Internationales Asienforum, Vol. 45 (2014), No. 1–2, pp. 49–68

Mobility as a Coping Strategy for Osh Uzbeks in the Aftermath of Conflict

AKSANA ISMAILBEKOVA*

Abstract
The aim of this paper is to look at the coping strategies of Osh Uzbek migrants in the aftermath of conflict, and to pursue a set of related questions: Why did Osh Uzbek refugees choose Russia, but not Uzbekistan? What are the experiences of Osh Uzbeks in Russia? How do they perceive their homeland in the aftermath of conflict? I discuss the situation in the aftermath of the Osh conflict of 2010, in which the Kyrgyz government consciously created uncertainty for Uzbeks (a minority ethnic group), thereby forcing them to leave for Russia as 'post-conflict' migrants. I compare and contrast these post-conflict migrants' experiences with voluntary migrants' experiences in order to reveal distinct characteristics of the respective strategies. I conclude by stating that the Osh Uzbeks who have fled to Russia contribute to the creation of an Uzbek diaspora in Russia, e.g. by applying for Russian citizenship, establishing and expanding social networks, and imagining their future in their homeland.

Keywords
Osh Uzbeks, conflict, migration, coping strategy, mobility

Introduction

During my research in the city of Osh in 2011, I often met ethnic Uzbeks who wished to leave the city for Russia, but not for Uzbekistan. The violent conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 had led to chaos and to a weakening of law and order, and many people tried to leave Osh by any

* AKSANA ISMAILBEKOVA, Research Fellow at Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), Berlin; aksana_ismailbekova@yahoo.co.uk. This ethnographic research was conducted in the framework of the Crossroads Asia competence network in the summer of 2011 and in 2012 for one month in Kyrgyzstan and one month in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The author is grateful to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for funding this research.

means possible. I heard stories of how prices of airplane tickets to every Russian city multiplied and how flights were booked out several weeks in advance. Some people hired a mini-bus to the capital Bishkek, from where they hoped to find some or other means of transportation to Russia. Those who owned cars drove several days to reach their destination, and many Osh Uzbeks sold their real estate (houses, apartments and land) and cars for a minimal price in order to leave as quickly as possible.

The aim of this paper is to look at the coping strategies of Osh Uzbek migrants[1] in the aftermath of conflict and to pursue a set of related questions: Why did Osh Uzbeks choose Russia, but not Uzbekistan? What are the experiences of Osh Uzbeks in Russia? How do they perceive their homeland in the aftermath of conflict?

In this article, I shall first give an account of the ethno-historical context of the ethnic groups in the Fergana Valley. Then I shall discuss the situation in the aftermath of the Osh conflict of 2011, in which the Kyrgyz government consciously created uncertainty for the Uzbek minority ethnic group, thereby forcing them to leave for Russia. I will discuss this flight in depth below. It justifies referring to them as post-conflict migrants. I use this term as an emic concept because people talk about fleeing or being refugees, even though they live in Russia without official refugee status. I compare and contrast experiences of these post-conflict migrants with those of voluntary migrants in order to reveal distinct characteristics of the respective strategies. I conclude by showing that the Osh Uzbeks who have fled to Russia contribute to the creation of an Uzbek diaspora in Russia by applying for Russian citizenship, establishing and expanding social networks and imagining their future in their homeland.

Ethno-historical background

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have a long history of peaceful coexistence in the Fergana Valley and more particularly in Osh, despite their differences in culture and mode of life.[2] Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan, lies in the Fergana Valley in the south of Kyrgyzstan, close to the border of Uz-

---

1 During my research in Osh, many Uzbek informants told me that the majority of Uzbeks went to Russia because their relatives and friends used to live in Yekaterinburg. However, there are other cities in Russia to which Osh Uzbeks moved after the conflict. My fieldwork in Russia focused on Osh Uzbek migrants in Yekaterinburg.

