was accompanied by the forced resettlement of semi-nomadic and pastoral populations in new towns and villages in the 1960s and 70s (Reeves 2014, p. 41).

Image 4.6: “Scheme of integrated use of the Naryn river,” from Ibriamov 1979, p. 88. The damming of the Naryn river was one of the most important infrastructure projects in Kyrgyzstan. The upper-most dam, Kambaratinskaya GES 1, was planned during the Soviet period but was not built, although in recent years there has been talk of resurrect these plans.



⁵¹ Including the “Hungry Steppe” of Kazakhstan, so named because of the famine brought about by the forced collectivization of pastoral-nomadic peoples. For more on this topic, see Cameron 2016.

The Second World War, known as the Great Patriotic War (1941-45), initiated a different type of large-scale migration. Hundreds of thousands of Central Asians were recruited into service on the front. Commemorating their lives and service continues to be an important time of the year in Osh. At the annual Victory Day parade on May 9, Osh's school children march along the main thoroughfare holding large signs bearing photos of those Oshliks/O'shtuks who perished during the war. It is a spectacular sight to see in a town so far from the war's main theater. One of the key factors enabling the Soviet Union to defeat Nazi Germany was related to its superior capacity to produce weapons and heavy ammunitions. Most of these industries were located on the Soviet Union's western front, and so in the early days of the Great Patriotic War, as Germans forces were rolling through Soviet territories at a tremendous pace, many key industries and their skilled employees were placed on trains bound for the eastern reaches of the Union.⁵² Hundreds of wartime industries, intellectuals and skilled classes were wholly relocated from the western front to Central Asia during this time.

While Osh was not the most important center of the wartime effort in Central Asia, it was nevertheless greatly affected by these processes. In 1941 a large textile factory ("Rahmanovskaya") was evacuated to Osh from Pavlovskiy Posad, near Moscow. The evacuation included 125 sewing machines and 240 specialized workers, many of whom were teenagers and women who had replaced men already recruited into military service. From Osh, these European workers produced tarps, silk parachutes and silk thread for medical purposes. They also initiated the construction of the first hydroelectric power station in Osh to supply the factory with electricity. Osh State University, which is now the country's largest university, got its start in a similar fashion. After Nazi forces bombed key targets in Rostov-on-Don in western Russia, including the university's physics and chemistry buildings, the surviving staff were sent

⁵² For a fascinating discussion of how the war effort impacted urbanization in Tashkent, see Stronski 2010.

to Osh. They arrived in 1942: sixty-four professors, teachers, graduate students and lab assistants from Molotova University took up residence in the buildings of the newly-founded Osh Institute of Study, which had just opened in 1939 only to be closed two years later when the war began (Djunushaliev et al. 2014).⁵³ Today, Osh State University is the largest university in Kyrgyzstan, training around 40,000 students a year.⁵⁴ Among the Central Asian republics, the Kyrgyz and Kazakh SSRs were most affected by these multiple waves of Russian-speaking migrants during and after the war (Shigabdinov and Nikitenko 2000; Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010).

At the same time that the Central Asians were recruited into the war machine, and entire industries and their employees from western Russia were relocated to Central Asia, millions of deported populations were arriving, often with no pre-planned place to go. Stalin uprooted and deported entire populations in the 1930s to Central Asia, including Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Ingush, Chechens, Balkars, Karachay, Kalmyk, Koreans, and others (J. O. Pohl 1999; M. Pohl 2002). Abdullaev and Nazarov report that, “In 1956, the Kyrgyz provinces of the valley alone had 19,482 Chechens and Ingush, 3,208 Balkars, and 2,819 Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Khemshils who had been expelled from the Caucasus” (Abdullaev and Nazarov 2012, p. 144). Still others fled to Central Asia when Stalin’s de-kulakization policies of the 1930s put their lives and savings at risk. It is hard to overestimate the impact of such migrations on Central Asian society, and harder still to meet someone whose family was not directly affected by such movements. A 69-year-old research participant born in Osh explained how her ethnic Tatar parents found their way to the city: traders (*kuptsani*) from a village near Kazan, Russia, they fled Stalin’s terror during the *raskulachivaniye* (dekulakization). Many other

⁵³ Reportedly, one week after they arrived the faculty of Molotova University organized a conference titled, “The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet People Against Fascist Invaders in Modern Fiction.” In addition, “from the first hours” of their arrival to Osh, the October collective of the university went to a local kolkhoz (collective farm) to assist rural workers of the Osh oblast in gathering cotton (Djunushaliev et al. 2014).

⁵⁴ Osh is also home to several other major universities including Osh Technical University, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, Osh Humanitarian-Pedagogical University, and several other institutes and branches of higher education.

Tatars ended up in Central Asia because, as the only Muslim and Turkic-speaking population in Tsarist Russia, they were frequently recruited into the service of colonial projects across Turkestan (Shigabdinov and Nikitenko 2000). The first half of the 20th century was a period of immense upheaval and social change in Central Asia. Those changes were driven not only by the internal politics of the Soviet Union, but also by its foreign affairs and global events.

4. Producing ethnic identities: From Soviet policies to independence

In the extended quote at the top of this chapter, historian Scott Levi artfully paints a picture of Central Asian society prior to the Russian conquest as one characterized primarily by the shifting relationships between nomadic and sedentary populations. The passage is notable because it avoids using the common markers of identity through which we almost ubiquitously speak about Central Asian societies today: Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and so on. Yet the analytical terms that today seem natural were by no means pre-given ways of organizing the world just 150 years ago. They are entangled with the Russian and Soviet colonial projects, and they continue to be shaped through the remaking of national identity since independence in 1991. These processes through which ethno-national identities have been produced took place in parallel and in tandem with the processes that have remade urban and rural areas described in earlier parts of this chapter. I argue that in being more attentive to the interaction of rural and urban differences with Kyrgyz and Uzbek identities, we can paint a more nuanced picture of urban conflict.

Ethnicity has not always been the primary line upon which difference was constructed in Central Asia, nor indeed elsewhere. The tethering of ethnicity to the political boundaries of the nation-state is an explicitly 19th-century European project (Arendt 1973) that the Soviet Union modified to fit its ideological view of the world on its periphery. Following German practice, the

Russians looked primarily to language as the main category of identity. Yet in the pre-Tsarist period, the Khoqand khanate's vast kingdom consisted of a diverse set of populations and communities, and its subjects were not easily classified in terms of language, ethnicity or religion. Factors that were important to group identity included: clan and tribal lineage (Gullette 2010; Ismailbekova 2017); language differences; religion, especially between Sunni, Shia and various brotherhoods of Ismaili Muslims,⁵⁵ class and economic difference; differences between nomadic, semi-nomadic, sedentary and mountainous cultures (Abashin 2004); and rural-urban distinctions (Abramson 2010). Language differences did matter but the most important lines of difference were between Turkic and Persian language families, rather than those within the Turkic language family (Bichel 2002).⁵⁶ Abashin provides perhaps the best description of pre-Russian societies in the Fergana Valley:

Based on the data that we do have, before the arrival of the Russians in the 1860-70s there was not a sense of ethnic self-consciousness among the population of Central Asia. [...] Within every governing entity and simply in every region there was a unique nomenclature and hierarchy of status positions or categories, along which the population was divided. A person or a group of people who moved to another region easily entered into a new hierarchy and nomenclature. The plasticity of this self-consciousness was dictated by necessity: every group needed to have a mechanism to incorporate new members and a mechanism to enter stronger groups.

Furthermore, these differences have evolved in different ways across the Central Asian states. For example, in pre-Soviet times there were dozens of Uzbek tribes, but such lineage has not been perpetuated as part of national Uzbek identity today (Bichel 2002). However, many ethnic Kyrgyz can proudly recite their ancestors' names back seven generations along the male line and some even claim identity to one of the 40 tribes united by the mythical Manas (Ismailbekova 2017). The blurred and fluid boundaries between all of these identity categories would later pose

⁵⁵ While most of Central Asia's population had been converted to Islam by the 1800s, the reach, extent and variety of Islam was not uniform. Islam arrived to the Fergana valley from Persia in the late 16th and 17th centuries, but it took two more centuries before Sufi missionaries converted the pastoral population of mountainous Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, nomads in northern Kyrgyzstan converted to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam (Gullette 2010, p. 11).

⁵⁶ Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Uyghur all belong to the Turkic language family, while Tajik is a Persian language.

significant problems for state-sponsored ethnographers, Soviet-era census takers and in the exercise of drawing political boundaries.

Lenin embraced ethnic nationalism on both ideological and practical grounds that were related to a set of “serious challenges” posed by their periphery: the Bolsheviks needed to construct realities that would correspond and be amendable to their political program of social engineering, but they had also positioned themselves as liberators from oppressive colonial rule and the right of self-determination for “formerly oppressed nations” was a central component of their program (Tishkov 2002). Lenin adapted Marxist theory, which was characterized by a teleological idea about development, and theorized that it could be artificially sped-up through state intervention. Marxism-Leninism saw nationalities like classes rather than racial-biological groups: nations were sociohistorical groups with a shared consciousness (Hirsch 2002). Therefore, nationhood would be a cure to feudal-era backwardness. In addition, the ideological foundations of socialism rested on the notion of an urban, industrialized society, and cities were seen not just as signs of progress but as concrete steps towards the realization of a classless society (Gentile, Tammaru, and van Kempen 2012). As such, socialist development privileged cities and urban development over the development of rural areas (Buckley 1998). Cities were the places where it was assumed that a true socialist consciousness—the most perfect form of socialist society—was believed to develop (C. Hatcher and Thieme 2016).

The Bolsheviks inherited a massive empire that they knew relatively little about, and so in the first years of their rule they set out to study, record and classify their new citizens. To enact these socio-historical transformations, Lenin and Stalin adopted modern forms of bureaucratic and scientific management, including a triad of powerful European technologies: the census, the map and the museum. Ethnographic knowledge was the essential foundation for all three of these technologies. It enabled the Bolsheviks to consolidate power in two ways:

through the establishment of a scientific system of territorial-administrative units, and through the “conceptual conquest” over the disparate peoples of the former Russian empire (Hirsch 2005). Hirsch describes the alliance that emerged between the Bolsheviks and ethnographic experts of the Russian empire, who did not support the revolution, as an unlikely one. Drawn together by a mutual interest in western notions of scientific rule, the scholars saw an opportunity for their work to influence the Union’s nationalities policy, while the new leaders, unfamiliar with the people of the empire’s hinterlands, recognized a more practical use for ethnographic knowledge. Thus, the ethnographers were tasked with describing, categorizing and mapping the nationalities of the Soviet Union and organizing a nation-wide census in order to recommend a logical administrative-territorial system. At first, their work was untainted with the need to conform to a Marxist historical interpretation of class and nationality, but eventually they engaged in lively debates about what makes a nation and how to define ethnicity (language? religion? self-definition?). Nomadic populations were difficult to situate on the historical spectrum of Marxist evolutionary development, and the ethnographers grappled with questions such as whether Central Asian societies were pre- or post-feudal, whether livestock or land could be considered a “primary means of production” for a nomadic society, whether the practice of wealthy herding families who employing poorer ones to watch over their livestock was a marker of a class relation, etc. (Gullette 2010).

At the same time that ethnographers were busy classifying populations and conducting the first all-Union census (1926), the Bolsheviks tasked a separate group of scientists to draw up administrative plans on the basis of Marxist-Leninist ideas about the most efficient organization of a socialist economy. When combined with the ethnographers’ work, a complicated system of territorial administration emerged. This system is, roughly, the set of independent nation-states that exists in Central Asia today. The boundary of each new Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR)

acknowledged the autonomy of some ethnic groups and simultaneously established “logical” economic territorial units. However, it did not come about by sudden fiat. Not every nationality was granted its own territory; some were reduced to a status lower in the administrative-territorial hierarchy. Furthermore, in the process of border delimitation, formerly disparate groups who did not necessarily identify with one another came to recognize and refer to themselves using the terms brought to them by census enumerators. Even those who used official categories to resist Soviet power ended up reifying those very categories. The process of simultaneously defining (1) ethnographic groups and (2) territorial boundaries led to what is called “double assimilation,” whereby the entire population of a territory was suddenly categorized into a single nationality *and* simultaneously incorporated into the Soviet Union. The people of Central Asia became members of an ethno-national group and Soviet citizens at the same time.

This was not just a top-down affair: local groups played an active role in generating categories, advocating for inclusion in this or that SSR. The national delimitation commission first drew up a set of borders for its Central Asian republics in 1924, but the status of each territory (e.g. as an SSR, ASSR, AO, etc.) and their specific boundaries of each continued to shift over the next decade. This was not just a Moscow-driven process; local leaders collaborated with and appealed to the scientific experts to negotiate the boundaries. According to Hirsch, the Fergana Valley had “tremendous economic and cultural importance” to the Union and, as an ethnically mixed area, there were intense disputes about its boundaries. Uzbek and Kyrgyz leaders petitioned the Central Asian Bureau (CAB) of the national delimitation commission to include the valley’s major towns in their territory. Kyrgyz leaders acknowledged that none of the major towns had ethnic Kyrgyz majorities, although there were many smaller Kyrgyz settlements throughout the valley. They argued that it was important from an economic perspective to have a

commercial center. The CAB considered these arguments carefully and weighed them against the claims of Uzbek leaders, studied the economic orientation of major towns in the region, and ultimately decided that Osh and Jalal-Abad would be given to the Kyrgyz, while Andijan, Margilan and most other large towns of the Fergana Valley would be given to the Uzbeks. Throughout the next three years, until 1927, authorities were literally “drowning in a sea of claims and counterclaims” (Hirsch 2005, p. 127) made by communities along all the new Central Asian boundaries. Ethno-national identities were not only imposed from above, but actively made from below. Local elites played a particularly important role on two fronts: in seeking autonomy and power within the Soviet system, they advocated for their groups and represented them in particular ways; and they served as a source of information about their groups to the ethnographers. Hirsch describes several cases in which villages on either side of the Fergana Valley boundaries continued to petition against the original decision, not just on economic grounds but also on the basis of fears about becoming a minority nationality, which they believed would disenfranchise them from the benefits of development. It was in this way that Osh, which was an ethnic Uzbek city, came to be incorporated into the Kyrgyz SSR while some ethnic Kyrgyz villages became a part of the Uzbek SSR.

Together, the map and census were powerful tools of social ordering, education and state-making. In Hirsch’s words, “Census-taking and border-making were couched in the language of self-determination but were in fact powerful ‘disciplining’ mechanisms that facilitated administrative consolidation and control” (p. 14). Abramson (2001) argues that in Central Asia, the census was like a modern public opinion poll, to the extent that opinion polls have the effect of *creating* public opinion where it did not previously exist. The category of nationality was not posed as an open question on the census, but presented as a required item that could not be left blank. Respondents did not have the option of refusing any of the choices, or of selecting more

than one. Some identity categories widely used in the Fergana Valley, such as “Sart” and “Kipchak” were excluded from the list of nationality options on the census because Soviet ethnographers saw those terms as categories primarily concerned with economic orientation, even while they recognized that many census respondents would want to be listed as Sarts or Kipchaks first. In addition, some national groups attempted to claim Sarts and Teptiars as their own, because this would secure their group’s rights to those territories (Hirsch 2005, pp. 112-113). Ultimately, Sarts were simply “decreed out of existence,” removed from the list of possibilities (Slezkine 1994). The way people answered the nationality question on the census also reflected their understanding of the state and its role in their lives, and the significance of identity for official documents. In this way, the census also shaped public perceptions of the state.

Across Central Asia, many Soviet systems interacted with existing identity politics. For example, the kolkhozes “became the new tribes of Central Asia” as the structure and personalities of former social institutions such as the *quam* and *mahalla* were transposed wholesale into the system of collective farms (O. Roy 2002). In writing about “actually existing socialism” Roy argues that, after Stalin’s purges, the languages of Marxism and Leninism became devoid of any real meaning.

Kyrgyzstan’s first president, Askar Akaev, embraced and promoted a multicultural national identity for the newly independent country under the slogan, “Kyrgyzstan-our common home.” He sought to protect the rights of national minorities such as Uzbeks and most ethnic Uzbeks supported his government. Akaev actively fought against a populist Parliament that sponsored numerous bills promoting a vision of Kyrgyzstan for ethnic Kyrgyz, that was driven by nationalistic concerns and decidedly anti-Uzbek (Megoran et al. 2014b; Khan 2010). In 1994 he established the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan to give voice to national minorities,

although the Assembly acts more as a government mouthpiece now. I freely wandered their empty halls in Bishkek in June of 2013. A long hallway is lined with doors marked for each minority group, but nearly all the doors were locked or empty. In 1996 Kyrgyzstan became the first and only Central Asian country to do away with the nationality category on its passports. However the move was deeply unpopular and after just two years the category was put back on identity documents. In 2003 Akaev secured a compromise establishing Russian as the nation's "official language" and Kyrgyz as a "state language" (Gaziyev 2008). He also made it his personal project to promote the Manas epic poem, an oral myth that was not written down until 1858, as the nation's historical roots. The Manas epic, which is in verse and usually recited from heart by bards, tells the story of the unification of 40 Kyrgyz tribes against hostile neighbors through three generations. Akaev promoted Manas as the pre-colonial father of the Kyrgyz nation, celebrating the values of independence, loyalty and egalitarianism that each of the 40 brothers displayed (Straube 2016). The Manas epic was taught in the Soviet period as part of the literature curriculum, but today it is taught through the curriculum for social science (Ismailova 2004). While it can be interpreted as a unification of 40 multi-ethnic tribes, it can also be interpreted in disturbingly nationalistic tones. Thus, by elevating Manas epic as Kyrgyzstan's cultural heritage, Akaev also promoted "ideals [that] were Kyrgyz-centric and offered rich source material for nationalistic forces" (Marat 2016).

Akaev was overthrown in 2005, accused of corruption and nepotism (one major complaint was that his son held the exclusive rights to supply fuel to the US transit center at Manas airbase). Kyrgyzstan's newly elected President, Maksim Bakiyev, was an ethnic Kyrgyz southerner who did not need to create political alliances with Uzbek politicians to be elected (the same was true for the recently-elected President Joornbai Jeenbekov). Scholars debate the degree to which such regionalism matters in Kyrgyzstan's national politics: Jones-Luong (2002) argues

that sub-national regional identities are extremely important, most notably the division between north and south Kyrgyzstan; while Gullette (2010) argues that regionalism is just one of many intersecting identities and should not be assumed to be strongest today. Whatever the case, ethnic Kyrgyz southern elites interpreted Bakiyev's win as a form of revenge for their political marginalization during the Akaev era, which was directly linked to Akaev's empowerment of Uzbeks and his embrace of multiculturalism (Laurelle 2008). The populists and nationalists whom Akaev had fought while in office found louder voices under Bakiyev's rule. Under Kyrgyz constitutional law, the mayor of Osh and the heads of each *oblast* are appointed by Parliament. Osh's appointed mayor, Melis Myrzakmatov, advanced a particularly strong version of Kyrgyz-centric urban development in Osh during his tenure. Myrzakmatov is also notable for the amount of real change he was able to institute compared with former mayors. Parks became cleaner, monuments to Kyrgyz national heroes were erected to the three main entrances to the city (Harrowell 2014), and there was a renewed sense of urban modernization and development. Under Myrzakmatov's influence, Osh also became distinctly more Kyrgyz on its face. In addition to the new monuments, the *tunduk* symbol at the top of the yurt—a circle with four crossing lines that also adorns the country's flag—became a ubiquitous element of urban infrastructure, incorporated everywhere from park benches and gates to the ceiling of the conference room at the mayor's office.

5. *Urbanization, Housing shortages, and Land-grabbing*

In Central Asia, the first General Plans of urban development were made up in the 1930s for major cities, and implemented after the war in the 1950s. They were closely integrated with regional development plans, and also reflected the ideological premises of socialist evolution. The era of large-scale, reproducible housing began in the 1950s when local organizations such as

Uzgosproekt and Kazakhgosproekt developed models that made use of prefabricated concrete slabs, making use of locally-available materials and aiming to be as economic as possible. This was a major change from the Stalin-era construction style of the 1920s and 30s, which Khrushchev condemned in 1954 as excessive. In its place, construction was industrialized, standardized, and transformed into an assembly line. Huge complexes of four to six-story buildings proliferated across Central Asia, wherever skilled workers were needed (Azzout 2005).

Industrialization and modernization in Central Asia were mutually dependent on urbanization (Azzout 2005). Industrialization picked up speed from the 1950s, and it drove several inter-related processes: more labor was needed in factories across the Union, and the workers needed housing. In addition, cities became the main sites of educational and employment opportunity and, while internal migration was heavily restricted at first, over time the *propiska* (residence permit) system, which required people to receive permission for even local travel, was less strictly enforced in the later years of Soviet rule. In Central Asia, urban population growth was largely driven by migration, but rural population growth, driven by high birth rates and better access to preventative healthcare, was also exceptionally high. As a result, Central Asian cities had higher rates of overcrowding than elsewhere in the Union (C. Hatcher and Thieme 2016). While the Soviet system is notorious for all manner of shortages, the shortage in housing also had the effect of introducing high rates of commuting across the Union (Szelenyi 1983). Several of my research participants recalled that in Osh, the demand for labor from the silk and cotton factories was so high that workers were bussed in from Andijon, just across the border in the Uzbek SSR, and that the work day was organized into three separate shifts with groups rotating continuously in and out.

The Soviet economy entered a period of stagnation and then crisis in the late 1970s-80s. Soviet support for agriculture waned, leading many in rural and mountainous areas of

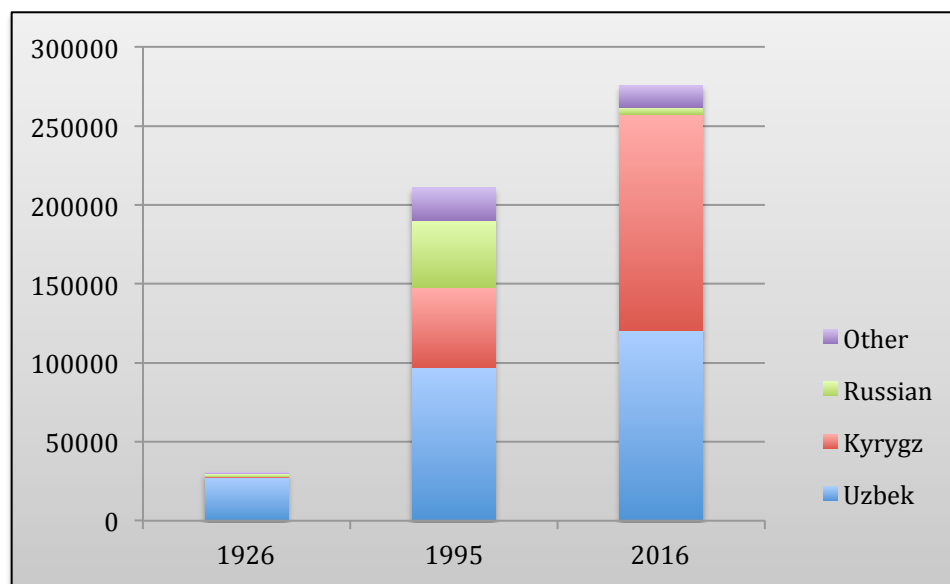
Kyrgyzstan to seek opportunity in cities. By 1990, Osh oblast had the highest unemployment rate in the republic (Megoran et al. 2014b, p. 30). At the same time, the Soviet Union's particular form of affirmative action, *korenizatsiya* (literally, "nativization"), promoted the titular ethnic groups of each SSR at the expense of other nationalities. Thus, ethnic Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, etc. had greater opportunity to take on leadership positions and to advance into the more prestigious levels of society. From the 1930s a new class of ethnic Kyrgyz intellectuals began to rise up within the ranks of the Communist Party (Igmen 2012). This led to an unusual situation in Osh, where by 1990 the majority of the city was ethnically Uzbek but living in older housing, or had been displaced to new neighborhoods lacking many basic services (water, especially) to make way for urban development. Uzbeks were employed mostly in trading and service sectors. Ethnic Kyrgyz held political power at all levels, from local to national, were employed as state administrators or gained vocational training and educational opportunities. They either shared state-run housing blocks with Russian and European factory workers, rented living space from Uzbeks in mahallas, or commuted to the city from nearby villages. Finally, a new class of ethnic Kyrgyz from the countryside began arriving in the 1980s, and their numbers substantially increased after independence in 1991. These rural residents were employed on state-owned farms outside the city that were subsidized by the state, but as the economic crisis of the 1980s wore on, they were also drawn to the city (Megoran et al. 2014b). In commentary about the 1990 violence published in a Russian journal of ethnography, Brusina (1990) compares census figures on the growth of ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations in urban areas between 1959-1989. Over this 40-year period, the share of ethnic Kyrgyz grew 5.3 times in cities and 2.7 times in rural areas. Ethnic Uzbeks grew by factors of 2.6 and 2.5 in urban and rural areas, respectively. Furthermore, the share of ethnic Kyrgyz in Uzbek SSR cities did not grow substantially, even though there were significant numbers of ethnic Kyrgyz across the

Fergana valley. This data suggests to Brusina that affirmative action politics favoring ethnic Kyrgyz in the Kyrgyz SSR was a major driver of urban growth. Megoran, et al. argue that because ethnic Uzbeks were unable to reach the top levels of society, they faced a choice of emigrating to the Uzbek SSR or working in trade, farming or technical occupations instead (p. 30). Furthermore, as corruption became rife during the late Soviet period, extending and deepening after independence, those who worked in trade or business were forced to “cooperate” with corrupt officials. In Osh, the dynamic of corruption took on an ethnicized pattern because very few Uzbeks worked in government or public administration.

It is also important to note that factory labor and opportunities for training and educational advancement were not equal: more highly-skilled workers received housing priority, while local workers from rural areas either commuted or rented from local populations. This mixed with the Soviet policy of “korenizatsiya,” elevating the educational opportunities and class-consciousness for titular nations in each republic. In the Osh region, the effects were increased training, education and travel opportunities for ethnic Kyrgyz but not for ethnic Uzbeks. However, for those ethnic Kyrgyz who advanced through the system to positions of leadership, their living conditions and places of residence did not match their perceived levels of stature and growing importance in political and social life. Daniyar’s story in the introduction exemplifies this dilemma: from a small village not far from Osh, Daniyar received a good education, held active leadership roles in the party system, traveled widely throughout the Soviet Union during his compulsory military service, but commuted to Osh for lowly-paid work and was exasperated with his living conditions and the bleak prospects for raising his children in them. Meanwhile, the skilled native-Russian speaking classes, who often had the best jobs in management and oversight, received housing priority. Discussing the situation, an ethnic Kyrgyz research participant referred to these as the “desk jobs” (white collar jobs) of Osh. The

demographic data below summarize this story. According to the first All-Union census of 1926, Osh's population was overwhelmingly Uzbek, with negligible Kyrgyz and Russian minorities. By 1995, four years after independence, Uzbeks were still the largest group but they did not make up more than half of the population. The most recent data, from 2016, shows not only the exodus of Russians but also the dramatic growth of Kyrgyz in the city.

Figure 4.1: *Osh city population by ethnicity, 1926-2016* (data from: Brusina 1990; Asankanov 1996; “Demographic Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009-2013” n.d.).



Housing shortage was endemic to the Soviet economy and cannot be separated from it. Some have argued that the state clearly understood the housing needs and that it was simply unable to keep up with them (Buckley 1995). However, in his landmark study of the socialist system, Janos Kornai (1992) observes that housing was a low-priority and neglected sector. Furthermore, Kornai argues that the main consumers of social services, including public housing, tended to be wealthier and more highly skilled populations. Population growth and density figures in Osh oblast and the Fergana valley suggest that the housing shortage was particularly acute. By 1989, when the last all-union census was conducted in the USSR, more than half of Kyrgyzstan's population lived in Osh oblast. Thus, Osh oblast was more densely populated than

any other oblast in the Kyrgyz republic (Asankanov 1996). Furthermore, even its rural areas were as densely populated as comparable areas of western Russia. Asankanov claims that Osh oblast was the most densely populated region in the entire Soviet Union. While Soviet interventions into health and education resulted in declining birth rates across much of the Union, between 1960-91, Kyrgyzstan's rural population doubled (Anderson 1999, p.67).

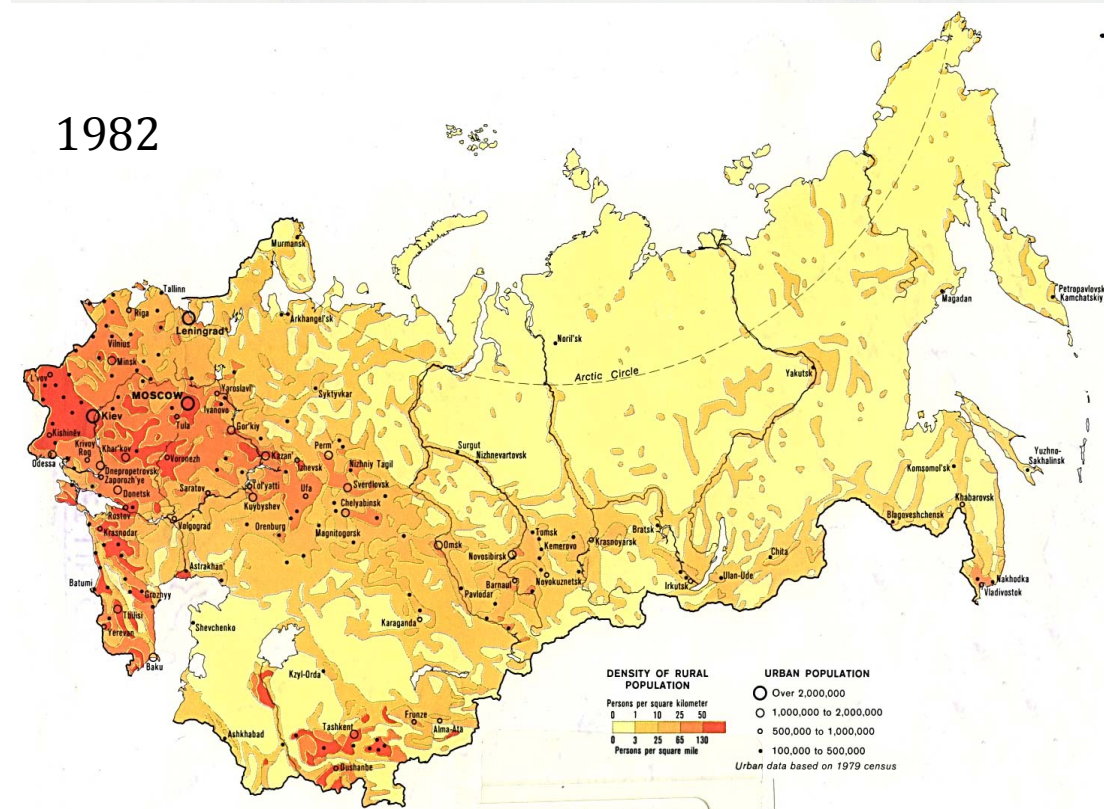
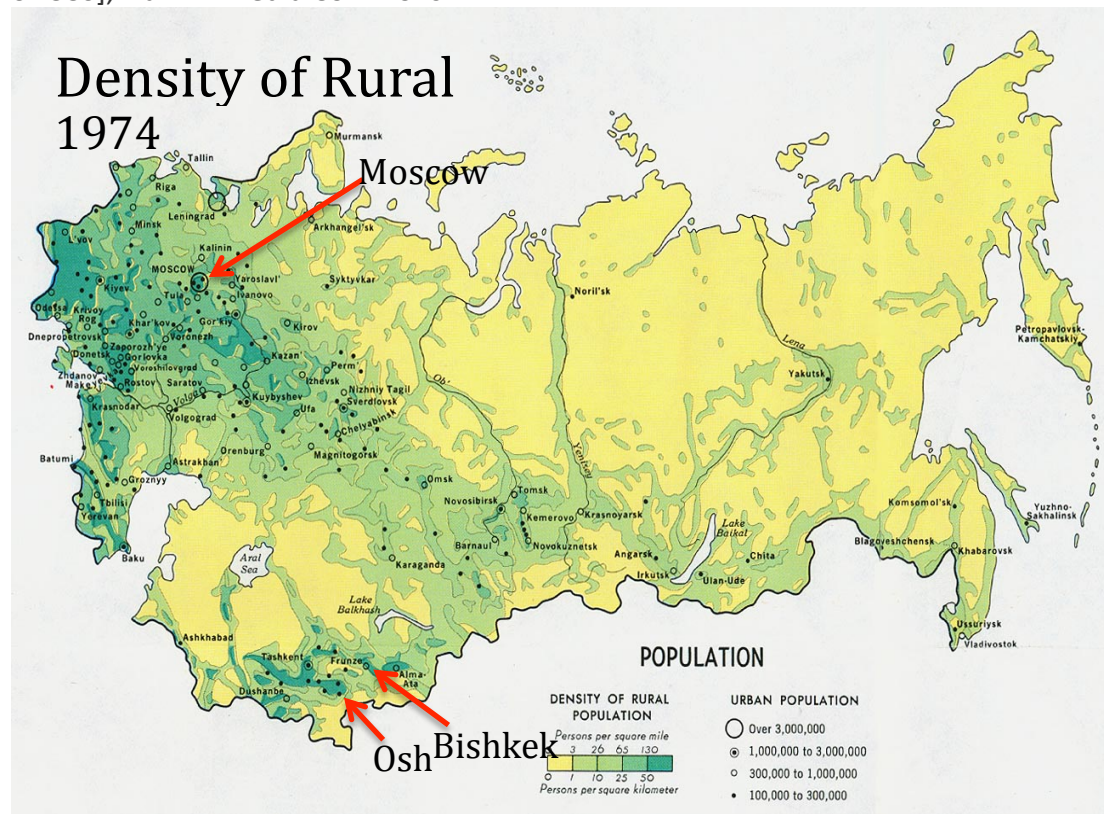
The first set of images below show the rural population density across the USSR in 1974 and 1982. Osh, and the rest of the Fergana Valley, do indeed rival the population density of the non-urban areas of western Russia and the Chui corridor of northern Kyrgyzstan, where Bishkek is located. The situation remains roughly the same today: in 2016 the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan reported that the population density of Osh oblast was nearly as high as Chui oblast, the urban corridor of the north, where Bishkek and dozens of other major interconnected cities are located.⁵⁷ The second set of images below is taken from the European Union's Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL). The GHSL combines two datasets: built up area, expressed as a proportion of building footprint area within each cell, measured through satellite images, and population census data. The result is a measure of urbanization. GHSL classifies orange areas as "urban clusters" and red areas as "urban centers." The squirrely purple line running from SW to NE is the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The images show dramatic urbanization in Osh in a very short period (1975-80). Similar change is visible in the Uzbek SSR town of Andijon in the same time period.⁵⁸ Over the next 20-year period (1980-2000) the degree of urbanization is relatively stable. There is another small surge in urbanization from 2000-2015, likely explained by internal (rural-to-urban) migration. It is also useful to

⁵⁷ In Osh region, there were 43 people per square kilometer, compared to 44 in Chui ("Demographic Yearbook of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009-2013" n.d.).

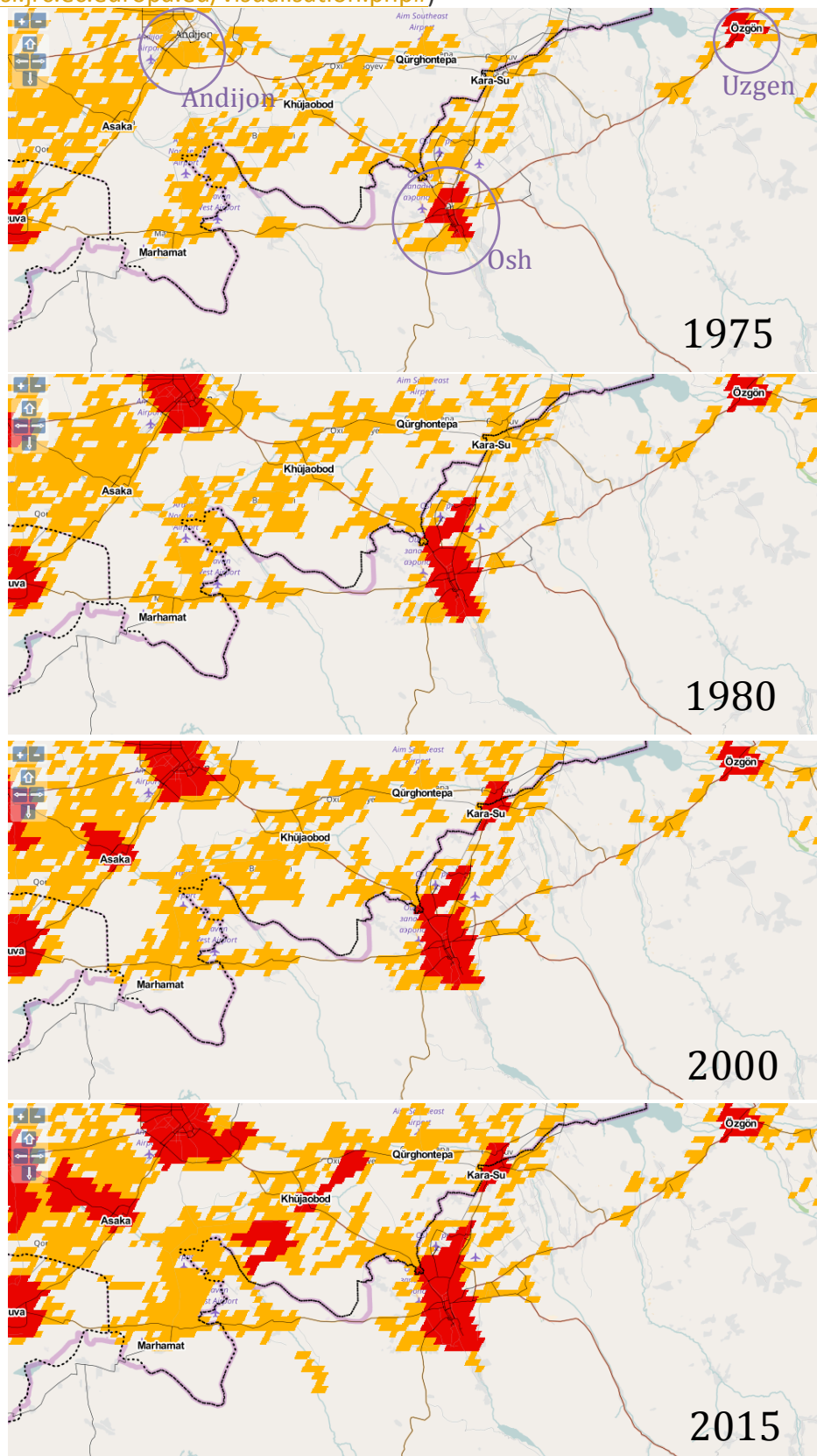
⁵⁸ It is not entirely clear what might explain such growth over such a short time and further investigation into the dataset is warranted.

compare Osh with Uzgen, a major secondary town with very little industry, over the same periods. Uzgen's degree of urbanization does not change significantly.

Map 4.1: Rural Population Density of the Soviet Union, 1974. Osh and the Fergana Valley are comparable in density to western Russia. From University of Texas at Austin [Public domain or CC0], via Wikimedia Commons.



Map 4.2: Degree of urbanization in Osh, 1975, 1990, 2000, 2015. From the European Commission Global Human Settlement data set:
<https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/visualisation.php#>



These figures will likely come as a surprise to anyone who has traveled in both the Chui and Osh regions. The Chui valley in the north includes the Bishkek metropolis and a string of interconnected secondary towns and villages similar to the Colorado Front Range, while Osh and its suburban environs have a more “rural” character. Even in the city center, many neighborhoods are single-story homes, while goats and roosters contribute to the aural landscape as much as the sounds of traffic and the evening call to prayer. Of course there are other signs of population density in Osh: a busy and crowded public transportation system, for example, and endless traffic jams through the main thoroughfares. Nevertheless, the similarities in population density are counterintuitive, and, I argue, should be read as evidence of a severe housing shortage. I frequently observed the crowded conditions of urban life in Osh. In 2014 I rented a large basement room from an Uzbek family on the slopes of Sulaiman-Too mountain, along Navoi Street. The household consisted of an extended family with three adult women, two teenage girls, and four children under the age of six. These nine people shared two sparsely furnished rooms upstairs, renting out the equivalent amount of space to me alone. This extra space was available because three male relatives were working in Russia in the summer that I rented the room. Our neighbors’ houses were similarly inhabited. The second example comes from an impromptu interview that took place in the old Uzbek mahalla of Majrimtal, located centrally on the east bank of the river near the bazaar. As my research assistant and I were saying the customary extended set of goodbyes at the end of our interview, the *aksakal* (community elder) invited me to live with his family for a month to get a sense for life in an Uzbek mahalla. There was plenty of room, he cajoled. After all, there were already 23 family members living there. Surely no one would notice one more!

It is instructive to look at what was happening in Bishkek during the 1980s-90s. Authorities began distributing land plots to internal migrants in the 1980s, contributing to a kind of “state-sanctioned urban sprawl,” according to Hatcher and Thieme (2016). Then, Sanghera, et al. describe three different waves of illegal settlement in Bishkek. The first, in 1989, took place when a group of middle-class ethnic Kyrgyz residents who were tired of waiting their turn for state housing seized plots of land and began building their own houses. (These are probably the protests that Daniyar refers to as inspiring the Osh Aimagy movement.) As in Osh, Bishkek also experienced a shortage of labor and housing, and state-owned enterprises recruited workers from outside the city who did not have the proper documentation (*propiska*, or residence permit). Many in Bishkek, which was a majority Russian city with a large Russian-speaking ethnic Kyrgyz minority, resented the new migrants, who were seen as lacking culture and contributing to a “ruralization” of urban life (C. Hatcher and Thieme 2016). A second wave of illegal land seizures took place in the late 1990s, when long-delayed agricultural reform and land privatization began to push rural migrants into urban areas.⁵⁹ A third wave of illegal settlements in Bishkek took place after the 2005 Tulip Revolution.⁶⁰ The largest settlement from this third wave, called Ak-Jar, has a population of 15,000 people. Many of them bought their land plots, although the sales were illegal, but because of the size of population they have been able to resist eviction. However, they lack most basic city services, including city registration (a holdover of the Soviet *propiska* system) for access to schools and healthcare, as well as paved roads, water, gas, electricity and trash service. An unsuccessful attempt—a unrealized fourth wave—of illegal

⁵⁹ There were some early attempts at land reform in the 1990s but a moratorium on the sale of land not formally lifted until 2003 (Spoor 2007).

⁶⁰ Kyrgyzstan’s first president, Askar Akaev, was overthrown in the Tulip Revolution and President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was elected President shortly thereafter. The June 2010 violence in Osh was connected to Kyrgyzstan’s second revolution, which overthrew Bakiyev in April of that year.

land seizures took place in a village near Bishkek just after the 2010 revolution,⁶¹ when a group of ethnic Kyrgyz attempted to seize land plots belonging to a Turkic minority group in the Mayevka village. The land grabbers supposedly shouted, “Kyrgyz land for the Kyrgyz!” (Sanghera 2010).

There were also significant tensions over land and housing in Osh in the 2000s, although these events are entirely absent from the majority of the conflict analysis literature (an issue that Chapter 5 discusses in more depth). Sanghera, et al (2011) document a number of cases before 2010 when housing insecurity led to protests and the occupation of land in Osh (Pyatibratova 2006). Most of them are cases in which former factory apartments and dormitories were privatized to “unscrupulous” investors and then rented to ethnic Kyrgyz tenants. Many privatized apartment buildings in Osh are “old, dilapidated, and lack running water and sanitation,” and a number of these buildings have been condemned by authorities, but they continue to be inhabited because the demand is high. Renters of these types of housing are not registered in the city so they are deprived of basic access to schools and healthcare. It is estimated that roughly 17 percent of Osh residents—some 50,000 people—lack an official residence permit in the city (in Bishkek, the figure is estimated to be 30 percent). Furthermore, among landlords in Kyrgyzstan it is common practice to rent housing without a signing proper lease because it allows landlords to avoid taxation. (Officially, people must be registered in their place of residence, whether they rent or own their housing. Registration in a rental unit requires that a landlord sign-off on the registration document, which may threaten the landlord’s own access to local health and schooling services, and alert authorities to the fact that there might be taxable rental income. In

⁶¹ In the 2010 revolution, Kurmanbek Bakiyev was overthrown; several months later, Almazbek Atambaev was elected. Atambaev stepped down in 2018 and new elections brought Sooronbai Jeenbekov to power. Jeenbekov is also from the south, and was the former governor of Osh region.

addition, utilities in apartment buildings are charged based on the number of people registered in the unit. If the number of unregistered renters outnumbers the number of absentee registered owners, then they will collectively pay less money for utilities, creating another incentive not to register. I was not registered in the apartment that I rented in 2015-16 and while I rented a 1.5 bedroom apartment myself, I paid utilities for three people. But lack of registration also makes one's tenancy somewhat insecure. Finally, the privatization of property after independence seems to have been uneven in Kyrgyzstan. The World Bank's "Land and Real Estate Registration Project" claims to have registered over 90 percent of property in Kyrgyzstan, but one commentator writing about the reconstruction of Uzbek homes after the 2010 riots noted that property registration in Osh and Jalal-Abad "seem to have been completely missed" by this project (Kaigyluu 2012a). As a result, property registration problems plagued the international community's rebuilding efforts in Osh after 2010. When destroyed homes in Uzbek mahallas were rebuilt, the aid community had enormous difficulties getting municipal authorities to formally register the properties, a move that aid groups wanted in order to protect the owners (and the international community's investments) from arbitrary government seizures in the future. Furthermore, because many ethnic Kyrgyz also lack legal documents for their property, the international community's efforts created further resentment towards ethnic Uzbeks in the city. Since the 2010 conflict, the distribution of land plots in and around Osh has continued to be a divisive issue. In November 2010, four months after the violence in Osh, a group of roughly 500 ethnic Kyrgyz migrants occupied a piece of agricultural land for two days in the Zapadnyi district of the city before authorities forced them to disperse.