2 The largest ethnic group in Kyrgyzstan are the Kyrgyz, who comprise 72% of the population; the largest minority are the Uzbeks, who comprise 14 % of the population (National Census 2009).

bekistan. Throughout history, the Fergana Valley has been populated by both Turkic- and Farsi-speaking nations. Their long history of coexistence is rooted in their different ecological adaptations: the nomads (Kyrgyz) used to reside in the mountains, and the settled population (Uzbeks) used to live in towns and practised irrigation agriculture. Before the Soviet era, being a native of, e.g., Bokhara, Osh, or Jalal-Abad was more important than being Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Uyghur, or Tajik. Until then, Russian and Persian were the languages of international communication, whereas the ethnic identification was a cultural, but not a political phenomenon. Ethnic identity could also be considered an indication of membership of a certain economic segment – for centuries the Uzbeks were famous as traders and craftspeople in southern Kyrgyzstan, while the Kyrgyz were nomadic herders in the mountains (Liu 2012: 26; Starr et al. 2011). Such divisions were not an obstacle to inter-ethnic marriage and cohabitation (Liu 2012; Reeves 2005; Roberts 2010).

In the early 1920s, the Soviet regime and its ethnographers started to create nations in Central Asia, as tribal and settled groups were perceived as lacking in national consciousness. Central Asian societies were viewed by the Soviets through the prism of feudalism, and clans and tribes were seen as remnants from feudal times. In consequence, the integration of clans and tribes into nationalities was seen as a necessary step on the path toward socialism (Hirsch 2005: 8). Thus, Central Asia's ethnic and national identities were at least partly created by Soviet rule. During Stalin's regime, ethnicity served as a guiding principle, and as a result, the Fergana Valley was parcelled out among the three national republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Abashin et al. 2011; Tishkov 1997).

However, all these countries had ethnically mixed populations in many areas, and the boundaries of ethnicity itself were blurred to such an extent that it was impossible to determine precisely the very names of Soviet nationalities, let alone their territorial boundaries (Tishkov 1997: 30–31). Despite the successful formation of new socialist nations, in the early years of the Soviet Union, many Soviet citizens expressed very vague feelings of ethno-national affiliation, meaning that they lacked loyalty to and identify-cation with these newly created entities (Tishkov 1997: 20).

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the by now independent states of Central Asia started to cultivate an ethnographic primordialism in the quest for new identities and established a new nationalist political discourse (Tishkov 1997: 7). Soviet definitions of ethnicity involving fixed and rigid sets of characteristics are now taken as givens and widely asserted (Liu 2011: 12), which exacerbates ethnic conflicts. Tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz began to rise as early as the late Soviet period. Competition over land and for political and economic influence eventually led to ethnic

violence and riots in Osh and Uzgen in 1990 (Liu 2012: 22; Tishkov 1995). Liu (2012) provides a detailed analysis of the structural inequalities of the socialist era that led to the violence in 1990. He emphasizes that Uzbeks were generally better educated and overrepresented in the state administration in Osh. These inequalities have persisted in new forms in the last two decades, with Uzbeks also doing better than Kyrgyz in cross-border trade. This might explain the nationalist reaction of the ethnic Kyrgyz.

The Osh riots of 2010

The Osh riots of summer 2010 in southern Kyrgyzstan were the worst in years, second only to the violent conflict that erupted in 1990. The conflict involved two ethnic groups, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. It started as a mob protest on 10 June 2010 in Osh and developed by stages into something more serious, spreading to the neighbouring towns such as Jalal-Abad and Uzgen. From 11 to 14 June more than 470 people were killed and thousands injured. Hundreds of private homes were burned down and properties looted. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (KIC)[3], nearly 75% of the dead were Uzbek, and a "disproportionately high number" of Uzbek-owned properties were destroyed (KIC 2011: ii). The riot erupted two months after President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was ousted in a popular revolt, creating what the report called a "power vacuum" (KIC 2011: ii). Political rivalries and fragile state institutions contributed to a militant "ethno-nationalism" (KIC 2011: ii).

According to the KIC inquiry, those responsible for the violence included leaders of the provisional government, separatists (a number of Uzbek leaders), those fighting for power (i.e., the Bakiyev family) and criminals (KIC 2011). After the independent international inquiry confirmed that Kyrgyz killed Uzbeks (though it clearly stated that Uzbeks killed Kyrgyz as well), on 26 May 2011 the Kyrgyz parliament banned the report's author, the Finnish politician Kimmo Kiljunen, from entering Kyrgyzstan (Camm 2011).