An online search for "Osh distribution of land plots" in Russian language results in a number of news articles dating to 2011 and 2012 that document the "mass distribution of land."

One article reports that the State Directorate for the Reconstruction plans to distribute land plots in the Katta-Sai and Achy massifs near Osh, and in the city of Osh itself, to 28,000 people. A government authority is quoted, “Today construction of a new microdistrict begins, which in the coming years will turn into a blooming paradise” (*AkiPress.Com* 2011; see also Anis 2012; *Kyrgyz Information Agency Kabar* 2012; *Kginform.com* 2012). Of course, no such microdistrict was ever built. More recently, a corruption scandal broke involving Osh’s head of horticulture, who fraudulently sold land plots in six territories recently annexed to Osh without the legal authority to do so, falsifying state documents and pocketing the income (Nurmatov 2018).

Osh’s Master Plan for 2025 aims to address the housing issues, calling for a significant increase in the construction of multi-story buildings. I asked most of my research participants what they thought the city should do about the issues of overcrowding, and whether they thought Osh should be developed in line with the architectural rendering in the image below. Almost no one seemed concerned about a loss of cultural heritage, and most agreed that the city should invest in building more multistory apartments. Such attitudes spanned all age, ethnic and gender groups, even though one might expect Uzbeks to be resistant to processes that were threatening their neighborhoods. In a public presentation of the Master Plan at an event organized by my NGO partner, the city’s head architect, Djanuzak Kulbatyrov, shared a few slides and maps of the city’s future plans with a public audience. At that time, the Master Plan for Osh was not a public document, although it became so a few months later.⁶² The slides are notable mostly for the scarcity of meaningful information and the complex, technical graphics that are nearly impossible to interpret. However, one informative slide addresses the city’s housing stock, reporting on the city’s plans to build more housing. In 2009, it reports, 135,000 m² of new multi-

⁶² This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

unit homes were built. The Master Plan then called for nearly 5.3 million m² of new housing by 2015, and by 2025 another 12 million m².⁶³ These would be built entirely as multistory apartment buildings.

Image 4.7: October 2015, A billboard in the construction zone of a controversial bridge project, days before it was completed, depicting one possible future for the city.



International donors paid for the construction of new apartment housing after the 2010 riots, units meant for victims who lost property or as compensation for those who lost family members, but it appears that many of these buildings are being used by the state to resolve other housing needs. A retired military veteran who gave me an extended tour of the city by car pointed out some of the new apartment buildings in the KhBK neighborhood that were just being completed. He had recently received a call from the government promising him an apartment there, although

⁶³ Data from a presentation by Djanuzak Kulbatyrov, the main architect of the Master Plans for Osh and Bishkek, at the “Osh Urban Forum “ event, March 7, 2015.

he said he wouldn't believe it until it actually happened. On the driving tour of Osh he also showed me some of the housing that had been built for victims of the 2010 violence with funding from international organizations. Next to them was an apartment block meant for the blind and those with disabilities. My tour guide laughed and said, "look at all these blind people with fancy cars!" and then explained that the "budgetniki" (state employees and bureaucrats) have declared apartments in these buildings for themselves. The housing for victims of 2010 was also mired in corruption and scandal—Uzbek and Kyrgyz widows who lost their homes and partners in the violence were given apartments side-by-side in the same buildings, and most of the Uzbeks have reportedly sold or rent their units rather than live in them. Some buildings have reportedly not been given to victims at all. Two years after the 2010 conflict, one of the professionals involved in the international community's post-conflict housing, land and property assistance to Osh criticized the aid community's work. Housing reconstruction work in mahallas was seen as sticking dogmatically to a "rule of law approach" that failed to recognize the corruption of domestic property registration institutions, many of which had received substantial technical assistance from those very same donors (Kaigyluu 2012a). The issues are complex, but in contributing to the urban housing stock after the riots, international donors entangled themselves in the politics of the city's housing shortage and its interplay with tension between ethnic groups.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has taken a fairly sweeping historical approach in an attempt to understand how literal and cognitive lines of difference (urban segregation; ethnicity) have been produced in Osh. The aim is to pull back the curtains on the contested nature of urban space today by understanding the processes that simultaneously produce space and difference within them.

Historical memory is a highly contested and debated topic in Kyrgyzstan, and different interpretations and versions of history are used in the process of claiming space on behalf of both ethnic groups. My purpose here is not to write a history that argues that Osh is “historically Uzbek” or “originally Kyrgyz” because such statements can always be contested by digging deeper into the historical record (e.g. before Uzbeks settled the cities of the Fergana Valley, it was inhabited by Persians). The 20th century has been one of almost unimaginable change and upheaval across Central Asia, and I hope that this chapter has given a small sense of that story. New practices and technologies of modernization, development, state-making and ideology have reconfigured the region in ways that are well understood, but not usually applied to understanding urbanization or conflict. I have aimed to show how such practices produce particular kinds of space, and the relations between them. This chapter is therefore a first attempt to capture and synthesize the immensely complex processes that have been involved in the making of a contested urban site today. There are a number of key takeaways:

1. Neighborhood segregation in Osh reflects the city’s history of Soviet-era modernization and developmentalism. This chapter begins by describing the neighborhood of KhBK, but in the following chapter the specific histories of other neighborhoods will also be tied to different eras of development and the operation of state power.
2. Russian imperial power in Central Asia was mediated by the patterns of settled and nomadic populations. Russian settler colonialism and the numerous local rebellions against the empire’s rule are testament to a long history of contestation over access to land and resources. Russia’s involvement in WWI and WWII, and its impact on Central Asia, also draws the region directly into conversations about modern world history and geopolitics.

Kyrgyzstan may be mountainous and difficult to access, landlocked, peripheral and a blank spot on most people's imaginaries of world geography, but it has never been isolated.

3. The relationship between urban and rural populations (and Kyrgyz and Uzbeks) was deeply affected by the early period of Soviet modernization and industrialization. Pastoral communities began to settle, or were forcibly settled, while their former grazing lands in the Fergana Valley were transformed into an industrialized landscape of cotton production.
4. Soviet development was largely driven by an elite class of "European," Russian-speaking teachers, doctors, engineers, skilled factory workers, and administrators. This led to the Russification of many cities, including Bishkek and, to a lesser extent, Osh. Combined with *korenizatsia* (affirmative action), it also created a hierarchy of class and opportunity that fell along ethnic lines. In Osh, these hierarchies had material and spatial expressions in urban space, as we saw in the details of housing policies and migration: Europeans and Kyrgyz received apartments, Uzbeks lived in older mahallas or they were forcibly relocated to newer mahallas on the dry hills above the city.
5. At the same time that urban spaces were being built up and shaped by industrialization, identities were also being transformed from multiple and fluid into more singular and static forms. With independence, the relationship between ethnic identity and the nation was at the forefront of many national policies and debates. The new politics of national identity that promote Kyrgyzstan for ethnic Kyrgyz under Bakiyev have greatly limited the space for Uzbeks to pursue cultural forms of autonomy, such as education in their native language.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ismailbekova (forthcoming) shows that in recent years Uzbeks have responded to this situation by embracing Russian-language education for their children, and she traces a proliferation of Russian-language kindergardens and pre-schools in Uzbek mahallas.

6. The housing crisis has been decades in the making. Urbanization and the concomitant housing shortage are two of the major stories of the Soviet modernization project in Central Asia. In Osh and Bishkek, that housing shortage combined with labor shortages, high rural population growth and density, to create pressures for the settlement of available land. Land grabbing and protests for better housing have been a regular feature of Kyrgyzstan's political scene since the mid-1980s, not just in Osh but in Bishkek as well.
7. A number of post-conflict housing reconstruction programs in Osh, funded by multilateral donors such as the Asian Development Bank, became imbricated in existing tensions over housing and property, unintentionally furthering the anger that some Kyrgyz felt towards Uzbeks in Osh.

One of the reasons that the 1990 violence in Osh has not been well understood (as I argue in the fifth chapter) is that many commentators have overlooked the severity of the housing crisis that newly independent Kyrgyzstan inherited, as well as how that housing crisis intersected with the ethnicization of urban space and the production of ethnic identities during the Soviet period. This chapter has sought to trace how the housing crisis, segregation and the spatialities of ethnic life in Osh are related to the region's modernization and industrialization.

CHAPTER 5

MIKRORAYONS, MAHALLAS AND NOVOSTROIKAS: CITIZEN HISTORIES OF
URBAN TRANSFORMATION

Whether it be poring over maps, taking the train for a weekend back home, picking up on the latest intellectual currents, or maybe walking the hills... we engage our implicit conceptualizations of space in countless ways. They are a crucial element in our ordering of the world, positioning ourselves, and others, human and nonhuman, in relation to ourselves.

-- Doreen Massey, in *For Space* (2005), p. 105.

1. Introduction

Both ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Kyrgyz residents of Osh make claims about their right to the city—specifically, their right to housing and property—by pointing to past policies that have excluded or displaced their group. One way to think of these claims is to view them as collective memories or social histories that are tied to specific urban spaces; to specific *conceptualizations* of space, as Massey suggests in the quote above. This chapter explores the histories of Osh's neighborhoods and considers how residents narrate the trajectory of their own lives alongside narrations of the changing urban scape. The chapter begins with a discussion of memory studies in geography, arguing that the highly influential concept of collective memory, while useful across a wide range of studies, is also an abstraction that has led to the sidelining of the multiplicity of ways that individuals interact with broader social and political frameworks of

remembering. Because history and urban space are themselves highly contested terrains in southern Kyrgyzstan, it is important to nuance these complexities. This chapter then proceeds in a scaled fashion. First, the chapter takes a closer look at the municipal boundaries of Osh, tracing how they have changed over time, how this has affected the “official” character of the city, and what explanations have been offered to make sense of them. Second, I move on to think at the scale of the neighborhood, describing patterns of residential segregation in the city across mikrorayons, mahallas and novostroikas as spatial outcomes of historical processes that have acted upon people and places. Finally, the chapter asks how residents themselves narrate the spatial history of the city, from their understandings of the importance of Osh within the country and broader region, to their understandings of the specific histories that are codified in specific mundane urban spaces. These resident histories of urban space draw our attention to four important themes in the relationship between history, memory and urban space: (1) the politics of urban infrastructure, (2) memories of neighborhood segregation, (3) ongoing contestations of history and memory, and (4) the territorializations of language and belonging. I argue that each of these four themes can help us trace the particular geospatial histories of neighborhoods; and they illustrate the ways that urban space articulates with the particular understandings of history and memory. The urban is a framework through which everyday life in the city is historicized, and it structures the way residents think about relations with the ethnic Other. The chapter draws heavily on data collected from participant-led tours (a method described in Chapter 1), supplementing that data with information gathered through neighborhood walk-throughs and semi-structured interviews with residents of Osh.

2. *Geographies of memory*

The political geographer Elly Harrowell's (2014) study of space and memory in Osh considers both elite (top-down) and quotidian (bottom-up) expressions of collective memory about urban space. The piece is a significant contribution to understanding how history and memory are being constructed by the Kyrgyzstani state through monuments and public spaces. Against this top-down process of memory-making in Osh, Harrowell identifies three common "street-level memory maps" about the city's history that are held by its residents and that differ from the official narratives. The first of these memory maps centers on industrialization, physically marked and symbolized in urban space by three brick-and-mortar sites: the former silk factory, the cotton factory and the pump factory. The second common "memory map" of the city involves a spatialized recounting of resident's personal experiences during the violence in 2010, which are usually told through reference to the specific sites where residents hid, constructed barricades, gathered for safety, buried their relatives or where homes were burned. These everyday spaces of remembering stand in stark contrast to the official sites of remembrance, which include a monument to peace and another to victims of the 2010 violence, both located in a public park adjacent to the mayor's office. The third memory map that Harrowell documents is a representation of the city as a formerly diverse and multicultural place characterized by the unique form of mahallas, diverse language and music in public spaces, and the dress of its diverse residents. In the three years since the 2010 riots, Harrowell documents how the diverse sights and sounds of the city have given way to domination of ethnic-Kyrgyz representational forms. Yet residents recall the city's past diversity as a point of pride and nostalgia. The first and third memory maps—of an industrialized city, and of a multicultural city—are attributed mainly to older generations of Osh residents.

Like Harrowell, I encountered common narratives about the city's history centered around industrialization, geographies of violence, and nostalgia for a multicultural past. Also like Harrowell, my semi-structured conversations with research participants centered on quite similar topics: how the city had changed over time, what it might or should look like in 20 or 50 years, and what places in the city participants frequented or avoided. Taking these memory maps as a starting point, this chapter departs from Harrowell's study in several respects. The interviews I present here were collected in 2015-2016, three years after Harrowell's study (conducted in 2013) and six years after the 2010 conflict. They therefore reflect the effects of temporal distance from the 2010 violence on ways of thinking about the past and about changing city space. If in 2013 the signs of Uzbek language and culture were almost entirely absent from the city's streets, signs of Uzbek culture had begun to creep back into city life by 2015, albeit not to the same degree as before the riots. In the words of one of my informants, "things are more normal here now." The local political situation also changed. Mayor Myrzakhmatov, responsible for many of the policies that led to an increasing Kyrgyzification of urban space, was removed from office in early 2015.

A more substantial difference between the two studies concerns how we approach the making of history and memory through urban space. Harrowell juxtaposes elite and quotidian narratives about the city's history with one another, and she identifies three "memory maps" that represent the collective narratives of her participants. By contrast, this chapter drills down to the individual scale in an effort to understand how histories of urban transformation are narrated, remembered and lived. Furthermore, Harrowell is not concerned with parsing the relationship between *identity* and urban space through historical narratives; the three memory maps she identifies are notably absent of attribution to either a Kyrgyz or Uzbek way of viewing the city,

presumably encompassing the experience of both groups. On the one hand, this absence of attention to ethnic identity reflects an important refusal to contribute to existing stereotypes or to the ongoing processes through which identities are often rendered flat, as I described in Chapter 3. Yet ethnic identities, although “invented” by the Soviet state, have also crystallized into an existence that is lived and enacted through reference to history and space, and that we cannot ignore. Here, I explicitly reference the identities of my informants along multiple axes including ethnicity (as well as gender, age and profession) because this identification helps to complicate the notion that there is a single Kyrgyz, or a single Uzbek, notion about urban life.

Geographies of history and memory, including Harrowell’s study, draw on the insights of French sociologists Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, both of whom were interested in the relationship between collective and individual memory and its relationship to space. Nora’s seven-volume edited set, *Les Lieux de Memoires*, published between 1984 and 1992, is an explicit recognition that memories of the nation are located in, and intimately tied to, physical and material spaces. Like many, Nora was inspired by Maurice Halbwachs’ landmark contribution to memory studies. Halbwachs argued that, contrary to popular belief, all memory is collective, rather than individual: “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs 1992, p. 38). Societal frameworks such as official sites of remembering and commemoration enable some memories while suppressing others. This social conditioning of individual memory is powerful and deeply political, impacting “what we are encouraged to remember; what we are told to forget; what is hidden from us; and what is invented to submerge us within a particular tradition” (Legg 2007, p. 458).

The field of memory studies in geography has largely focused on monuments, museums

and memorials, and their relationship to narratives of the nation (Forest and Johnson 2002; K. Mitchell 2003; Till 2003). This focus stems from Nora's highly influential project, which drew attention to the spatial constitution of memory. For Nora, memory is "attached" to both tangible sites (geographical places, monuments and buildings), as well as to intangible sites (e.g. historical figures, parades and public commemorations) (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). Invariably, the large and spectacular sites where memories are located are produced by national and political elites, who have the social and financial capital to impose their vision onto space. Christine Boyer (1994) views cities as "theaters of memory" where history is played out upon the stage of spaces constructed by the political elite: public squares, boulevards, statues. Yet the dichotomy between the role of the elite and the public in memory making is quickly blurred when one realizes that even the most powerful elite seek to cultivate public approval. In their study of monument building in Moscow after 1991, Forest and Johnson remind us that the meanings of such monuments are not imposed from above upon a passive audience. The intended messages of the political elite are necessarily limited, given meaning only when filtered through the readings of individual's own circuits of memory, experience and knowledge systems (Forest and Johnson 2002b, p. 538). If collective memory and individual memory are not coterminous—people do not simply parrot the official narrative—and so understanding the relationship between individual and collective memories is important (Connerton 1990). Indeed, Legg warns that memory scholars have taken Halbwach's basic insights so seriously that they have neglected the agency of individuals in producing historical narratives:

The intellectual tradition of picturing social memory as somehow independent of the individuals who share it is itself a mechanism that represses the incentive for individuals to harbor their own interpretations of events. Collective memory must be dereified and viewed as a product of individual and institutional memories, as well as their precursor. Collective memory is a narrative that excludes rival interpretations and is thus haunted by the potential to remember differently or to refuse to forget. (Legg 2007, p. 459)

In other words, we should not forget about individual memories and their relationship to the more mundane spaces of everyday urban life. Jones and Garde-Hansen call for more work on the place-memory relationship, highlighting “the need in memory studies for more work on the personal connections that the individual makes between identity, place and becoming” (Jones and Garde-Hansen 2012, p. 4). If this is true for the field of memory studies, I argue that urban studies likewise needs a stronger understanding the mundane ways that urban space acts as “mnemonic material,” embedding history, memory and forgetting into its very foundation and serving as a device of recall and meaning making. While the localization of history and memory is not only an urban phenomenon, cities are ideal places to understand this relationship because of their constantly-changing landscapes and dense populations (Legg 2007 p. 462). For geographers, cities represent the transposition of multiple histories and time periods onto physical space (Crang and Travlou 2001, p. 153).

In this chapter, I draw on these debates to conduct a close reading of individual narratives about urban spaces in Osh. Rather than seeking to generalize residents’ readings of the cityscape and set them against elite politicians’ attempts to write an official history onto that space, I want to use the historiographical accounting of urban transformation laid out in the previous chapter as a baseline of scholarly accounting through which to read and interpret resident’s own, personal understandings of those same histories. The point is not to fact check the accuracy of their historical narratives, although it is interesting to note where informants’ narratives about the city’s history depart from what is widely understood by contemporary historians. However, what matters more than what is right or wrong is to understand what actually exists. Indeed, the historiographical accounting of urban transformation in Chapter 4 is just one of many histories that could be told. Events (past, present and future) do not just act over and across blank spaces.

They are lived, experienced and embodied in those places; events can survive in material form and they can be erased from the built environment (although absences can act as places, too); they are remembered and misremembered; inherited through state-controlled media as well as through intimate storytelling. The histories and memories of Osh residents that I present here may well already be filtered through the frameworks of collective memory, but this does not mean that they add up to a single and coherent set of narratives. In refusing to collapse these histories into a shared collective, I instead draw attention to the ways that the past is remembered, narrated and performed through vernacular, non-spectacular, kinds of spaces.

3. Municipal boundaries: inclusions and exclusions

After an unusually warm winter marked by freezing rain and the haze of charcoal heating, March brought an intense blossoming of fruit trees, climbing rose bushes and clear skies with spectacular mountain views. Such days are a reminder of Osh's proximity to major mountain systems, something easily forgotten in the winter haze. Having put quite a bit of time into NGO office life over the winter, I felt less worried about the politicization of my research and ready to more systematically explore the city. With a rudimentary tourist map of Osh spread before me, I searched for all the toponyms that had tickled my ears, but that I did not know first-hand: place names that repeatedly came up in my interviews, landmarks cited to me as navigational instruction, splashed across hand painted signs resting in the front windows of minibuses, and of course those that I had read about in the reports on the 2010 riots: On Adir, Geologorodok, Anar, Japalak, Cheremushki, Furkat, Vostochniy, Oblbolnitsya, Yugo-Vostok, etc. With the help of my RAs, I tried to locate these places and identify whether they were

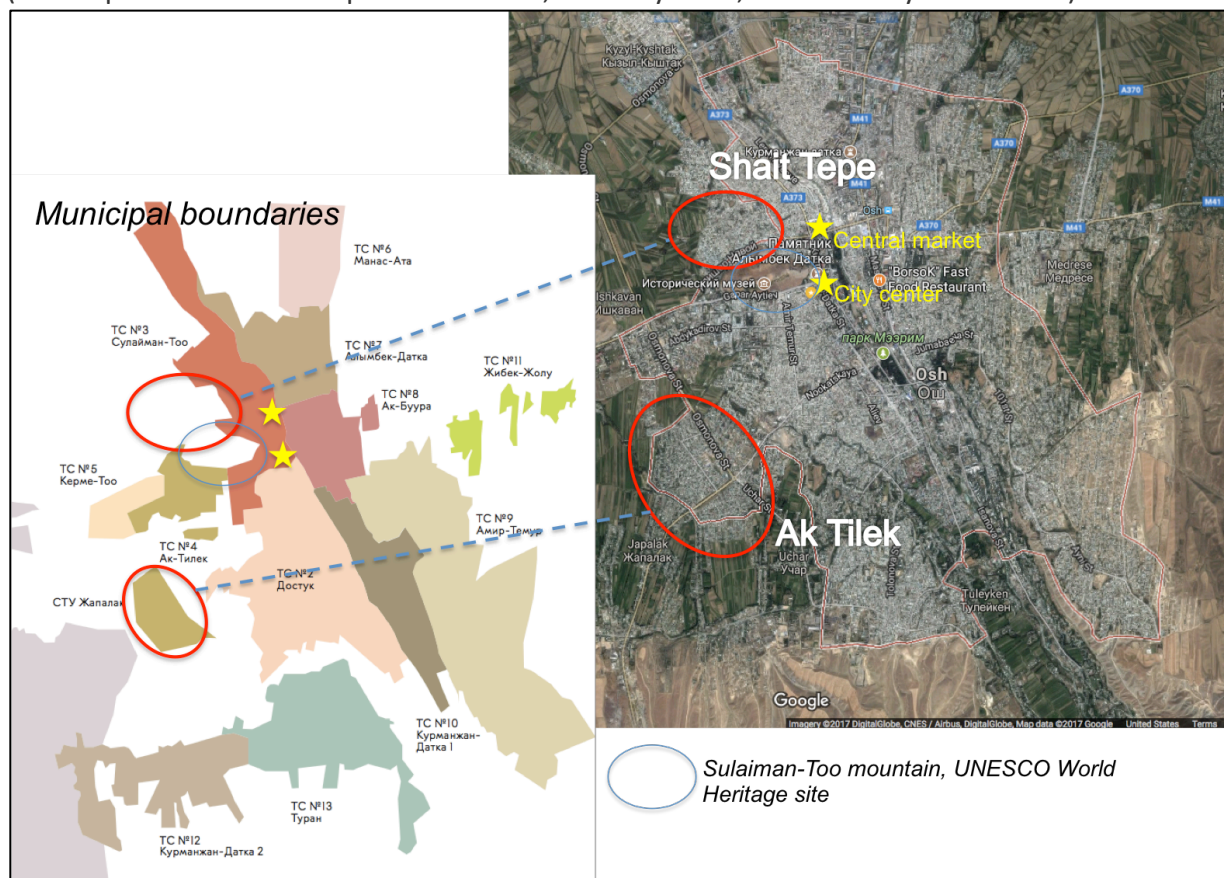
“Kyrgyz” or “Uzbek” neighborhoods; new or old; mikrorayons, mahallas or novostroikas. Over the next few months I planned a schedule of neighborhood walk-throughs to learn more.

One of the most striking features on the administrative map of Osh is a collection of abnormal exclusions and inclusions of territory. Some areas falling within the city’s official jurisdiction are not contiguous with the rest of the city, while other spaces that do not fall under the city’s jurisdiction appear like donut holes punched out of the urban fabric. They are surrounded on all sides by the administrative territories of Osh city, but are themselves part of the administration of nearby Kara Suu district. There is a widely-held suspicion among Uzbek residents of Osh that these anomalies are blatant efforts by authorities to gerrymander their group into a minority position (Liu 2012; Megoran 2013; Harrowell 2014), and indeed the inclusions are mostly Kyrgyz neighborhoods while the exclusions are Uzbek mahallas. Despite their centrality to the pulse of urban life in Osh, Uzbek mahallas along Navoi street such as Shahit Tepe, which is within walking distance of the main bazaar and of Sulaiman-Too mountain, are not part of the city’s territory. However, some scholars have offered an alternative explanation, suggesting that in the Soviet period such gerrymandering was, paradoxically, meant to establish or maintain a balance between ethnic groups by maintaining roughly equal numbers of Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations within the city’s territory. In 1982, for example, the city’s boundaries were redrawn to include the Kyrgyz-populated area of Kenesh,⁶⁵ but Uzbek areas such as Furkat and Kyzyl-Kyshtak were assigned to the Kara-Suu district neighboring Osh (Matveeva, Savin, and Faizullaev 2012). These annexations have no doubt driven the ethnic balance in the city in favor of Kyrgyz, and whether or not the intention is to reduce Uzbek representation or to achieve a balance between the two groups, the outcome has direct political implications that cannot be

⁶⁵ Among my contacts in Osh, no one has been able to verify where Kenesh is located. However, the report cited was written by several authors of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, so I am inclined to trust the information.

ignored. After independence, manipulations of municipal boundaries in the form of territorial annexations to the city from neighboring regions continued to take place. In 2006, the outlying areas of “Edelweiss”, "Tulip", "Alay-1", "Alay-2", "Ozgur" and "Tülökön" were all annexed to the city (Nurmatov 2018) – most of these are ethnic Kyrgyz neighborhoods relatively distant from the city center, and their names carry connotations of mountain and nomadic life.

Map 5.1: Left: The 13 territorial councils (TerSoviet, “TC”) of Osh municipality. Right: a screenshot of the same area from Google Earth. Scales are not exactly the same. Shahit Tepe, an older and central Uzbek mahalla, is not part of Osh city; Ak Tilek, a neighborhood built on land given to ethnic Kyrgyz after the 1990 protests, is not contiguous with the rest of the city. (Municipal boundaries map from: Akishin, Korobeynikov, and Korobeynikov 2015.)



Such administrative-cartographic anomalies piqued my interest and I made a point of visiting all of them, inside and outside of the official city boundaries. One of the donut holes turned out to be a pleasant Uzbek mahalla built along a canal. When my Research Assistant and I

asked residents whether the street was part of Kara Suu district, we met mostly with blank stares: as far as residents were concerned, this was Osh. My Uzbek host family, who lived along Navoi street just on the outside of the city boundary, reported only one frustration with their position: their address complicated the process of vaccinating their children. Kara-Suu district's public health system was not as well organized as Osh's, so they did not receive notification reminding them about childhood vaccinations and when they realized it was past the date, they had to travel a much longer distance than neighbors who lived just across the street.

From a cartographic perspective, the most conspicuous inclusion into city territory is a neighborhood named Ak Tilek on the western side of the city, located just outside a newly asphalted, four-lane highway that will eventually encircle the city. Ak Tilek is one of the anomalous islands of municipal territory that is not contiguous with the rest of the city. Just opposite Ak Tilek, inside the ring road, is a jumble of poured concrete foundations and half-finished brick homes that falls under the jurisdiction of Kara Suu district. The neighborhood is eerily empty of the usual sounds and sights of the city. It was opened by the Kyrgyz government soon after the 1990 riots in response to demands from rural Kyrgyz migrants for land to build housing. Despite the dramatic shortage and significant demands for land and housing, however, this area remains curiously unfinished, although similar territories of land given to rural migrants at the same time, such as Japalak (see the story of Daniyar in this chapter, below) have developed into mature, lively neighborhoods in the intervening 15 years.⁶⁶

The half-finished and uninhabited homes in this cutout hole of municipal territory are testament to a number of important forces shaping urban life in Osh. Many of the properties in this ghost village belong to labor migrants who live and work in Russia but invest their savings

⁶⁶ Thanks to Morgan Liu, who pointed out this contradiction.

in Osh. They therefore index a shared desire to have a home in the city, and the sentiment that a future of opportunity is possible and desirable here, but they also signal the economic hardship that drives migrants abroad. In 2015 Kyrgyzstan was the second largest remittance-receiving country in the world (after Tajikistan). In that year remittances were valued at 32 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (Trilling 2015). At the same time, this hole in the urban fabric is also a product of geopolitical machinations between world powers. After the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the western blockade of finance and credit to Russia significantly slowed Russian construction and consumer spending, with repercussions for the millions of legal and illegal Central Asian workers in Russia. Lacking the capital to keep building, many land plot owners in Osh have postponed their private construction plans.

Image 5.1: Stalled construction of new housing in an area of the city that is quite central compared with many recent territorial annexations. However this area falls under the administration of Kara Suu district.



These cartographic anomalies draw our attention to the combination of geopolitical and domestic forces shaping urban life and territory in Osh. Municipal boundaries are a powerful symbol of inclusion and exclusion that contribute to collective and elite narratives about belonging in urban space. However, despite numerous attempts to understand the impact of these boundaries for residents, none of my research participants felt that these strange inclusions and exclusions mattered in their day-to-day lives.

4. *Mahallas, Mikrorayons and Novostroikas*

It is generally accepted that mahallas represent the material culture and tradition of ethnic Uzbek life. While traditional ethnic Kyrgyz material culture is represented by the yurt and the related symbol of the *tunduk*, in the city of Osh ethnic Kyrgyz are associated with the urban form of *mikrorayon* and *novostroika*. As self-contained, standardized housing estates, mikrorayons are historically tied to industrialization and they are associated with the Soviet ideological project

that sought to create new relations and identities (see Chapter 1 for a further description of this project). However, there is no neat one-to-one mapping of ethnicity onto urban form in Osh. One finds many Uzbeks living in apartments or *novostroikas*, and ethnic Kyrgyz who are deeply familiar with Uzbek mahallas.

The definition and usage of “mahalla” is highly contextual. Mahalla is an Arabic word that has been adopted into many Turkic languages including Kyrgyz and Uzbek, and it is used widely throughout the Islamic world, including western China (Uyghur neighborhoods in Urumqi were called mahalle), Turkey, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bichel defines mahalla so broadly that it seems to be a synonym for community: mahallas are “vernacular expressions of community within Central Asia, ranging in form from extended families and rural collectives to urban/suburban neighborhoods/subdivisions” (Bichel 2002). In my experience, I found that ethnic Kyrgyz use the term “mahal” to refer to a village street, even in a village with no Uzbek residents. However, among Uzbeks living in Osh, a mahalla is a configuration of houses and streets that “indexes a particular, ethnically marked mentality—intensely community oriented, conservative, and religious. The mahalla was Uzbek ethnic authenticity made concrete (Liu 2012, p. 6).” Indeed, all residents in the city of Osh, Uzbek and Kyrgyz, use “mahalla” to refer exclusively to ethnic-Uzbek parts of town.

However, there are many kinds of Uzbek mahallas reflecting different periods in the development and socio-economic transformation of the city, and each one has a different architectural style, as well as a population with a unique history. These unique histories of each mahalla are part of residents’ own concepts of their own, and others’, urban identities. The oldest remaining mahallas are in the city’s historic center, near the market and along Novoi Street where I lived for some time. One research participant guiding me to her house in the

Novoi neighborhood joked that, with its winding alleyways and mud-covered walls, the neighborhood felt more like an Afghan village than the heart of Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city. Indeed, the Novoi neighborhood's winding alleys and mud walls are popular with tourists following guidebook recommendations, and the streets are included within the protected territory of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Sulaiman-Too mountain. Some mahallas (e.g. Cheremushki and Geologorodok) date to the mid-Soviet period. In summer these neighborhood streets are lush with overhanging figs, persimmons and roses. Open canals running through the city are a natural playground, and they keep these neighborhoods cooler in the hot months of summer. Uzbek homes in some mahallas can be quite decadent. Eaves of intricately carved wood face the street, while occasional glimpses through open gates reveal inner courtyards of lush private gardens, shaded overhead by canopies of grape vine. New mahallas (such as On Adir, literally "Hill 10," named after the Soviet-era bus route that serviced the neighborhood) are growing in the water-sparse hills to the southeast of the city, established when Soviet authorities razed central parts of the city in the 1960s and fed by subsequent waves of displacement and natural birth rates. These new mahallas continue to see an influx of new residents who were displaced during more recent urban development projects since 2010 (e.g. those from Majrimtal, as described below), as well as those who now choose to move into ethnically Uzbek neighborhoods out of concerns for safety, in a worrying trend of increasing urban segregation. In On Adir, streets are unpaved and unshaded as water is scarce in the dry hills above the Ak Buura river. Hayat, one of my participant-guides who took me through the neighborhood, explained that the large drums lining the streets of On Adir were for water storage, serviced by truck on a weekly basis, and he pointed out the piles of *kizyaki* (bricks of animal dung) that were used for fuel. City services such as water lines, public transport, sewage and gas are only slowly reaching

the On Adir area, even though it has been a developed suburb since the 1970s. In contrast, the ethnic-Kyrgyz suburb of Japalak, which was established in 1990 in response to the riots in a former agricultural field, has almost all of these services, albeit many of them have been installed by residents' collective financing efforts. The differences reflect land use patterns—On Adir was an empty hillside and the logistics of bringing water to the area are beyond the means of its residents, even if they do act collectively. In short, the sheer diversity and dynamism of Osh's mahallas makes it particularly problematic to define and study them as a single phenomenon. Instead, I have come to view each neighborhood as having its own particular geo-spatial history.

A correlate of the problem with trying to map ethnic Uzbeks onto mahallas is that other neighborhood types are equally diverse in form and content, and they also resist easy categorization as “ethnic Kyrgyz” neighborhoods. Mikrorayons (literally “micro regions”) are denser areas of multi-story apartment blocks, not more than 4-6 stories high because of the region's high earthquake activity. Mikrorayons are usually constructed around a soccer field, playground, parking lot or set of small garages. Like a mahalla, the age of a mikrorayon can also be identified by its construction and architectural style, and the populations in each neighborhood have a particular history and political economy of migration. In Osh, mikrorayons are associated with 1960s-era factory housing (such as the KhBK area), with more upscale “villages” around universities (e.g. in Yugo-Vostok), with downtown residential areas (e.g. the Zaibedinova area), and with mass housing projects in the late 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Anar, Tülökön and Zapadniy).

Factory housing makes up the oldest multi-story apartments, especially in the KhBK neighborhood. This type of housing tends to be in very poor physical condition, and it is now densely inhabited by new migrants to the city and by students. KhBK is a majority ethnic Kyrgyz area on Osh's northeastern edge. The neighborhood's apartment buildings are frequently marked

with “ХБК” graffiti, a mark that carries an ethnic Kyrgyz connotation. After the reinforcement of international borders in the late 1990s made it impossible to drive due north from Osh to Bishkek, KhBK has become a kind of gateway or entrance for Osh residents to both the northern part of Kyrgyzstan and to the ethnically-Kyrgyz populated mountain villages of the east. One must pass through KhBK in order to access most areas outside of Osh, with the exception of the road west to Batken. During the 2010 riots many ethnic Kyrgyz from the north and east of the country reportedly came to Osh after hearing rumors of the rape of an ethnic Kyrgyz university student by an ethnic Uzbek student. On one of my walk-throughs along the boundary between KhBK and an older Uzbek mahalla, several Uzbek respondents described waves of violent mobs during the 2010 riots sweeping through KhBK into other areas of town, from east to west.

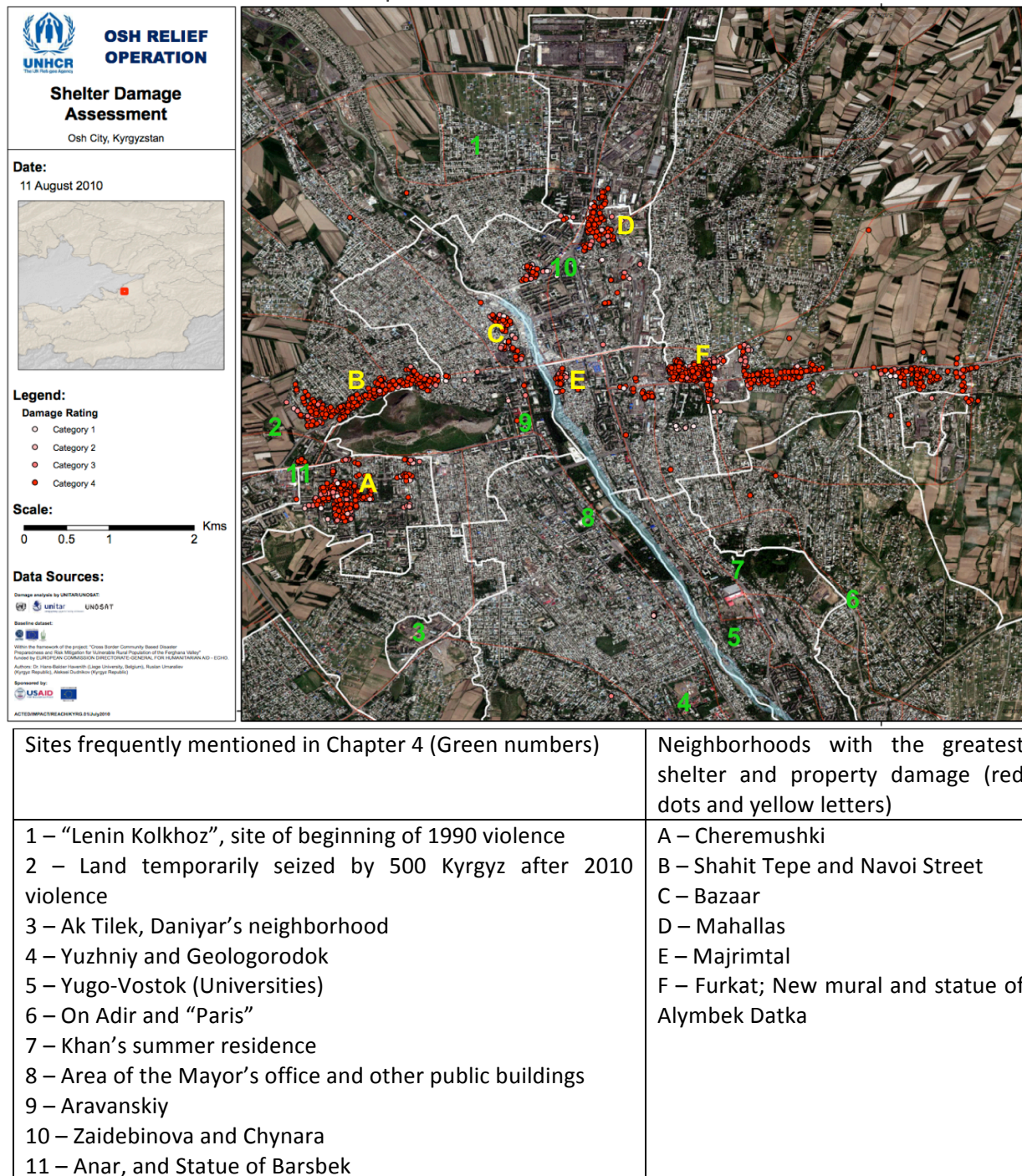
The newest multi-story residential buildings in the city number less than a dozen. Most of these have been constructed by private Turkish investors and contractors or by a local oligarch known by his first name, “Jalil,” and they offer higher-end residential opportunities. Rumors about the shoddy design of one new building, the tallest in the city, have deterred many residents who fear it will not withstand an earthquake. Another handful of conspicuously new apartment buildings in Osh were funded by international donors to house victims of the 2010 conflict, but it appears that many of these have failed to house their intended beneficiaries. Some are being offered to military families. Furthermore, while some apartment complexes are inhabited almost entirely by ethnic Kyrgyz residents, such as those belonging to the former cotton factory, others are ethnically mixed. The wealthier apartments where I lived in the center of the city fall into the latter category.

Novostroikas (literally “new constructions”), represent an equally diverse array of populations and socio-economic markers. Generally built after independence, many *novostroikas*

have popped up in the former fields surrounding town. Some have a deeply political history associated with protest, land grabs and informal squatters; others, extensive city blocks of half-finished homes that are largely un-inhabited, are material testament to the vagaries of life as a labor migrant and the boom-and-bust cycles of available employment abroad. Still other novostroikas, look much like contemporary western suburbs. In the latter, each house stands alone at the center of a plot of land surrounded by a wall with a gated entrance to the driveway. An example is the area called “Rezidentsia,” where the President has a home. Individual homes are gated or fortified with high cement walls, giving way to ornately decorated carports and gardens inside.

In looking closely at the different kinds of neighborhoods in Osh, from mahallas to mikrorayons to novostroikas, I have aimed to destabilize all three of these categories and to show that there is no neat one-to-one mapping of residential form onto ethnicity. Rather, neighborhoods and material space are best understood through their histories of migration and settlement, and the construction of infrastructure that is tied to national modernizing projects.

Map 5.2: Key sites and neighborhoods referenced throughout this Chapter. The letters and numbers are layered on top of a map created by the UNHCR to track the extent of damage and to coordinate the humanitarian response.



5. Resident histories of urban space

a. The politics of urban infrastructure

The riots and their aftermath ushered in a set of changes to urban space in Osh that illuminate the intertwining of politics, development and ethnic identities with the materiality of the city. While the scale of these changes do not compare with the dramatic changes taking place in many other fast-growing cities of the global south, the changes are significant in the local context, where relatively little official urban development took place—except for a gradual decay of infrastructure—for nearly two decades between 1991-2010. Since 2010, official changes to urban space have advanced the marking of urban space as ethnically Kyrgyz, but many of the changes are also driven by very real needs associated with aging infrastructure and rapid population growth.

Following the destruction and looting of Uzbek mahallas during the 2010 riots, the government under interim president Roza Otunbayeva established a new state agency, the State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development for Osh and Jalal-Abad Cities (hereafter, “State Directorate”).⁶⁷ Ostensibly, the purpose of the State Directorate was to centralize the coordination of international donor funds and the international agencies overseeing reconstruction, with the various Kyrgyzstani government agencies involved in the reconstruction. However, the creation of the State Directorate was also a contested political move that aimed to reduce the power of Osh’s mayor, Melis Myrzakhmatov, to channel the reconstruction funds as he would have liked. While the State Directorate may have diluted Myrzakhmatov’s influence over reconstruction, he was nevertheless able to exerted substantial influence over the rebuilding of the city. City authorities began to widen streets in some mahalla districts, displacing hundreds

⁶⁷ The agency was first called the State Directorate for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, but later renamed the State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development for Osh and Jalal-Abad Cities. It was headed by then-Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldiev (See Kaigyluu 2012b).

of people months after the initial outbreak of violence (Trilling 2010). Authorities couched their activities within the language of official planning, claiming that many of the damaged mahallas fell within the “Red Line” that was indicated in the city’s Master Plan. The Red Line marked out territory for future development, and supposedly it crossed through private homes that had been looted and destroyed. Rebuilding them would be senseless, the Mayor argued. These references were not, however to official planning documents: Osh had no Master Plan. Planners supposedly finalized a new Master Plan in 2009, but for murky reasons it was neither made public nor approved by Parliament at that time. It was not until 2015 that the Master Plan for Osh was renewed and revised, and finally became semi-public. I eventually discovered a copy of the plan when a journalist tipped me off to a Kyrgyz-language news website, AkiPress.kg, where it could be downloaded. However, I found that many interest groups that could have benefitted from access to the Plan were unaware of its availability. For example, a legal aid group in Osh defending the rights of those displaced by urban development projects in 2016 did not know that it was indeed available. Nevertheless, in the months after 2010 authorities frequently invoked “The Red Line,” a term representing the arbitrary power of authoritarian “planning” to commandeer private space and property for “public works.” The Red Line became a source of immense frustration for international aid agencies rebuilding destroyed neighborhoods, as they did not have access to the Master Plan itself and they could not secure a guarantee that the homes they were rebuilding—their humanitarian investments—would be protected from further development. One staff member involved with the reconstruction of mahallas noted that the newly-elected President, Almazbek Atambayev, “is said to have expressed puzzlement and mild exasperation at the international community’s obsession with preserving and reconstructing the *mahallahs*, in the face of the inexorable march of modernisation and progress (Kaigyluu

2012a).” The comment highlights the tension between the goals of different actors involved in urban (re)development in Osh. Such tensions operate across multiple scales, from municipal authorities to State Directorate to international actors.

One of the areas that saw the worst damage in 2010 is at the **eastern entrance to the city**, where an Uzbek mahalla known as Furkat is located. Before 2010 this area of town had narrow streets and frequent traffic jams. The ACTED damage map (below), which depicts the areas of town where buildings were burned, shows a large cluster of red dots in Furkat. One of my research participants (Bektur, Kyrgyz/Uzbek man, 37) described this geography of the domicile from the ground: “It was summer time, very hot. But on the third day of violence it was cold because the smoke blocked the sun. Most of the smoke was coming from Cheremushka and the area around the mountain, and from Furkat... you could see the roads because of the smoke.” Soon after the 2010 conflict the road in Furkat was widened, rendering the reconstruction of the destroyed homes here an impossibility. The road was lined by two high walls decorated with elaborate murals depicting scenes of nomadic life, while behind these walls the residents of the mahalla gradually rebuilt their homes and lives. An arch in the shape of a yurt bridged the two walls and an imposing statue of Alymbek Datka astride a horse now welcomes the traffic that arrives from Bishkek.

Image 5.2: A new road and monuments built after the 2010 riots through a mahalla in the Furkat neighborhood. One of the new, modern apartment buildings built in the last several years is just visible in the distance, through the arch.



In addition to the monument of Alymbek Datka in the photo above, Myrzakhmatov also built monuments of two other ethnic Kyrgyz heroes and placed them in a traffic circles on the south and east sides of the city, so that anyone leaving or entering the city must pass by one of the three monuments. All three statues were built in 2011, and the Barsbek statue was unveiled on the first anniversary of the 2010 events (Harrowell 2014).

Other post-2010 changes to urban space have taken longer to materialize. The central bazaar, celebrated for being a centuries-old meeting point between nomadic and settled groups in the Fergana Valley, and for its role as a key node along the Silk Road, was also partially destroyed during the 2010 riots. Today, the city is investing in infrastructure that promotes a more modern, rational and controlled market space on the opposite side of the river. Control of market space leasing rights is a major source of income generation for corrupt officials and mafia members. The new space includes an indoor bazaar, Kelechek, and a series of stalls on the opposite side of the river which are slowly replacing the historic site. In 2015-16 the old parts of the bazaar remained in an uncertain state of partial destruction. Mostly Uzbek sellers and traders

continued to operate from some of the stalls that were not destroyed, but at reduced scales and with the new market across the river competing with them for customers.

Another important change to urban space in recent years is the construction of a new bridge, replacing an older one that linked the two sides of the city—old market and new market, mahalla and mikrorayon. Construction on the new bridge began by tearing down the old one, reportedly without a plan to finance its replacement (interview with journalist). Also one of Myrzakhmatov’s projects, the new bridge would be an important step in the city’s efforts to modernize its street infrastructure, relieving traffic congestion and bringing a more contemporary architectural sensibility to the central part of the old city. When I conducted fieldwork in May–June 2014, the old bridge had been torn down and the site was an abandoned construction zone. Traffic was redirected to the only other two bridges⁶⁸ upstream, causing enormous congestion and making foot travel a more efficient method of traversing the two sides of the city. For months and months, pedestrians made their way between the two sides by picking through a hazardous and seemingly abandoned construction zone, climbing up and down rickety wooden stairs and making their way along makeshift planks of wood that were never intended to serve as long-term infrastructure. In February of 2014 the central government finally managed to manoeuvre Mayor Myrzakhmatov out of power and the new mayor had not been able to corral the resources necessary to complete the project. Like the other changes to urban space—the post-2010 road widening that displaced many Uzbek homes, the new monuments to ethnic-Kyrgyz heroes, and the elaborate entrance to the city adorned with murals—the new bridge was supposed to be a monumental project: a two-story “stacked” highway over the river (*estekadnyi*

⁶⁸ In 2016 a fourth bridge on the southern end of the city was under construction. It would eventually link the university area of Yuzhniyi with a wealthy *novostroika* area often jokingly referred to as “the green zone” because so many international aid agencies rent offices there.

most). In September 2015, just a few weeks before Parliamentary elections, the new bridge finally re-opened as a more modest single-story construction, nearly two years after the destruction of the old bridge. The President of Kyrgyzstan participated in the opening ceremony, and a convoy of heavy military vehicles drove across the bridge to demonstrate its strength. In the weeks before its opening crews hurriedly placed bricks for decorative sidewalks, paved the road leading to the bridge, and painted the run-down homes on adjacent streets, a modern-day effort to build a Potemkin village. Soon after the opening, photos circulated on Facebook documenting cracks in the asphalt and other visual flaws in the bridge's construction, mocking the government's transparent attempt to win votes just before an election. For these online communities, the flaws of the new bridge were a hilarious sign of government ineptitude and corruption. However, much of the negative social media coverage was generated by people living in Bishkek. Underlying the political satire was a second joke that Osh, the so-called "southern capital" of the country, was making such a large celebration out of such a small achievement.

Myrzakmatov made other important changes to urban space that required enormous political capital. He moved the former car bazaar and bus stations from central locations that generated chaotic traffic conditions to the city's outskirts. The changes eliminated major bottlenecks in the flow of traffic, but the minibus and car sales industries are run by powerful local elite and mafia. The fact that an elected mayor could challenge such strong business interests is remarkable, and many residents that I spoke with, both Uzbek and Kyrgyz, praised the progress that Myrzakhmatov and brought to their city. Finally, one of the more significant changes to urban space in Osh is the slow rise of new multi-story apartment buildings. Several have been built with Turkish financing, but quite a few modern high-rise apartments have been

built by a rich southerner whom everyone knows by his first name, Jalil (his full name is Jalil Atambaev; he is not related to former President Atambaev).

While a number of fairly significant infrastructural changes have been made in the city since the 2010 violence, my participants rarely raised these obvious issues on their own. I had to ask explicitly about them, and most of the time I found that people's reactions were fairly tepid. For example, I expected that many ethnic Uzbeks would see such many of these changes to the city as a threat to their way of life, so I was rather surprised when several Uzbek participant-guides were not critical of recent urban changes. Alisher (Uzbek male, 30) had some interesting opinions. On the day that violence broke out in 2010 at the Hotel Alai, he was living in an apartment in the city center with his wife and new baby, just a block away. The apartment sat at the foot of the Sulaiman-Too mountain, close to the mahallas of Shahit Tepe and Navoi street. Alisher's uncle, who lived just up the road in the mahalla along Navoi street, was hosting a gathering when the violence broke out. Alisher was in attendance, and he became trapped in the house while his uncle was wounded by gunfire. These are the intimate experiences of the 2010 violence that form one kind of mental map of the city for many of its residents, as Harrowell describes. To begin our tour, Alisher and I hovered over a map of the city together in his apartment, trying to decide where to go. Alisher pointed to our location on Navoi street, and then traced his finger across the river to Monueva Street, which borders one side of the Majrimtal mahalla. He reminded me that he had told me about this place before. Eighty Uzbek houses had been destroyed after the 2010 events to make way for Mayor Myrzakhmatov's urban development projects. He then offered his own opinion on the matter:

But actually, it's my own point of view, but *lots of Uzbek households were put in the wrong place*. It's like, Osh is the second capital of the Kyrgyz republic, and somehow people want to make our city flourish. That's why they destroyed those blocks. Five years ago [2010 or 2011] it was said that Bishkek would not be the capital of Kyrgyzstan but

Osh would be. And *from that time the local government started to make our city more civilized, more beautiful*. That's why I think they make this project, building a new bridge here, a road... they planned to build several skyscrapers with 70-80 floors. [Emphasis added.]

I repeatedly heard the sentiment that Osh had become “cleaner” and “more civilized” since the 2010 violence from research participants of every ethnicity, gender and age. Alisher understood that the plan for skyscrapers was probably a fantasy given the region's significant earthquake activity, but the idea struck him as a sensible one, fitting for a city of political importance. The idea of vertical urban growth as a marker of modernity, stability and a prosperous future, as Alisher expresses here, was nearly universal among my research participants, even while the way of life that apartments offer is dramatically different than life in a mahalla. When pressed on this topic, several Uzbek participants admitted that they would not want leave their mahallas to live in apartments, but that it would be a good option for others.

On our tour, Alisher walked me through the Navoi mahalla, where he had spent a lot of time as a kid. He knocked on strangers' doors, introducing me and conducting mini-interviews with them about the questions that I had been asking of him. While this was not my idea of how a participant-led tour should go, I went along with it. Alisher had worked as a research assistant in the past, and so this reflected his expectation of my agenda. We learned that although teams from UNESCO had been canvassing the neighborhood in recent weeks, asking residents for their property registration documents, no one expressed concern about a threat of eviction or forced displacement. Several of the residents we spoke to pointed out the lack of basic services: everyone had outdoor pit latrines, and it was only in the last few years (*after* the 2010 events) that most homes had received piped water. Before that, residents had to carry water up from the canal. One resident told us that the pipeline was built by one of the city's deputies (a city council representative), attributing the new infrastructure to an individual politician rather than to the

local government as a whole. Like many other areas of Osh, electricity was installed in the 1960s and around 1975 telephone lines were installed. It is remarkable that residents have such clear memories of these infrastructural changes, perhaps a testament to the way that access to modern urban services impacts people's lives. We also learned that many houses in the neighborhood had been made of mud bricks. After they were destroyed in 2010 they were rebuilt with more durable materials. In the two images of the Navoi mahalla (below), taken in 2015 and 2016, the shinier metal roofs mark out the homes that were destroyed and rebuilt.

Image 5.3: Navoi mahalla, as seen looking North from the top of Sulaiman-Too Mountain. The small hill in the distance on the left marks the border with Uzbekistan. These mahallas are not part of Osh municipality, although they are central to the city itself. The new and shiny roofs in the image on the right mark the homes that were burned, looted and destroyed during the 2010 violence, and later rebuilt with humanitarian aid. Images by Caitlin Ryan, 2015 and 2016.



Alisher grew up in Dostuk, a newer mahalla in the south of the city. “It’s a mahalla, but not like this one [on Navoi street],” he said. “It’s wider and more clean. We have a sewage system and we don't have electricity shortages.” Alisher described how his family had teamed up with others in the neighborhood to build the sewage system: “Not government, but our people, people who live in our neighborhood. We shared our project, by money, by workforce. We own it.” I found that Alisher’s understanding of the city’s history and transformation was quite accurate and detailed for someone of his age. He explained, “One hundred years ago, Osh was

not like a city, it was like a small province. In the 1970s the Soviet Union and Central Asian countries started to build cities here.” He did not romanticize mahallas, or seem them as a uniform urban form. At one point on our tour he suddenly volunteered his own opinion on the matter of preserving mahallas:

You know my point of view, personally? If I were the local mayor, actually I would destroy these houses and build skyscrapers and give them an apartment there. Why? First of all, when people go to Sulaiman-Too Mountain, people will see that this area is very clean. Even if UNESCO said these houses should be included in the project, I think these houses should be destroyed.

Alisher thought that, if left alone, the residents of Navoi mahalla would eventually build their own homes vertically, closing off the unobstructed view of Sulaiman-Too mountain.

In 2009 UNESCO designated Sulaiman-Too and a portion of the mahalla at its base as a World Heritage Site. Explaining why the same neighborhood that Alisher feared would grow vertically to block the view of the mountain was also included in the protected territory, UNESCO wrote:

Since the sacred associations of the mountain are linked to its dramatic form rising from the surrounding plain, it is highly vulnerable to continuing new development on it and around its base. In order to protect its majesty, spirituality, visual coherence and setting and thus the full authenticity of the property, great vigilance will be needed in enforcing protection of its setting. The integrity of the mountain relies on protection of the cult places and their connecting paths as well as their visual linkages and views to and from the mountain. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d.)

After the 2010 violence UNESCO issued a press release reiterating the importance of the mahallas around its base to the cultural significance of the site. Two of these—the area along Navoi Street and Cheremushki—had been badly damaged. While Alisher agreed that the mountain is worth protecting, he did not value the mahallas as important cultural sites. Instead, he saw that many (of course not all) residents in this central district lack the basic amenities that are possible in an apartment such as his own, or at his parents’ house in a newer mahalla. To Alisher, the value of the old mahalla is only as a source of tourism; indeed, he points out that in

Uzbekistan the government subsidizes the populations who live in the old town centers of its world-famous cities, many of which are also World Heritage Sites (e.g. Bukhara and Samarkand). For Alisher, mahalla preservation was only valuable as a tourist attraction that would put “ancient traditions” on display.

Hayat (Uzbek male, 50) had a different perspective on the city and state’s new development schemes. This came through as we were passing over a major canal on the far side of the On Adir mahalla. Hayat explained that all the canals dated to the Soviet period, adding, “Nothing new is built now, because if they build something now they make a big PR advertisement out of it, they say, ‘Look! We built this!’” I didn’t fully understand, and so I asked, “Like the PR for the new bridge?” “Exactly,” Hayat replied. “It took them a year and a half to build it.” In his view, the Soviet state did not make a spectacle out of the construction of simple and necessary things, but the independent Kyrgyzstani state does.

b. Histories of neighborhood segregation

Participant-led tours with two ethnic Kyrgyz participants, both of whom took me around town by car, drew my attention to a clear and deliberate if not widely discussed planning effort to establish the western (*Zapadnyi*) side of the city exclusively for ethnic Kyrgyz residents. As we drove toward the apartments of Anar mikrorayon, Almazbek (Kyrgyz male, 28) announced that this was his neighborhood. Almazbek explained that Anar is an ethnic Kyrgyz area (*kyrgyzskiy natsional’niy raion*). As we drove, he pointed to an Uzbek mahalla on one side of the road and to a series of small apartments where Russians and Tatars lived on the other side. I was surprised by how explicitly Almazbek spoke of ethnicity, especially because, not knowing him very well, I had not asked him to show me where different ethnic groups resided. This was, therefore, his

own way of showing the city and his neighborhood to me. A month later I drove again through the same neighborhood with Omurkan (Kyrgyz male, mid-50s), a retired military officer who described the area of Ak Tilek in similar terms. He explained that Ak Tilek had grown a lot after 1990. “Kyrgyz people were given land plots there, but Uzbeks could also get land. Everything here was a cotton field before.” When Omurkan entered the roundabout with the new statue of Barsbek Kagan, a 7th century Kyrgyz hero, he announced, “These areas are called Uchar and Japalak. They are *chistaya kyrgyzskaya* (pure Kyrgyz). Uzbek people were not allowed to live here.”

It became clear that urban segregation, while not a new phenomenon in Osh, has taken on a new meaning since the 2010 violence. As a kid in the pre-2010 era, Almazbek walked to school #42 by himself through the Uzbek mahalla of Cheremushki and back every day, roughly a 25-minute walk each way. He picked up Uzbek language from the neighborhood kids and Uzbek-language television programming, and sometimes he drove to “Paris” with friends, especially girls, to hang out. Paris is an overlook of the city located near a large telecommunications tower that is shaped a bit like the Eiffel Tower. It is located well into in the On Adir neighborhood, an Uzbek mahalla built on dry hills above the city in the 1970s. Uzbek residents of what is now the Zaibedinova and Chinara areas in the center of Osh were forced to move to On Adir to make way for the construction of multi-story apartments. Although Almazbek said that things were calmer and less dangerous in 2016, when we conducted our tour, than they were a couple years before, he still avoids Paris and other Uzbek neighborhoods. After warning me to be careful of going into Uzbek mahallas by myself, Almazbek explained that as a kid in the neighborhood before 2010, all of his friends lived in the Cheremushki mahalla, which he walked through on his way to/from school. But things had changed after 2010. “Now, even

after five years, I drive and only on the main streets. Especially with kids, or with a woman or my wife. My wife and I also come here [a park on the edge of Cheremushki], walk around, and then we go back in the car along that route [to avoid driving through the mahalla].”

Almazbek was not the only person to express a fear of Uzbek mahallas, especially a fear of On Adir. Sonia (Russian woman, mid-40s), a businesswoman, told me about a visit she made to one of her employees’ homes in On Adir. Sonia was watched closely by her employees’ neighbors, and she recalled an intense feeling of being an unwelcome outsider. She wondered if the attention was because she was wearing pants instead of a skirt and her head was uncovered. “It was terrifying! (*Eto strashno bylo!*),” she told me. The next day at the office, Sonia’s Uzbek colleague asked her not to arrange any more business from his house. The request had come from his neighbors. Samara (Kyrgyz woman, early 30s), who worked for my host NGO, told a similar story of a Kyrgyz friend who was politely discouraged by the residents of On Adir from buying a home there. Rather than intimidation, the message emphasized an informal understanding of rights: “Look, this is ours and that’s yours.”

The sense of insecurity tied to urban spaces in Osh is expressed by residents of all kinds. Roma (Uzbek male, early 20s), a multilingual translator, reported feeling unsafe in the ethnic-Kyrgyz areas of KhBK (the cotton paper factory) and in the area of Yugo-Vostok, where a number of universities are clustered together. Yugo-Vostok has a large number of student dormitories and the majority of the resident student body are ethnic Kyrgyz from rural areas outside of Osh. To Roma, the fact that there were no Uzbek houses in the area added to his sense of insecurity. On the other hand Bakyt (Kyrgyz male, early 40s), a professor who lived and taught in Yugo-Vostok, considered his neighborhood to be the epitome of safety and multiculturalism. “People are multinational here, this is a highly educated district, many people

study and work here, both Kyrgyz and Uzbek. We share the same entrance (*podyezd*), there are even Tatars and Dungans nearby.” I eventually came to realize that “multinational” or “mixed” are terms most often used to refer to the presence of a third group, such as Tatars, Turks, Russians, and so on, rather than to a neighborhood of mixed Uzbek and Kyrgyz residents. Roma also found the area around Aravanskyi, the heart of the city’s social life and located just under the nose of Sulaiman-Too mountain, unsafe. In particular, Roma felt that it was most dangerous at night when young male Kyrgyz from outside of Osh were wandering around Aravanskyi.

One of the common themes in these stories of insecurity is that people who are new to the city are more feared than those who have been there a long time. Ethnic Kyrgyz are not a single entity to ethnic Uzbeks; intra-group differences based on class, region and urban/rural identity are also important. Many people in Osh who experienced the violence of 2010 explain the perpetrators as “outsiders,” and indeed one of the important dynamics to the violence was that both Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups called on co-ethnics from outside the city to defend and protect them.

My participant guides each had their own sense for the history of Osh’s neighborhoods, the causes of ethnic segregation and conflict. Ravshan (Uzbek male, early 20s) showed me around the mahalla of Majrimtal, a small area stretching for less than one kilometer along the Ak Buura river from Monueva Street up to Masalieva Street, which is a major thoroughfare on the city’s right bank. Majrimtal sits across the river from Navoi park and just upstream from the main bazaar, and is just one city block wide. At the center of its narrow streets is a modest cemetery, imperceptible from the outside unless one peeks in via Google maps. Several footbridges facilitate pedestrian traffic between the park and the neighborhood, and in summer the river here is full of naked children splashing in the glacial runoff. Majrimtal was affected by

Mayor Myrzakhmatov's road-widening projects on three of its four sides, effectively losing half of its housing and population to demolition. Dozens of homes along its edges were knocked down to make way for the new roads. For compensation, residents were reportedly forced to accept empty land plots outside of the city that had no infrastructure, most importantly no water. In response, international organizations like the UNHCR expanded their legal aid clinics to assist residents of these newly-impacted communities. When I first explored Osh in 2013 it was hard to distinguish the destruction of homes in Majrimtal from those that were destroyed during the conflict. The homes along the river road had been partially bulldozed. The decorated interiors, now devoid of furniture and the stuff of everyday life, were exposed to the outside like an empty dollhouse swung open on its hinges. Some homes were covered by tarps and makeshift barriers, which gave them a look of destruction that I associated with the conflict. By the fall of 2015 much of the "messiness" of the Majrimtal area had been cleaned up and painted over in anticipation of the grand opening of the new traffic bridge. As we walked through the inner streets of the mahalla and called on some of Ravshan's acquaintances here, he explained how he thought the city had changed:

My father tells this sometimes, that the population was composed of Russian and Uzbek people, mainly. In those parts of the city like Zapadnyy,⁶⁹ and in many tall buildings, there lived Russian people. In the old part, mostly Uzbek people. Kyrgyz people were very few in number. Then after 1990—you know that event? the same one as in 2010?—many Russian people moved to Russia because of the conflict, and then Kyrgyz people began to make raids to the city and they set up houses and neighborhoods. And after 2010, again. Other nationalities moved to other places, to Azerbaijan, to Russia, and their places were distributed, or they were purchased by Kyrgyz people. Then the Kyrgyz population was growing. Our people were not against their people. But they were accustomed to the conditions of a rural area. This is not a generational but a cultural gap between two individuals.

⁶⁹ Zapadnyy is a large district on the western edge of town that includes neighborhoods such as Anar, Tülökön, Japalak and Ak Tilek. It consists almost entirely of mikrorayons and apartment buildings and is the area built explicitly for ethnic Kyrgyz residents.

Ravshan's explanation is rich and worth picking apart. He articulates a similar sentiment of "ours" and "theirs" that Samara's friend had heard from the Uzbek residents of On Adir, as well as a strong understanding of the dramatic population changes that have taken place in Osh since 1990 and their relationship to residential space (Russians lived in apartments, and when they left, Kyrgyz from rural areas moved in). Ravshan also describes the land seizures as "raids" (he was speaking in English). Yet Ravshan articulates the key difference between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz as one of *culture that is tied to urban space*, and *culture that is tied to rural space*. One of the Majrimtal residents that Ravshan and I spoke to alluded to "other people" who "came and constituted some problems for us." Once we walked away, Ravshan clarified that our interlocutor was taking pains to avoid a direct reference to Kyrgyz or Uzbek people "because of political pressure." To Ravshan, the tension between the two groups "is not nationality discrimination, it's just attitude. We have to accept that."

Another important element of Ravshan's understanding of urban history is the way that he articulates the violence in 1990 as "the same" as that of 2010. Because I was still trying to learn what happened, I asked Ravshan to explain what the causes of the 1990 conflict were. Ravshan said again, "it was the same thing as 2010." I clarified that I had read that the 1990 conflict was a fight over a piece of land, but Ravshan had never heard about that. Given Ravshan's fairly nuanced understanding of urban change over the last 30 years, it is remarkable how little he knew about the conflict of 1990 itself. In Chapter 3 I demonstrate a kind of collective amnesia among international peace building groups about the causes of violence in 1990, and the relationship of those events to earlier socio-economic and political processes. I show that the 1990 events are generally seen by foreign aid groups as a precursor to the 2010 violence, rather than understanding them in their own right. Yet a narrative of violence recurring

at regular intervals is strong among Osh's population as well—several other participants including Hayat (mentioned below) also lamented what they saw as a disturbing repetition or pattern of violence that seemed predestined to occur yet again.

Like Ravshan, the two other young male Uzbek participant guides that I worked with also had a strong understanding of the specific histories of Uzbeks being displaced from the city center to the less desirable outskirts of town during the Soviet period. Roma, for example, distinguished between the Uzbek mahallas of Amir Temur and Yuzhniy on the basis of this history: “the difference between them is that people came willingly to Amir Temur, but they were forced to go to Yuzhniy.” By this, Roma meant that Uzbeks who were displaced from their homes by Soviet modernization projects were sent to Yuzhniy, while Amir Temur was an old mahalla that existed prior to Soviet involvement. As a kid, Roma's mother lived in the area of Chynara and Zaibedinova, which were cleared for apartments. Likewise, Hayat (Uzbek male, 50) explained how his parents came to live in the area of Geologorodok: both of his parents have lived for several generations in Osh. His family moved to Geologorodok in 1968 because his father received a new land plot as compensation for the seizure of his home on Masalieva Street, where the Osh Technical Construction College and *Dom Byta* (“House of Everyday Life,” a kind of Soviet-era department store) were built. Hayat remembers that 70 percent of Geologorodok's population was Russian when he was growing up. While his parents spoke poor Russian, Hayat attended a school where Russian was taught from kindergarten. In the 1960s the neighborhood of Geologorodok (literally meaning “geology township” in Russian) was established to support the Central Asian Geological Expedition. The Expedition was a massive scientific and industrial endeavor that, at the height of its operations in the mid-1970s, hosted as many as 2,000 scientists involved in mineral exploration and natural resource exploitation, particularly of gold and other

rare earth minerals. The neighborhood's Russian population would grow every summer as graduate students from Russian universities arrived for a summer of research and fieldwork. They were housed in nearby dormitories.

Image 5.4: A wall-to-wall map of the geology of the entire Soviet Union, hanging in the Museum of the Geological Expedition to Central Asia, in Geologorodok.



Today the neighborhood of Geologorodok is a mix of apartment buildings and mahallas. Research participants cited it many times over as a model of inter-ethnic harmony and integration in the city, a “mixed” neighborhood where violence seemed unlikely to take place. For a very long time, I wondered what made it unique compared with other areas of the city, and I made numerous trips to the area in an attempt to determine what was unusual about it. Based on Hayat’s understanding of the neighborhood’s transformation, I do not think we should see its “success” in avoiding conflict a consequence of its mixed population, whatever “mixed” might mean. Rather, Geologorodok was a majority Russian settlement with a highly educated population, built in an unsettled and therefore uncontested area that was not close to the city

center, where there was no need to displace existing populations. The neighborhood is neither central to the city, nor contested in any major way. The widespread discourse about Geologorodok's "mixed" population as a cause of its relative security and peace is interesting because it suggests that Osh residents' valorization of multiculturalism is actually a valorization of diversity that includes a non-indigenous group.

Unsurprisingly, none of my ethnic Kyrgyz participant guides articulated such a strong understanding of, or personal experience with, displacement in the city during the Soviet period. But they did recall what it was like to grow up in the 1970s and 1980s. Omurkan (Kyrgyz male, mid-50s), grew up on the Kalinina massif as the son of a military officer. Omurkan's father is from Karakulja, an ethnic Kyrgyz village in the foothills of the Fergana Valley. In the 1970s his father came to Osh to attend graduate school (*aspirantura*) at the Russian language department of Osh State University. Omurkan's son now lives in a prestigious neighborhood of Bishkek, where he works as a high-level government employee. Like many of the successful men that I interviewed, Omurkan and his wife remain in Osh because he is the youngest son and is responsible for caring for his elderly parents. The Kalinina neighborhood where he grew up is an Uzbek mahalla on a small rise above the new Russian part of the city. Laughing, Omurkan fondly recalled getting into fights with the local kids: "The Uzbek kids would beat me up on the way to school. I would call on my Russian and Tatar friends, and on the way home we would beat them up. If I came home without two black eyes, my mom wouldn't recognize me." At the same time, Omurkan said that the KGB kept a tight lid on ethno-nationalism and that "you were not allowed to say that you were Uzbek or Kyrgyz." Aisalkyn (Kyrgyz woman, mid-50s) repeated this fact, but she was also critical of that policy and blamed it for creating ethnic tension. To her, an effective policy to promote peace and tolerance would have deliberately

placed Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in residences side-by-side, house-by-house or apartment-by-apartment. Several of my participants expressed this idea of living side-by-side (*bok-a-bok*) as a policy that would forge friendship between the two ethnic groups. Yet when gently pressed, Aisalkyn confessed that she would not want to leave her home for an apartment mixed in the manner that she described, although she still thought it would be a good policy for younger people today.

The history of urban settlement has led many people to associate housing type with ethnicity in Osh in a way that is not characteristic of other cities in Kyrgyzstan or across Central Asia. Many of my research participants, city guides and otherwise, drew parallels between housing type and cultural attributes such as ethnic identity. Thus, standing on the top of Sulaiman-Too mountain, the professor Bakyt (Kyrgyz male, 40) pointed out the “big” houses (apartment buildings) where Kyrgyz people lived and the “small” houses where Uzbek people lived; Alisher (Uzbek male, 30) corrected me when I asked if the opulent private homes behind the state library were built by Russians (“No, Russians don’t like to live in houses like that”); and Roma (Uzbek male, early 20s), explained that while Amir Temur is 95 percent Uzbek, Yuzhniy is only 70 percent Uzbek, “because we also have apartment buildings in Yuzhniy”—in other words, wherever there are apartments in Osh, Roma knew that they were inhabited by ethnic Kyrgyz people.

c. Neighborhood segregation: “We wanted land, and they were against it”

I met Daniyar ake (Kyrgyz male, 62)⁷⁰ in the spring of 2016 as Gulnara, one of my research assistants, and I, conducted a neighborhood walk-through of Ak Tilek. The purpose was

⁷⁰ “Ake” is a term of respect used for older Kyrgyz men (in Uzbek, the term is “aka”). For women, the respective terms are “eje”/“opa.”

simply to get a better sense for the neighborhood itself, which was conspicuous because on an administrative map of Osh it sticks out like an exclave of the city, not contiguous with the rest of the municipal territory. Ak Tilek is a compact area of private homes clearly built after Kyrgyzstan's independence. It is bordered on one side by a wide new road that will eventually encircle the city, redirecting traffic through the congested downtown. On the other three sides are agricultural fields. Gulnara and I wandered through the streets of Ak Tilek for a few hours, stopping to speak with residents to inquire about the history of the neighborhood. No one seemed particularly interested in a lengthy conversation and we were beginning to tire, so we crossed the highway to flag down a minibus heading back to the city center. It was the end of a long and dusty day of interviews that had felt repetitive, so we were quite surprised to run into Daniyar tending to his sheep. Daniyar was one of the first people to receive a land plot in Ak Tilek, after his involvement in a series of protests led by Kyrgyz youth in 1990 that culminated in the 1990 conflict. Daniyar agreed to speak with us at length, so we exchanged contact information and returned to the same road-side spot a few days later to conduct a more extensive interview. I describe the interview in depth here because it presents the only account I know of from a protestor involved in the 1990 riots. Daniyar's story brings many of the events and Soviet policies described in the previous chapter to life, and it situates the neighborhood of Ak Tilek and the entire western side of town within a history about town planning that is poorly documented: western Osh was established to be an ethnic Kyrgyz area. This is a history that no one explicitly described to me, but that can be clearly pieced together by the stories of Daniyar as well as Omurkan and Almazbek, told in the sections above.

The interview with Daniyar was remarkable from a number of different perspectives. First, it was quite rare that anyone I met on my neighborhood walk-throughs discussed details

about the violence in either 1990 or 2010 with us—it is simply not discussed in the open or with strangers. Moreover, while it is fairly easy to encounter someone who has a personal story about the 2010 riots, that is simply not the case regarding the 1990 riots, and so telling Daniyar’s story is a way to fill a existing hole in the broader picture.

Daniyar was born in Langan village, about 30 kilometers from Osh in the neighboring district of Kara Suu. After finishing high school he worked in the local House of Culture (*Madaniyat Ui*, in Kyrgyz), attributing this job to his innate creativity. The Soviet Houses of Culture were institutions built in towns and villages across the republics in the 1920s-30s for the purpose of introducing local populations to Bolshevik ideology through adult education and entertainment (Igmen 2012). Daniyar ake served in the military and traveled across the Soviet Union and to the eastern bloc, and when he returned he became a member of the GorKom (*Gorodskoy Komitet*, or City Committee), which was the highest organ of the Communist Party in Osh. These details suggest that Daniyar benefitted substantially from the Soviet Union’s “affirmative action” policies, which in Kyrgyzstan promoted ethnic Kyrgyz over other groups. In the late Soviet years Daniyar worked in the music department of the Osh Pedagogical Institute and as a kindergarten teacher, but in the early 1990s state salaries were so low that he could not even afford transportation to work, so he left his teaching job to become a trader. As in many other parts of the USSR, after 1991 many of Kyrgyzstan’s elite and intellectual classes turned to trading and shuttling goods for survival. The town of Kara Suu, on the border with Uzbekistan, was a major trading hub for many years.⁷¹ Today Daniyar is retired and he looks after a small flock of sheep. He points out a small flyer advertising his sheep, and explains that people buy them for birthday celebrations or when they are hosting special guests. Daniyar’s wife works as a

⁷¹ For an in-depth case study of Bishkek’s two major markets, see Regine Spector (2017), *Order at the Bazaar: Power and Trade in Central Asia*.

senior nurse in a nearby dental clinic and they have four children, two sons and two daughters. The youngest son is in the sixth grade, and the oldest is working in Moscow to save money for a family of his own. Daniyar's oldest daughter is married and lives with her husband and kids in Almaty, Kazakhstan, but they are investing in the construction of a new two-story house in a district of Osh called Furkat. As mentioned above, the mahallas of Furkat were some of the most severely damaged during the 2010 looting and violence and the grandiose new entrance to the city is built there.

I turn to Daniyar's own words to describe the situation of ethnic Kyrgyz in 1990 and his involvement in protesting for access to land. While this is an unusually extensive passage of direct quotation and his narrative is circular and repetitive, I have chosen not to substantially edit the narrative because the iterations and circularities emphasize the significance of many issues described in previous chapters:

Kyrgyz people were not given homes or land here, and they were not allowed to be registered in the city. Those were the politics of the time. People who came from Russia immediately received a house and they were automatically registered. They moved here and immediately became directors. [To Gulnara] Don't you know this? They worked in offices. In Soviet times Kyrgyz were involved with livestock. That's why the Soviet authorities didn't give them land, because they thought that they would come and fill up the city. That was the political situation. Uzbeks were involved in agriculture, cooking, trading, restaurants, shops. Since we were not registered, they did not give us land or houses.

We were your age, 25-30 years old. When the problems with the land began, the "Osh Aimagi" community was founded. Uzbeks founded the group "Adolat."⁷² In 1990 there was a conflict. Our goal was to receive land. Young people said, "Either we receive land, or we will seize it ourselves." Before that Kyrgyz lived in apartments belonging to Uzbeks. They were small and resembled chicken coops. It was very difficult for us. They did not allow us to turn on the electricity, to have guests and friends. They [the Soviet authorities] did not give us homes here to prevent us from coming to the city and to make sure that we looked after animals.

⁷² Osh Aimagi (Osh Area) was a political group representing ethnic Kyrgyz in the 1990s; Adolat (Justice) was a political group representing ethnic Uzbek interests.

In the city everyone was Uzbek, ninety percent of the city was Uzbek. The others who came from Russia and Europe, they immediately registered them and gave them houses or apartments in multistory buildings. The private houses belonged to Uzbeks, but those were old houses. It was all a government program. No one could escape from this program. That's why, as I said, they divided [people] between animal husbandry and agriculture. The program was sent from Moscow and fulfilled here. The majority of Kyrgyz, ninety percent, were engaged in animal husbandry. Uzbeks did not do that, neither did Tajiks.

If Kyrgyz were not registered in the city, not given apartments, land, then that [protesting and seizing land] was their only option, there was nothing else they could do. So in 1990 young people were outraged and we protested. In the HBK neighborhood there were men with rifles, and there was a conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. It was smaller than in 2010. It was a protest about land. There, behind the statue of Manas, there is a construction next to the Kambar-Ata teahouse. It took place there. That's where we protested, from the end of April or May. On June 4th we came here [to Ak Tilek] and we said, "Either we receive this land or we will seize it," and we created a scandal [...] Afterwards the Party became accountable to us, because we were very strong. We said, "Either they give it to us or we will seize it ourselves."

We were forced to protest because there was no place to live for young people. We rented shelter from Uzbeks. All the workers and even teachers rented apartments. Life was difficult. Before that, land was seized in Bishkek. That was before us, and then it came to us too.

The territory of Ak Tilek, which in 1990 was just another cotton field surrounding Osh, was divided into land plots and distributed to the Kyrgyz protestors. The territory of Ak Tilek is a concrete expression of the chaotic events at that time.

Daniyar's story raised a number of questions about the 1990 conflict that I was not immediately able to answer by reading the available literature. We learn that even though it is still the Soviet period, there are two political groups representing Kyrgyz and Uzbeks—Osh Aimagi (Osh Region) and Adolat (Justice), respectively. We also learn some background about one of the participants (Daniyar himself), who is no thug, but turns out to be a highly accomplished and educated member of society. Daniyar also hints at the relationship between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, rural and urban areas, and housing shortages during the Soviet period. He suggests that there was a kind of ethnicized division of labor imposed by Moscow on

the peoples of Central Asia that contributed to the conflict. Perhaps most importantly, Daniyar hints at a much broader set of events going on at the same time across Kyrgyzstan: a series of protests and land seizures in Bishkek, which, as I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4, has been forgotten by the humanitarian and development industry.

While we cannot attribute Daniyar's explanation of the 1990 events to all Kyrgyz of Osh, or all Kyrgyz who protested in 1990, it certainly adds a layer of complexity to some of the other ways that conflict has come to be understood. Megoran (2017: Chapter 4, "Osh's Borders"), for example, traces two tales of precarity that characterize the narratives of Osh's ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbek populations regarding the border and national belonging. Megoran argues that while the two narratives of precarity exist alongside one another and "darkly mirror one another," they also contrast with one another, highlighting different elements of the same historical experiences. Thus, understanding and critically interrogating them is important. Yet the two narratives of precarity that Megoran describes acknowledge briefly (but do not emphasize or elaborate on) the issues of land and housing scarcity, which Daniyar returns to again and again in his narrative.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked Daniyar what now seems a rather puerile question, but it was one that I asked of all my participants: was he proud of his city? The majority of my research participants gave an unconvincing "yes" in reply to this question, but Daniyar's response was earnest, even passionate:

Gulnara my dear, at that time [in 1990] I had two young daughters. We left them in the village. Back then you could be shot or thrown in jail. We were not afraid of that. We left the village in order to receive land. We fought for this land. So much blood was lost because of this land, so of course we are proud of that. We were the only ones and the first ones among Kyrgyz to receive land, so we must be proud of the fact that we are here.

Struggling to make sense of Daniyar's explanation, Gulnara asked a deceptively simple follow-up. "I am wondering why your protest turned into an ethnic conflict?" Daniyar's response was swift: "We wanted land, and they were against it."

Daniyar's startlingly simple answer seems to reject the fundamental assumption in Gulnara's question, that the 1990 conflict was about ancient ethnic hatreds. However, Daniyar does not seem to be suggesting that the conflict was *only* about land and housing. Daniyar's response equates ethnic identity with certain kinds of space and territory ("we" Kyrgyz were landless and "they" Uzbeks had land), but that these concepts are so interrelated that they cannot be considered independently. Zooming out and contextualizing the 1990 conflict in broader geographic and historical terms, as done in the previous chapter, conflict seems much less about ethnicity than about other socio-spatial processes that worked upon and through ethnic identities. By shifting the scale of analysis about the 1990 Osh events from the local to the national and regional, the optics change substantially. We need to somehow keep in mind both of these scales at the same time. I do not argue that the local and the particular must be ignored, only that it has perhaps been privileged too much. In doing so, the responsibility of global and international actors is also elided. We need to find an understanding of the conflict that operates across scales, taking multiple perspectives into consideration.

Importantly, we should interpret Daniyar's story as a political act. When we first met Daniyar and learned that he was one of the neighborhood's early residents, he said, "I guess enough time has passed that this story should be told." He acknowledged that the story was contested and that it was not discussed widely in public. This stands in stark contrast to the walls of silence that have been built up around the topics of violence and ethnicity, as well as to the very generalized, non-specific narratives that do circulate about the 1990 events, even among

Osh natives, such as Roma's assumption (described in the section above) that the 1990 events were "the same" as those in 2010. Finally, it was also extremely common for potential research participants to agree to a meeting and then fail to show up or to cancel our plans at the last minute, and so also in that respect, the interview with Daniyar was exceptional. He could have easily had second thoughts between our first encounter and our next full, audio-recorded interview.

d. Elite histories of urban space: Svetlana

Svetlana (Russian woman, mid-50s), is a historian who works at the local branch of the Academy of Sciences and has published several books about Osh's history, one of which focuses on the history of Russians in the city since their arrival in the late-1800s. In fact I have used her books to help formulate the details of Osh's industrialization. Svetlana's understanding of Osh's history was therefore quite authoritative, but it was also clearly contested by her colleagues and even our local Kyrgyz driver. The stories below are particularly relevant to the question of contested histories because Svetlana should be a reliable third party, yet they must be read within the politics of ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan of which she is a part.

Svetlana was born in Kazakhstan to Russian parents and moved to Osh with her husband, who worked as a journalist covering news across the southern portion of the country. I found Svetlana because she was a featured speaker at a day-long conference on urban planning and development in Osh. When Svetlana and I met for the first time, on the benches in the quiet and leafy Toktogul park, she brought along several copies of her publications and convinced me to purchase two of them. She seemed busy and self-important, and when I asked a few questions about urban change, she repeatedly referred me to her books rather than answering them directly.

When I asked if she would give me a city tour, she suggested that there were many tour guides whom I could hire and asked if I would pay her for the service. Noting that I had just bought two of her books, she relented and we met a few days later at her office on an uncomfortably warm summer day.

The office was difficult to find, located in a peaceful and wealthy residential neighborhood on a hill called Naukatskiy Podyom, above the Mayor's office and other municipal buildings. Svetlana was running to and fro, giving instructions to her colleagues so that they could manage in her absence, and so I waited in the hallway, where an unusual painting caught my eye. It depicted a scene in Osh, which is identifiable by the iconic shape of Sulaiman-Too mountain. The scene clearly dated to the Russian imperial period. A woman in traditional Kyrgyz dress rides a horse through a crowd that is being held back by Russian soldiers clad in white, while a Russian man and woman in European dress sit apart from the crowd, on a guarded stage. The crowd has gathered around a podium where a hanging is just about to take place, the executioner reaching up to pull the noose down while the prisoner, also in white, stands in anticipation.



Image 5.5: The painting that hangs in the Osh branch of the Academy of Sciences. I am grateful to Aichurok Nurbaeva, who visited the office after I left Osh and took this photo. Contrary to our expectations, the office staff found it fairly unremarkable that Aichurok wanted to take a photo of the painting on behalf of an American scholar and let her do so without protest or fanfare.

The woman on the horse in the foreground is Kurmanjan Datka (1811-1907), a national hero in Kyrgyzstan. Her image appears on the country's currency, one of the main streets in Osh is named after her, and many statues throughout the country commemorate her. In 2014 a high-budget film was produced about her life (see Canning 2014). Kurmanjan Datka was from Karakulja, a village located in the foothills of the Alai mountains south of Osh. When her nobleman husband, who governed the Andijon province of the Kokand Khanate (which included Osh), was assassinated, she became “datka” or “righteous ruler,” a combination of governor and general. Her authority was recognized not just by the diverse peoples of the province but also by

the Kokand and Bukharan khanates and by the Russian Tsar. While she inherited a rebellion against Russian colonial influence, ultimately she persuaded the people of her province to submit to Russian colonial rule, recognizing that the Russian army was far more powerful. She is an important symbol of Kyrgyz independence and national strength, and a powerful female ruler who resisted colonial rule and ultimately fought for peace in the southern half of Kyrgyzstan (Canning 2014; Pannier 2014).

Svetlana did not want me to photograph the painting and, without explanation, hurried me out the door to prevent me from doing so. I learned later that she and her boss disagreed on the painting's interpretation, and she did not want to discuss it within earshot. After a short tour of the city, Svetlana and I stood on a footbridge crossing the Ak Buura river, looking over the new campus of Osh State University's medical department towards a bare mound of earth that had archaeological significance. Svetlana raised the topic of the painting again:

- S: Why don't you take any photos of this mound? You should be taking photos of these sites. [referring to the archaeological site]
- C: Oh, I didn't know that I was allowed to do so.
- S: No, I didn't say it was forbidden to take photographs. Someone painted that [painting] specifically. It is a contested moment, a bad one, and that's why I said that you don't need to photograph it. For some reason, our Director loves it.
- C: What moment, what is it? Is it historical?
- S: Yes. You know in history there are these very contested moments (*sporniye momenti*). Those are Russian border guards working in the Alai region. There was a smuggler and he brought in contraband, and the Russians got in the way. They [the smugglers] killed the border guard, and the Russians caught them and hung them. That is the moment, when the Russians are hanging them.
- C: What is contested about that?
- S: The guy who is being hanged is a distant relative of our Director. He is the son of Queen Kurmanjan Datka, and our Director is her great-great-grandchild. She [our director] says that there was no way that he was a smuggler, they just happened to be there... in short, she does not agree. [...] I don't agree with our director. She says, "No, they [the smugglers] just happened to be there, and they were hanged." But I don't challenge that in any way, because I work alone, and the rest of us are 100 percent Kyrgyz. But our Representative, who is a scholar, supports me. He said, "I need people, not just dead weight [*ballast*]", but working people. Those who are

knowledgeable and are able to write, publish books.” He says, “We studied together and we will work together.”

According to a number of reliable historical accounts, Kurmanjan Datka attended the Russian execution of one of her own sons, who, alongside his father, was a leader of the rebellion against Russian imperial forces. By attending the hanging, Kurmanjan Datka demonstrated her commitment to the unity and wellbeing of her people, which she placed above that of her own offspring (Pannier 2014). According to Svetlana, the event depicted in the painting is about a crime and the just punishment of the criminals; it is not about the politics of Russian colonial violence. Her director’s interpretation—at least, what we can glean of it from Svetlana’s telling—hints at the larger issues of colonial encounter, violence and rebellion, which Svetlana mentions only obliquely, only by way of admitting that the painting is contested. Our conversation about the painting also reveals Svetlana’s sense of embattlement at work—the only Russian among supposedly unqualified Kyrgyz colleagues—hints at the ways in which historical memory is being contested and remade in Kyrgyzstan through the politics of ethnic identity, and upon the institutions (such as *korenizatsiya*, or affirmative action) of the Soviet past.

Leaving her office to begin our tour, Svetlana hailed a taxi at the bottom of the hill and we crossed the river to visit the former summer residence of the Kokhand Khanate, a pleasant area of white-washed buildings and tree-lined walkways that are overgrown and unkempt, but that offered relief from the mid-day summer temperatures. Throughout our tour of historical sites in the city, Svetlana eulogized the Soviet influence in Central Asia and lamented the loss of Russian culture and education. When our taxi driver (ethnically Kyrgyz) did not want to advance further up a muddy, pot-holed road in the Khan’s summer residence, Svetlana muttered, “That is the price of independence.” Svetlana explained that after the unification of the Kokand Khanate’s territory to Russia, the area became the summer residence of the governor of the Osh *uezd*

(region), and he received the other governors and commanders of Turkestan there. During the war years of the Soviet period, the Residence was converted into a *Dom Otdyha* (house of rest), and that soldiers injured at the front were brought to Osh to recover. Later, one of the buildings became a schoolhouse, and it was named after Urkiya Saliyeva, a Hero of Collectivization. Svetlana explained,

Urkiya was the Representative of a kolkhoz [located in the nearby village of Nookat⁷³], and she was killed. In the Soviet period they didn't want some people, and so they killed her because of that, because she built a kolkhoz. She was for the collectivization and they wanted it to be private, so she was killed. This was in the 1930s.

The history hints at the resistance to collectivization that Soviet authorities faced, and to the internal conflicts between those local populations who accepted and promoted Soviet policies, and those who did not. In describing the story of Urkiya and her fate, Svetlana hinted at her own interpretation of what Urkiya's death symbolized: a tragic outcome wrought by an unenlightened majority against the agents of progress. This was not just Svetlana's nostalgia for the Soviet past: a sense of cultural chauvinism permeated much of Svetlana's historical commentary and her interactions with myself and others during our tour.

Throughout the tour, Svetlana constantly interrupted herself to field phone calls, several of which came from her Director, and Svetlana made a concerted effort to let me know not only that she was very busy, but also that she was fighting an uphill battle at work. At the end of the dialogue above, she mentions her status as an expert among “dead weight” at the Academy of Sciences. When the phone rang again for the third or fourth time, Svetlana said to me, “My Director is calling and she'll say, ‘Svetlana, we need this urgently!’” Then Svetlana answered the call with the speakerphone enabled so that I could overhear their conversation. They spoke in Russian, but her director's Russian was so heavily accented and broken that I could not

⁷³ For a somewhat uncritical but informative telling of Urkiya Saliyeva's story, see *Limon.kg* 2015.

understand any of it. Svetlana had made her point: Russian language itself, and the high standards of scholarship and modernity that it represented, were in peril. During the tour our driver, Azamat (Kyrgyz male, 50) gently and curiously inserted himself into our conversation from time-to-time. Svetlana recognized how well he spoke Russian and pointed out to me, as if our driver was part of a display on our tour, “Look! The older generation of Kyrgyz speak Russian perfectly and without an accent because the education system was better then, and now young students teach and they don’t know Russian very well.” (Svetlana herself had left the profession of teaching because she struggled to teach in Kyrgyz language). So I asked our driver about his education:

Caitlin: Did you study in a Russian school?

Driver: No, I studied in a Kyrgyz school.

Svetlana: Look how perfectly he speaks!

Caitlin: How did you learn Russian?

Driver: In school. We had Russian language from the 4th to the 10th grades.

Svetlana: He speaks absolutely like a real Russian!

Driver: I have a son and a daughter who speak English, French and German. One of them lives with us and another is working in Moscow right now as an engineer.

While our driver confirmed Svetlana’s suspicions about the superb quality of Russian language education in the Soviet period, he surprises us with the information about his children, who appear to be highly educated, well-traveled and successful in spite of their non-Soviet educations. The child in Moscow probably speaks excellent Russian, but it is not among the languages that Azamat mentions to demonstrate their pedigrees. Their success does not correlate with Svetlana’s picture of the dire state of education and Russian language in Kyrgyzstan today.

I hope the reader will excuse the extensive quotes from my dialogue with Svetlana in this section. I include them because they add color to the dynamics of language, ethnicity and opportunity that are layered throughout Osh (and Kyrgyzstan), and that come alive in acts of touring the city and talking about its history. They demonstrate some of the everyday prejudices

and injustices that seem to define the experience of being Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek in Osh today. There is certainly no single ethnic group in Osh that has a monopoly on historical grievances.

Svetlana also helped me to physically locate the histories that are told in Chapter 3 within actual urban space. As we drove past Toktogul park and across a bridge towards the summer residence, she pointed out several rows of barracks that were built during the war years. Svetlana explained that there was nowhere to live for the workers of the silk factory, and that the need for housing was urgent. Sonia's family history (Russian woman, mid-40s) speaks to the gendered dimensions of violence during the Second World War. Sonia's grandparents were ethnic Russians who lived in Tatarstan. As an Old Believer, an outlawed schism of the Russian Orthodox church, her grandmother was persecuted by the Russian state. She was sent first to Tashkent and then to Osh in exile. Sonia's grandfather died in WWII and her grandmother never remarried, raising two kids alone. Over and over, Sonia's grandmother was forced to host soldiers at her home who were still in recovery, well enough to leave the hospital but still requiring care, because she lived alone in a large house. For her grandmother, who was a young and beautiful woman, it was very difficult to have strange men in her home. Eventually she appealed to the authorities, requesting that they allow her to trade her large house for a small one if they would only relieve her of the responsibility to host more wounded soldiers. This story also hints at the pressures of the housing shortage and its impact on individual lives.

e. Elite histories of urban space: Bakyt

While we can trace the historical processes through which ethnicity has been historically constructed (Chapter 4), ethnicity is also an ontological reality whose making goes unquestioned by the millions of people in the world who use it to think about themselves and others. Take, for

example, the history lesson that the professor Bakyt (Kyrgyz male, early 40s) gave me on our tour of Sulaiman-Too Mountain. Looking out over the border with Uzbekistan, I asked Bakyt why the political boundaries of the Fergana Valley were so jagged and irregular. He responded, that before the Soviet period, the Fergana Valley was “our territory,” Kyrgyzstan’s territory. I argued that there was no concept of “ours” or “Kyrgyzstan” at that time, so this did not make sense. Bakyt answered,

Kyrgyzstan didn't exist, but there was the Kokand Khanate. The Kokand Khanate was ruled by Kyrgyz from the 13th to the 19th centuries. The Kokands ruled Fergana, Namangan, Andijan, Jalal-Abad, Batken—they were all ruled by Kyrgyz. The majority, 80 percent, were Kyrgyz. But the Kyrgyz population decreased and the Uzbeks increased. Why? Because under the unification of the USSR our people fought against the Russian army. They didn't want to give up territory. And they killed all the Kyrgyz and more than 2-3 million Kyrgyz ran away from Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan. This was the Urkun. In the north they were killed, here they ran away.

This is also a rich story worth picking apart. First, I want to draw attention to the way that Bakyt uses categories of ethno-national identity that were invented in the 19th century to speak about a period long before that, and as a way to claim territory for that group. Second, Bakyt’s assertion that the Fergana Valley belonged to Kyrgyz and was ruled by ethnic Kyrgyz is historically inaccurate (see Levi 2017). It is true that nomadic and pastoral populations resisted the Russian empire, as we know from the story of Kurmanjan Datka, but there was widespread resistance to Russian rule in urban areas of the Fergana Valley as well.

Svetlana and Bakyt’s narratives of history each replicate an elite or “top-down” version of history, both of which are highly contested and more deeply problematic than any of the histories that my other participants told me. While I asked Svetlana and Bakyt to tell me about themselves and I worked hard to pull out personal details with which to contextualize their stories, both of them approached our interviews as a one-way pedagogical event in which I was

supposed to listen, somewhat passively receiving the correct information. Both Bakyt and Svetlana were more “in control” of our interviews, as well. Certainly this has something to do with their positions as instructors and scholars. However, I think something more is at work here. Bakyt unabashedly advances a historical narrative about Osh that renders it ‘originally’ Kyrgyz, a false representation that nevertheless mimics the official state ideology. In her interaction with our driver, Svetlana gives an almost comical performance of the colonial master and her attitude towards the ‘backwards native’. Svetlana also whitewashes the violence of the Russian imperial project, but simultaneously positions herself as under siege by the tyranny of the uncultured natives, who do not speak her language and whose own language she has never learned. Perhaps in the attempt to be authoritative and to describe a more sweeping and analytical version of history, rather than one’s personal experience, errors and biases become magnified and attached to political

f. *Territorializations of language and identity*

As chapter three demonstrated, ethnicity and identity are neither static nor easily identifiable in Osh. Many people in Kyrgyzstan are of mixed ethnicity and scholars have shown that ethnic identity, like other forms of social difference, is a fluid and shifting concept in Osh and Central Asia more widely (Tishkov 1992; Slezkine 1994; D. Abramson 2001; Martin 2001; Hirsch 2005; Ilkhamov 2006). One young man of Uzbek ethnicity used this to his advantage after the 2010 violence, adopting the ethnically ambiguous name “Murat,” which could be Uzbek, Kyrgyz or Turkish, when introducing himself to someone new in the city. Murat’s mutable identity allowed him to move through the new reality of his post-2010 world, where young Uzbek men were targeted and harassed by the predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz police and

other groups of young Kyrgyz men. This strategy could only be successful in a place where the other typical “tells” of identity are equally mobile and normal, and it draws attention to the ways in which ethnic identities can shift at an urban and local scale. It is possible to fluidly move between two or more identities in Osh because of the extent to which languages and cultures have been intertwined in the past. Thus, identity is contingent on place. Many people growing up in southern Kyrgyzstan have been exposed to both Uzbek and Kyrgyz languages and use them daily in interactions at the market, with neighbors, on public transport, etc., often using them interchangeably and moving easily from one to another, sometimes speaking one language at home and another in school or business. Such fluidity is unique to the south: northern Kyrgyz people can easily identify a southern Kyrgyz person through the peppering of Uzbek and/or Tajik words throughout their speech, or from their accent, and the elite of Osh pride themselves for passing in Bishkek without being identified as an Oshtuk/Oshlik. Gulnara (Kyrgyz woman, 20) grew up in an ethnic Kyrgyz household in a village about an hour north of Osh, in a mixed village of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. She had Uzbek neighbors and easily picked up the Uzbek language, which is very close to Kyrgyz, by watching television and playing with neighbors as a child. Uzbekistan produced the best cartoons and TV shows and these were widely broadcast across southern Kyrgyzstan in the early- and mid-1990s. Almazbek (Kyrgyz man, 38), who grew up in Osh and was sent to a Kyrgyz-speaking school, recalled that he learned Uzbek by watching cartoons as well. These experiences of growing up in a pluralist society allow ethnicity to be negotiated and deployed situationally and temporally, even while the categories of Kyrgyz and Uzbek are shifting into more ossified forms today. Since the 2010 riots, there is no Uzbek-language broadcast media and fewer children are growing up in multilingual environments. OshTV was owned by an Uzbek businessman who fled the country after the 2010 riots, and the

station was municipalized. While it used to broadcast pieces in different languages, today it broadcasts only in Kyrgyz (see Liu 2012).

Language and ethnicity are also spatially situated at the urban scale. After nearly a year of living in Osh, I became aware of my own assumptions about the place of ethnicity in the urban environment when a western visitor who spoke some Uzbek tried to order from a confused ethnic Kyrgyz waiter. We were at a German-style beer hall in a part of town that had been built since the 1990s, surrounded by well-known ethnic-Kyrgyz neighborhoods of Anar, Japalak and Zapadniy. I understood this beer hall as a space where Kyrgyz (or Russian) language should be used, and where Uzbek would be out of place. The “proper” place for Uzbek was not here, but at the market, the central streets, in mahallas, or at chaikhanas (tea houses) and street-side cafes. The visitors’ attempt to communicate in Uzbek with the young waiter was embarrassing to me because they felt out of place. Social difference in Osh is negotiable and fluid, but one must know the spatial rules and expectations in order to deploy multiple forms of identity effectively. My embarrassment helped me realize that over time, and through my research activities, I had begun to intuitively understand in what spaces Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Russian languages were preferred and accepted.

One of the first lessons I took away from the participant-led tours was about the proper place of language. To recruit more participants for the guided tours, I placed a short advertisement in RekPark, the weekly journal of job advertisements, services for hire, apartment rentals and property for sale in Osh. I delivered the text, which was in three languages, to RekPark’s small central office on a USB drive and stood over an employee’s shoulder as he opened the file. He was surprised to see Uzbek language, and retreated to a back room to consult his boss on whether Uzbek language was permissible. With approval, he returned to the

computer and, without asking for my input, rearranged the order of the three languages in the advertisement, putting Kyrgyz first, then Russian, and Uzbek last (the original order was Kyrgyz first, Uzbek second, Russian third).

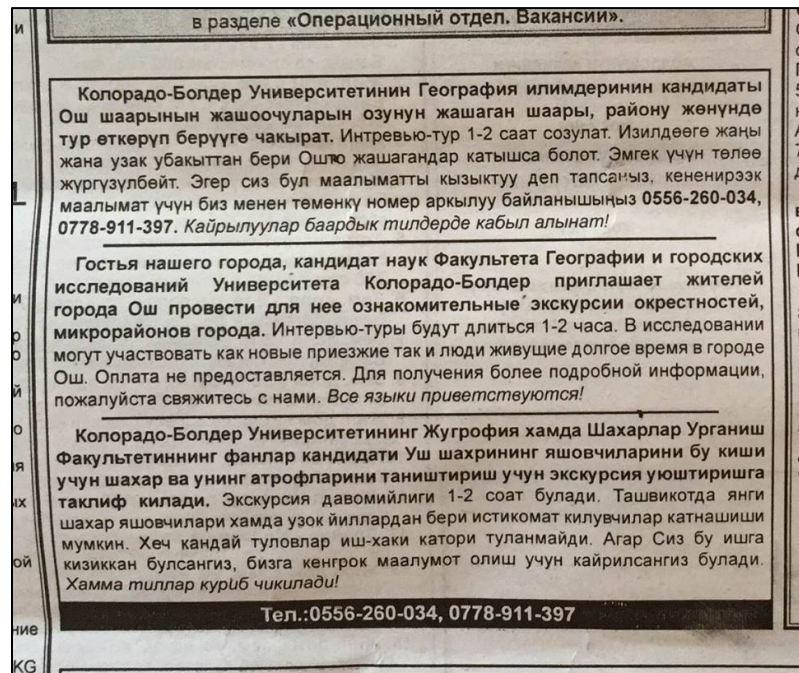


Image 5.6: Participant-guide recruitment ad placed in RekPark: “Researcher on Urban Development Seeking Participants. Seeking Osh residents to give tours of their neighborhood/city to a visiting PhD candidate from the University of Colorado, department of geography and urban studies. Interviews/tours will last 1-2 hours. New and long-time residents both needed for study. No compensation offered. If interested, please contact us and we will send you more details. All languages welcome!”

The politics of language in Osh became evident during the participant-led tours, both as a specific topic of discussion and as it arose organically in places and in interactions with people during the tours. For example, I learned that Omurkan (Kyrgyz man, mid-50s), the retired military officer who drove me around the city, prefers to listen to Russian language radio, but he says many people have chided him for doing so. They tell him, “You’re Kyrgyz, why are you listening to Russian radio?” Omurkan’s response to them is, “Because I am cultured and educated.” Roma (Uzbek male, early 20s) experienced similar pressure to speak Kyrgyz in public areas. He told me about a job he had held for some time at one of Osh’s more prestigious

hotels, where he worked a night shift. Roma speaks half a dozen languages (Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turkish, Russian, English and Chinese). He grew up in Osh attending an Uzbek-language school that had earned a reputation for having the best Kyrgyz-language instruction in the city. His school's dominance was established through Kyrgyz-language competitions that were held between the Uzbek-language schools of Osh. Roma learned Russian from his family and from watching TV, and he picked up Turkish after spending a few months working in a Turkish restaurant in London. His English was also excellent—we first met when he was assigned to me as a translator during an academic conference on anthropology at Osh State University. At the hotel in Osh, Roma made frequent use of his language skills with guests. The flight crew on Turkish Airline's Osh-Istanbul route often stayed at the hotel, as well as Chinese businessmen, while some of the cleaners were Uzbek women. Roma communicated with everyone in their native languages. One day, one of the Kyrgyz staff at the hotel overheard him speaking Uzbek with the cleaning staff and became upset, telling him, "You are in Kyrgyzstan, you should speak Kyrgyz here."

Almazbek (Kyrgyz man, 28) attended School #42 in a neighborhood called Anar in the western part of the city, which is an ethnically Kyrgyz area of multistory apartments. As he drove me around the area he pointed out his former school, noting that it is the biggest Kyrgyz school in Osh:

The authorities specially protected it in 1990 so that it would remain specifically a Kyrgyz school, so that all students here would be Kyrgyz. They built the school and accepted students from all over. They did it very correctly (*ochen pravil'no zdelali*). [...] There are other schools [in my neighborhood]. A Russian school, VKSM. But my parents didn't send me there so that I would graduate from here instead.

In 1990 Almazbek's parents would have been ethnic minorities in the city, experiencing the housing and land crisis directly. Sending their son to the newest, biggest, all-Kyrgyz school

instead of to a Russian-language school was undoubtedly a choice not just about politics but also about their hopes for the future. What kind of education and language would be most important for their son, growing up in a newly independent Kyrgyzstan? The story of Almazbek's education raises new questions about city development in the late 1980s by suggesting that the development of this particular side of the city, which is not far from Daniyar's neighborhood of Ak Tilek, was meant to be for ethnic Kyrgyz only. Several research participants described Anar to me in the same, strange way. They said, "they managed to build (*uspeli stroit*) Anar before the collapse." The language suggests a sense of urgency or frenzy in completing new buildings, and recalls the housing crisis directly. It is in this way that the politics of language (through education and the construction of school #42) are also a politics of material space in Osh.

Language and identity are also context-specific, and as one travels across Kyrgyzstan one encounters very different understandings of identity and its relationship to national and city space. Bektur (Kyrgyz man, 37) grew up in the village of Mady, which is just a few kilometers from Osh. In 2011 Bektur went to the United States on a student fellowship, and he moved to Bishkek in 2013 to pursue a job opportunity. We met at a café in Bishkek because I wanted to include the views of research participants from Osh who were no longer living in the city, to understand what factors drove them to leave or might bring them back. Bektur and I spoke openly about the 2010 events, and Bektur gave me a play-by-play of each day during the riots—where he was, what he observed and how he responded to the escalation of the situation. The details of each day were deeply inscribed in his memory and he recalled them with more clarity than I am typically able to remember the details of the previous week. Discussing ethnicity and conflict with Bektur in such a public setting felt normal, and when I commented about this fact he nodded in agreement. The distance we had from the location where "The Events" happened

made the discussion about them less loaded, more neutral, and it opened up the possibility of more direct questioning about topics that are so sensitive in the south of Kyrgyzstan. In this way, I began to understand the place-specific nature of ethnic identity and its changing meaning across national space.

Bektur's family is of mixed ethnic heritage. He described his father, whose family was from Kokhand in Uzbekistan, as "Uzbek to Kyrgyz." Bektur's grandfather on this side was Uzbek, but his wife was Kyrgyz, "sort of." She was from a village called Kava, with descendants of Alexander the Great who "look very European, tall, white, with green eyes." Bektur's mother, who is ethnically Kyrgyz, was born in Issyk-Kul in the north and sometimes Bektur tells people in Bishkek that he is from Issyk-Kul to avoid the negative stereotypes about the south. Bektur's parents met attending university in Bishkek and after they married, they moved to Mady, which was a mixed village of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Bektur's father worked as a veterinarian in the local Sovkhoz. When the clashes in 1990 took place, his father learned that villagers in the nearby Kyzyl Abad village had captured two Uzbek beekeepers and were threatening to kill them. Bektur's father intervened, taking the two men to the Kara Suu police station to keep them safe. After that, villagers in Mady ordered him to leave, on the basis of his Uzbek identity. In fear for the safety of his family, Bektur moved his family to Jalal Abad, but Bektur came back to Osh in 1994 to attend the Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, where he studied economics and later worked in public health. Bektur recalled that his university days in the student dormitory were fun. Sixty or seventy percent of his class were Uzbek students at that time. Uzbekistan was converting from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, and so quite a few Uzbeks from Namangan and the Fergana Valley came to Osh to study in a written language that they already knew.

When I asked Bektur what his first language was, he gave a confusing answer, referring instead to the mark in his passport, which is not a mark about language but of “nationality.”

My first language is Kyrgyz. It’s in my passport. But I spoke all my life in Russian and I only learned Kyrgyz when I was 18. I only knew a few words, but then university life taught me Kyrgyz. I also learned Uzbek there. Even though we were in the Russian group in university, most classes were taught in Uzbek.

Bektur explained that many of the ethnic minority groups in the south have “Uzbek” in their passports – Tajiks and Uighurs, especially. Because one is allowed to change their nationality, after the 2010 riots many of them took the efforts to change the mark Tajik or Uighur. I asked Bektur whether he considered himself Kyrgyz or Uzbek, but he sidestepped the question, saying, “I am also sometimes confused about this.” However, living in Bishkek made Bektur less sure that he was Kyrgyz. Bektur had been in Bishkek for about three years when we met, and he found that Kyrgyz people in the north are ignorant about the complexities of identity in the south.

They think we are uneducated, that we don’t know how to behave ourselves. They call us ‘Sart’ [he says this word quietly as if it is a bad word]. The word ‘Sart’ itself is not bad, but the meaning they give to it is bad. In the northern meaning, it is someone who will sell everything just to get profit. They mean Sart are Uzbeks, but they do not differentiate between people from Osh, Jalal Abad or Uzgen. When they say ‘Osh’ they mean all of the south. My friends in the north are always surprised to hear that I am from the south because they think that I am Kyrgyz.

Bektur articulated a pattern that also became clear to me as I traveled across Kyrgyzstan and told people that I was living in Osh. To those in the north, Osh was simply known as a site of violent conflict and its ethnic Kyrgyz were seen as corrupted by Uzbek language and culture. The heart of “real” Kyrgyz ethnic identity in the country was in the high-mountain town of Naryn. These regional stereotypes and divisions give a sense for the instability and multiplicity of ethnic categories at broader scales, even while such categories seem to be ossifying into less malleable forms in the city of Osh itself.

6. Conclusion

The historiography of spatial and urban transformation in Osh described in Chapter 4 takes an expansive view of historical processes. This chapter progressively zooms in and simultaneously alters the angle of analysis, from the birds-eye view of municipal boundaries to multiple street-level views through which *Oshtuks* and *O'shliks* emplace their memories, narratives and own senses of history. This street-level view challenges us to think about the relationship between collective memories and individual memories, and it roots those individual memories in actually-existing places, rather than representative or symbolic spaces.

We can trace the geospatial histories of each neighborhood. For example, the “mono-ethnic” Kyrgyz novostroikas in Ak Tilek, Japalak and the western side of the city; the crowded, less wealthy, ethnic Kyrgyz neighborhood of KhBK on the opposite side of the river; the wealthier and “mixed” neighborhood of Geologorodok, the old mahallas in the city center along Navoi Street, Shahit Tepe, and Majrimtal; and the new mahallas on the city’s outskirts in On Adir and Yuzhniy. But such neighborhoods are also lived and perceived

So what are we to make of so many histories, opinions and experiences of urban change? Taken together as a single, if fragmented, body of knowledge, these stories simultaneously illustrate and defy the collective and scholarly narratives. I began by complicating the representation of urban space in terms of mahalla, mikrorayon and novostroika – a triad that is often invoked to serve as a spatial container for ethnicity and class. Instead, I show that mahalla, mikrorayon and novostroika exist in a dynamic relationship with one another. Neighborhoods are frames through which their residents view themselves, understand their own identity and their relationship to the ethnic Other. Each one indexes a quite specific historical moment, although these neighborhoods have different meanings to their residents. For example, Daniyar

proudly fought for his land plot, while Almazbek, 30 years younger, was a child when those fights were going on and is a product of the Osh-for-ethnic-Kyrgyz project that Daniyar helped to establish on the west side of the city. When we look at the stories of Daniyar, Almazbek and Omurkan regarding the western part of the city (Anar, Tülökön, Ak Tilek and Zapadniy neighborhoods) as a single whole, they seem to suggest that the area was being purposely and exclusively built to serve as an ethnic-Kyrgyz suburb of Osh. Yet as residents of these ethnically-pure neighborhoods, and as urban citizens whose subjectivities were produced through a drive towards segregation, they offer nuanced perspectives on what the experience and the spatio-historical representation of such segregation means. Another clear story emerges about the history of Geologorodok. Built to house the intellectual class driving the industrial machine of mineral resource exploitation across the southern half of Soviet Central Asia, Geologorodok exemplifies how the Soviet era's housing and land policies that privileged Russian populations can transition smoothly into the current period. It is an example of managed suburbanization, in which people were given land plots in an area that received (comparatively) substantial state investments into infrastructure and education because of the nearby Geological Expedition. Compare this with the On Adir mahalla, which dates to roughly the same period in the developmental history of the city. On Adir is where we were introduced to the city overlook "Paris" and what it represented to Almazbek as a former site of recreation that is now deemed too unsafe to visit; where Sonia encountered the hostile surveillance from her employee's neighbors; and where many residents collect animal dung for heat (cleaner than coal) and water is sourced by a truck that fills a small storage tank outside residents' homes. If Geologorodok is a lush, "mixed" neighborhood today, in the 1960s it was certainly no different than On Adir—an un-irrigated hill far from the center, where those displaced by Soviet-era development received a

land plot. The difference is that On Adir had no essential state function or institution that might attract further infrastructural investment, as did Geologorodok. Without a water source, On Adir is dry and dusty, while the mahallas of Geologorodok and nearby Yuzhniy are lush and have an inhabited feel to them.

What can these ethnographically rich individual stories tell us about broader issues of history, memory and identity in Osh? And how do they explicate the relationship between individual and collective memories? I suggest that we can answer these questions by borrowing from Cindi Katz's concept of "topographical knowledge" and Doreen Massey's "contemporaneous heterogeneity." In her influential article about the effects of globalization on a Sudanese village, Katz (2001) offers a useful framework for thinking through the relationship between individual and collective histories that constitute knowledge about urban space. Katz describes knowledge about a place as topographical knowledge, but there is an important contradiction in the act of producing it. If topography is the "accurate and detailed delineation of a particular place," then both the description of the place (its representation) *and the place itself* are produced through the exercise of delineating or describing it. Katz argues that throughout history, topographical (detailed) knowledge of particular places has been integral to projects of imperial domination, because such knowledge produces the thing that it names in ways that cloud other ways of seeing and knowing. In Chapter 4 I demonstrated how Soviet knowledge produced about ethnic difference also produced ethnically marked kinds of spaces, from the Republics to the differentiation of urban and rural places by ethnicity. Daniyar was acutely perceptive about the creation of these divisions between urban and rural space, between Kyrgyz and Uzbek, and he refused to accept them. His refusal-by-protest was part of a broader project by local elites (of which he was a part) to create a city-within-a-city, Kyrgyz space within Uzbek

space. Yet the dramatic history of urban transformation through which this story might have been told has been erased by the topographical knowledge that has been produced about Osh as a post-conflict city.

To counter the tendencies for exploitation and domination of such topological knowledge forms, Katz argues that we need a *critical topography* that sheds light on the very global processes that produce a place and knowledge about it. This involves illuminating not just the local, but the “mutual and broader relationships” between different places. Drawing on the work of historical anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Katz explains how these mutual relationships can be illuminated:

If "history is lifeless without topography," *so, too, are topographies without history*. Not only can a sense of sedimented process be read off the land itself, but producing topographies necessarily situates places in their broader context and in relation to other areas or geographic scales, offering a means of understanding structure and process. (Katz 2001, p. 1228, emphasis added)

Thus, Katz advocates for a greater attention to the attenuations of local events with broader historical processes, especially those processes and events taking place elsewhere. The “elsewhere” of Osh’s urban transformation is the context of housing shortage and protests for land that took place across other parts of the Soviet Union, as well as the geopolitics of the war in Ukraine (resulting in the half-built and uninhabited neighborhoods). It is the Second World War (The Great Patriotic War, as it is known in the US), the Soviet-inflected form of socialism that borrowed from Marx, critiqued the West, and tried to forge a different path. It is the idea, that industrialization is the most important step forward on a developmental trajectory, one that is certainly not unique to Russia or the Soviet Union. And it is also the *deindustrialization* of urban (and rural) space, also not unique to postsocialist countries despite the fetishism in the West of abandoned Soviet industrial landscapes.

Doreen Massey (2005) is likewise interested in the relationship between history and place, and of the articulations of specific places with the global processes of knowledge production. But she is wary of letting history, or time, take over. She warns that when a dominant narrative exists about a place, geography is turned into history and space is reduced simply to time. Space, she insists, is a contemporaneous heterogeneity, a multiplicity of trajectories going in all directions, autonomous vectors of development that exist at the same time and in the same place but that do not adhere to a single logic of where the past was, where we are now, or where the future is going. Yet in its obsession with singular forward motion, modernity has rendered space “as merely stages in the temporal queue.” This is most easily seen in how the West represents the Other as “behind” or “backwards”, always trying to catch up. But *history* is “not only temporal or chronological but also spatial and relational” (Massey 2005, p. 69, citing Sakai 1989). As I see it, the task that Massey has set for us to resolve is the *untaming* of space. This does not mean that space should be dehistoricized, but it requires an effort to hold historical processes in tension with the particular and the individual. This requires that we go beyond a critical topography, a la Katz, and recognize that history and memory are situated and simultaneously multi-directional. This is not a denial of collective memory, it is a recognition of the individual histories and trajectories that traverse space, make it up, and constantly produce new kinds of spaces and people.

In Chapter 3 I traced the flattening of identities among representations of Osh as a post-conflict city. The result is that complex urban geographies are erased in favor of history repeating itself through binary identity politics. Here, I have attempted to heed Massey’s call for greater attention to the political possibilities that attend a spatialized representation of the world by seeking to recover a multidimensional sense of urban space in Osh. Ultimately, to understand

contemporary urban life in Osh beyond the narrow focus on ethnicity and neighborhood as corresponding attributes of identity requires that we ask different questions about peace and conflict, history and memorialization, memory and experience, in new ways.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aims to put the historiography of state-led development policies (chapter 4) alongside the experiences of everyday urban life (chapter 5) as a way to reframe our understanding of urban conflict (problematized in chapter 3). It argues that the construction of the built environment in Osh is the outcome of two parallel and interconnected processes. These are (1) state-led programs of industrialization, modernization and neoliberalism over the last 150 years, and (2) the process through which ethnicity and national identity became actually existing categories with assigned meanings and assigned spaces (Republics named after titular majorities, as well as urban/rural space). In other words, space and identity are mutually constituted in Osh. Yet these complex historical processes, and the ways they are understood by local residents, tend to be forgotten by the peace building and conflict prevention interventions of western development groups. Instead, western development groups produce and naturalize conflict as “ethnic conflict,” at the same time de-historicizing the category of ethnicity. As such, their programs have largely failed. Such programs might do better if they began with a more complicated narrative that highlights the multiple lived experiences of negotiating space *and* identity in Osh today.

I argue that we need to move beyond a focus on ethnicity in order to understand conflict and post-conflict processes in Osh. A failure to properly understand them has led not just to the

failure of many preventative development and peace-building initiatives, but also to distrust of these programs and of the west, more generally, among local populations. I do not mean to say that urban transformation is the only explanatory variable for understanding violence in Osh. Rather, my claim is that the context of the violence, and what might be done to prevent it, are not well understood *because* the dynamics of urban transformation are left out or deemphasized. Yet, an urban perspective has been left out of most analyses of conflict and post-conflict reconciliation in Osh, conditioning a kind of humanitarian action that does not—indeed, is unable to—acknowledge the multitude of ways that identity and belonging intersect with the invention of space. Instead of focusing on ethnicity, this dissertation argues that we draw attention to the spatial and territorial aspects of identity and difference, focusing on the multitude of ways that one can belong to urban space.

In 2003, scholars from the Russian and American Academies of Science conducted a series of joint meetings to further the study conflict and reconstruction in multiethnic societies. In his comments for the group about the design of comparative frameworks for the study of conflict, Edward W. Walker noted many of the difficulties in defining “ethnic conflict” and suggested that “identity conflict” might be a better starting point:

Not only does this make the problem of defining *ethnicity* or *ethnic* less important, but it also opens up some very important questions that would be missed if the topic were ethnic conflict, however defined. (Walker 2003, p. 93)

I propose that we ignore ethnicity, recognizing that doing so is both an impossible task, and a necessary one. I was forced to do so out of concerns about state surveillance (Chapter 2), but the unusual strategy of ignoring an essential and difficult topic relieved me of the burden of having to consider it all the time, and it opened up new avenues for talking about urban development and my participant’s lives and futures. Ignoring ethnicity in Osh is ludicrous, but it might just be the strategy that allows us to imagine an alternative future.

A conceptual shift away from ethnic identity as the dominant lens of inquiry brings historical processes of colonialism, developmentalism, modernization, migration, and the relationship between urban and rural space explicitly into the picture. One simply cannot ignore the rural or the countryside in understanding urban space in Osh. This is where Lefebvre has been helpful in opening up new avenues of inquiry. It is hard not to see the parallels to the Soviet modernization project in Central Asia: nomadic and rural forms of life disappeared as agriculture and animal husbandry were collectivized and industrialized. Ethnicity was simultaneously produced and defined in a way that town and country were set against one another, and so antagonisms between town and country took the form of conflict between ethnic groups over access to land and housing in the city. Across Central Asia, urban industrialization created an antagonism between town and country populations. In Osh, this antagonism worked alongside the production of social difference promoted by Soviet policies that favored titular majorities (e.g. Kyrgyz in the Kyrgyz SSR). Urban industrialization in Osh required the industrialization of agriculture as well, and the settlement of nomadic and rural populations, who became consumers of new “commodities” such as electricity, tractors, healthcare, education, and so on (Merrifield 2006). The transformation of the countryside even had large-scale environmental consequences, as Lefebvre predicted: while the disappearance of the Aral Sea is a direct result of the expansion of industrial agriculture across the Fergana Valley.

For Goonewardena, urban theory must account for *both*, “the role of urbanization in the uneven development of capitalism *and* in emancipatory political possibilities” (Goonewardena 2014). Lefebvre’s concept of urban revolution is the answer for Goonewardena. In *The Urban Revolution* (Lefebvre 2003), Lefebvre argues that the entire planet is in the embrace of urban society—a proposal that has generated an explosive debate about planetary urbanization,

totalizing social theory and the decolonizing of urban research (see Derickson 2015; Peake 2016b, 2016a; Roy 2016; Brenner 2018; Ruddick et al. 2018). The challenge, Goonewardena believes, is to keep clear of totalizing metanarratives while maintaining a focus on the concrete mediations of identity and difference in urban space. This does not mean that we must abandon Marx, but it does require a finessing of our Marxism.

David Harvey's Marxist geographical and urban work is widely credited with popularizing Lefebvre within geography, especially through *Social Justice and the City* (1973), as well as the more widely known *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), which is replete with Lefebvre's language of "the urban fabric" and questions of urban "style." Both works draw on a reading of Lefebvre in the original French before its English translation (Lefebvre 1991). The former seizes upon Lefebvre's observation that real estate investment in and around cities is a secondary outlet for the surplus accumulation of capital. Harvey expands on this point in *The Limits to Capital* (1982) to develop his notion of the spatial fix. But critics note that this reading is selective, privileging just one part of what Lefebvre saw as a three-dimensional and dialectical process of producing urban space that involved not just material (perceived) space, but also ideological-institutional (conceived) and lived-symbolic (experienced) space. Harvey treats the third part of this triad, everyday life, as a "repository of larger processes, rather than as a semi-autonomous and contradictory level of totality" (Kipfer et al. 2008, p. 8), and therefore has a hard time dealing with people's lived experiences. This cherry picking of Lefebvre's theory is also evident in chapter 4 of *Condition of Postmodernity*, "Postmodernism and the City." Here, there is no view of space as lived or of acquiring meaning from everyday use and daily life. Instead, Harvey sees an uncanny resemblance between postmodern literary visions of the city and the actual systems that produce urban architecture and planning. The fantasy worlds and

“illusory highs” built by postmodern architects and planners conceal the alienation of modern urban life, of which slums are the paragon. According to Harvey, we should not be so naïve as to believe that the meaning behind this spectacle of the postmodern urban lies in the eye of the beholder (Harvey 1990, pp. 96-97). But this view of postmodern architecture leaves little room for people to re-appropriate urban spaces vis-à-vis the power of architects, planners and capital.

This one-sided understanding of space as produced by the macro forces of capitalism also carries into Harvey’s reading of Raymond Williams (Harvey 1995). Harvey grapples with the relationship between political action and scale by discussing a struggle among unionized factory workers to preserve their jobs at an aging Rover car factory in Oxford. For Harvey, their struggle reveals a tension between resistance to and complicity in global capitalism as the workers petition to save their industry jobs, which are threatened by outsourcing and the globalized economy more broadly. Harvey views their class struggle as being manipulated by “dilemmas of scale” that are wrought by capitalism as a social system, and concludes that the workers’ efforts would be more productive if they engaged in a global politics against capitalism across localities and scales. Harvey argues that the key question is about how local politics can translate to large scales: “social life operates in and constructs some sort of nested hierarchical space rather than a mosaic. How do we critically conceive of these variously nested scales, how do we arbitrate and translate between them?” (Harvey 1995 p. 93, citing Neil Smith). Harvey is blindsided by his narrow focus on the production of space through capital flows only, a static interpretation of Lefebvre’s triadic and dialectic lived-perceived-conceived view of spatial production.

An important critique of Harvey’s work by Doreen Massey (1991) argues for a relational and interconnected view of space, and in so doing unintentionally identifies where Harvey goes wrong in narrowly interpreting the production of space. Massey argues for a progressive sense of

place, rather than a reactionary sense of “us” and “them” that Harvey’s story of the Rover factory workers elicits. Contra Harvey, Massey emphasizes that places are the sum of their connections to the world. A hierarchical or nested view of place/space, on the other hand, implies that places should be understood as bounded and isolated from other scales. Massey further critiques Harvey’s notion of time-space compression as ethnocentric, developing the notion of “power geometries” to explain how space and place are experienced differently by different races, genders, etc. Thus, the power geometry of time-space compression refers to the fact that different social groups are positioned in vastly different ways in relation to the flows and interconnections of capitalism, and that different social groups have different relationships of power to these flows and connections – some groups are in charge or initiate flows, while others are on the receiving end, “effectively imprisoned” by them. This critique leads to a wholly different definition of places, as “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations/experiences/understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself” (D. Massey 1991). The residents of Osh are intimately connected to events and processes connected to capitalism that are happening (and have happened) both near and far. This is not a view of urban space or neighborhood as a locality that exists in opposition to the larger world happening ‘out there,’ it is a view of place as process.

Future directions

This dissertation has perhaps raised more questions than it has answered. One of the most significant gaps is that there are no voices from the neighborhood of KhBK. This is due, in part, to the focus on stories that arose from the participant-led tours. As I suggested in the methods

section of Chapter 1, participant-led tours are biased towards residents who have grown up in the city or who feel they have something to show. Future research could bring residents of KhBK into the picture by altering the recruitment method and strategy. Further research would also extend the inquiry beyond the boundaries of the city itself. While I traveled to Bishkek frequently and include interviews with a small number of people outside of Osh, further research should focus on the way that Osh is understood from the perspective of the countryside that is now the source for so many of the city's newest migrants.

The dissertation also indirectly draws attention to a number of existing gaps in our understanding of the history of Central Asia. In particular, future research should focus on better understanding the transformation of land and property tenure during the post-Soviet period, including the role that major western financial organizations such as the World Bank and IMF have played in establishing property registration systems. Furthermore, quite little is known of the two political movements, Adolat and Osh Aimagi, that played a role in the protests in 1990.

AFTERWORD

This dissertation has skirted around a significant topic that deserves at least some attention: corruption. In 2018, Kyrgyzstan ranked 135th on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, its overall score rising only incrementally since 2012, from 24 to 29. I witnessed the impact of corruption on the lives of my friends and contacts nearly every day. One friend who received a prestigious and highly competitive scholarship from a western country to study abroad was forced to bribe her university professors and administrators to allow the credit to transfer: they believed that her scholarship would give her a generous stipend. Another pair of friends were arrested because police believed that their relatives, who were involved in organized crime, were wealthy and would pay the bribe needed to get my friends out of their jail sentence. Yet another friend's brother, a master of interior renovations, was jailed when he refused to work for a wealthy businessman. The stories of everyday corruption are simultaneously heartbreaking and mundane.

In southern Kyrgyzstan, corruption also has an ethnic dimension to it. In his analysis of the 2010 violence in Osh, Megoran (2017) suggests that corruption intersects with the ethnicization of the police and those who hold administrative power. I saw this in action in Osh, too. My favorite lunch spot was a small outdoor café run out of an Uzbek family's private home. It was also one of the preferred cafes of the staff in the mayor's office. About once a month, a

group of city employees would come by the café for lunch. order the most expensive dishes on the menu, and leave without paying. The owners were powerless to prevent it. Such corruption intersects with ethnicity because the majority of restaurants in the city are run by Uzbeks, who have been excluded from other professions and tend to work in the service sector.

Corruption at the highest levels of government is also implicated in the violence of 2010. Politicians siphon off state funds while simultaneously driving the country's debt-to-GDP ratio higher and higher. Kyrgyzstan is one of the world's poorest countries, and development is increasingly uneven. International lending institutions play a role in perpetuating this spiraling debt, but so do the geopolitical interests of western countries. President Bakiyev's son held the exclusive rights to supply the Manas airbase with fuel. The Manas airbase leased to the United States and it was an essential link for the US war on terror that was being waged in Afghanistan. Bakiev was ultimately overthrown in 2010 because of political corruption, paving the way for the power vacuum in which the violence of 2010 in Osh took place.

In *Dictators Without Borders*, the authors demonstrate repeatedly how corrupt politicians and the elite of Central Asia take advantage of lax global financial regulations to strip their countries of national income and tax revenue, regulations and loopholes that western countries could do much more to close (Heathershaw and Cooley 2017). Corruption is a kind of violence that is both insipid and spectacular. It depends on the abilities of national elite to stash the looted wealth of everyday Kyrgyz citizens in by investing in property abroad, and it is a violence in which the west is complicit. If the west is serious about preventing ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley, tackling the global system that allows corruption to flourish would be much more effective than most peace-building projects.

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APPENDIX

Guidelines: Participant-led tours of Osh city

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 Dissertation topic: Processes of urban development in Osh, Kyrgyzstan

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BACKGROUND

I study the relationship between people and urban environments. I am interested in the modern development of Osh, from the 1970s and 1980s until the current period, from the point of view of local residents. I am not an historian: I want to understand the development of Osh city from the “everyday,” mundane point of view. What do residents themselves think about their city, how is the city changing and how are resident’s opinions of it changing? What is the city’s future? What parts of the city do they use or not? How do they travel through the city? Specifically, I am interested in how these questions vary between different socio-economic groups: youth and elderly, men and women, newcomers vs. long-time residents, and different ethno-linguistic groups.

What is a city?

A city is the interaction between its infrastructure and its people. The inanimate streets, cafes, parks, houses, apartment blocks, canals, government buildings, etc., come to life through the movements, habits and perceptions of its residents.

Why have you been asked to participate?

It does not matter if you have lived in Osh your entire life or only for a few months. I would like to understand how different people, with different life experiences, view and think about the city.

What is a “participant-led tour”?

A participant-led tour is an experimental research method, which I will use alongside other more traditional research methods (interviews, archival research, surveys), in order to understand the modern development of Osh.

As a geographer, I want my research methods to reflect the research topic itself. Therefore, it makes sense to talk about the subject of my research (Osh city) by being in it and moving through it together. This will help me understand what you say about the city during our interview on a deeper and more concrete level. In this way, the research participant (you)

has more control over the research material, rather than putting control fully into the hands of the researcher (me). Finally, I also hope that a walking interview will remind you of details you might have forgotten to tell me if we were just sitting in a café, drinking tea and talking about the city that lays “somewhere out there.”

INSTRUCTIONS

Please show me your city or the neighborhood where you live, explaining what we see. With your permission (see the consent form), I will use my phone to record our conversation and to take photos. I will ask you questions about the city and the history of your family. The interview will not be too formal, and it should last 1-2 hours.

There are two options for organizing our tour together:

1. You are the tour guide and you decide yourself where we meet and where we go. Show me what you think is interesting or important about this city.
2. I can propose a meeting point, perhaps in your neighborhood. We can decide where to go together, modifying our route as we go along.

We can walk, drive, take a taxi or bus, or a combination of all of these methods of transport. During our tour, we can spend up to 300 som for transportation costs.

Some suggestions and ideas:

- Don't limit your tour to only the most beautiful or well-known parts of the city. Don't be afraid to show me the “real” Osh – not the tourist version.
- Keeping in mind definition of a city (a city is the interaction of infrastructure and people), think not just about *what* might be interesting to show me, but also *who* (and where they are located).
- Think about the city's past, present and future. Where could we go if you wanted to show me a slice of the past, or piece of the future?
- We can go somewhere you have never been. This might be interesting for both of us.
- Be creative and have fun!