There has been a major change in the lives of those who became refugees. During and after this conflict, thousands of ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz tried to escape from southern Kyrgyzstan. The KIC stated that many

---

[3] The Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan was established after the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Roza Otunbayeva, asked Dr Kimmo Kiljunen, Special Representative for Central Asia, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, to coordinate this investigation (KIC 2011).

thousands of people were displaced, and there was large-scale damage to property, most of which was Uzbek-owned. About 111,000 people were temporarily displaced to Uzbekistan and a further 300,000 were displaced within Kyrgyzstan. After the conflict, many Uzbeks returned to Kyrgyzstan. Large numbers of local people had to rely partially on their own strategies for survival, such as migration.

Theoretical framework

The movement of people as a result of conflict, ethnic mobilisation policies or unemployment has been a key social phenomenon in Central Asia since 1991. There are different patterns of mobility, such as Tajik refugees to northern Afghanistan (Marsden 2010), labour migration (Reeves 2009, 2011, 2012; Ruget / Usmanalieva 2006; Werner 2004), policies to repatriate ethnic Russians and other Slavs to their historical homeland (Piadukhov 1996), Germans moving to their historical homeland (Sanders 2010) and the return of Crimean Tatars to their peninsula, Meskhetian Turks to Georgia (Uehling 2007) and Mongolian Kazaks to Kazakhstan (Werner / Barcus 2009). Schmidt and Sagynbekova (2008) point out that the recent labour migration is not exceptional because the movement of people, goods and ideas has always been part of Central Asia's history.

Migration has led to a shifting perception of self and others, of here and there. Moreover, it has resulted in complex adaptation and interaction processes. Due to the various ways in which people adapted to their environment, different generations, and those who have stayed, have different perceptions and experiences regarding migration and its consequences (Hegland 2010; Isabaeva 2011; Reeves 2011; Thieme 2008). Multi-local livelihoods emerge when part of a family migrates in search of better job opportunities and family members live in different places and different political and socio-economic contexts (Thieme 2008: 326–327). Reeves (2012) argues that in the context of such population shifts or movements migrants sustain social networks through various kinds of lifecycle events. Reeves (2012) points out that the main incentive behind this movement is not necessarily economic; it can also be the wish to improve family status or to comply with the obligation to get married. Isabaeva (2011) demonstrates that remittances guarantee acceptance by the community.

Even though the Uzbeks, like other ethnic groups in Central Asia, have practised migration for generations as a way to generate income and sent remittances to their families, another form of mobility and migration has been imposed upon them as a result of conflict. Following Monsutti's (2010)

argument for mobility as a planned strategy, I call this a coping strategy in the aftermath of conflict. In the case of the Hazaras in Afghanistan, Monsutti argues that "the dispersal of family groups can be the result of a strategy aimed at diversifying resources and minimizing risks: it does not always lead to a weakening of social ties" (Monsutti 2010: 46). Furthermore, the most important aspect of these people is their "links of solidarity and mutual assistance which cross international borders" (Monsutti 2010: 47). The case of the Uzbeks is similar: through moving, they diversify resources and minimise risks in the aftermath of conflict. However, in contrast to the Hazaras, the Uzbeks throughout history have lived mainly in sedentary communities. Yet new forms of mobility have been imposed on them as a result of conflict: because state authorities are unable to protect them, for their own security and survival Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks have been forced to flee their homes and cities such as Osh and Jalal-Abad.

A comparison with other conflict situations in the post-Soviet sphere is instructive. For example, hundreds of thousands of Chechen refugees fled to Russia and abroad during the Chechen Wars of 1994, 1996 and 1999[4]. Civil conflict and war in former Yugoslavia forced hundreds of thousands to leave their homes (Finlan 2004). Georgia experienced severe political and economic crises in the early 1990s, including military conflicts in South Ossetia (1991–1992) and Abkhazia (1992–1993). As a result of these conflicts, more than 250,000 people were forcefully displaced, mostly from Abkhazia (Kharashvili 2001). In this context, the flight of Osh Uzbeks seems to be typical.

Naturally enough, the existing diaspora of Uzbeks in Russia greatly facilitated the post-conflict movement of Uzbeks to Russia. The term diaspora is appropriate for this network. Tölöliyan (1991: 4) argues that the concept diaspora "now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community". The concept is thus very broad and needs further clarification.

Safran (1991: 83–84) defines diasporas as follows: 1) dispersal from centre to periphery; a history of dispersal (past or present); 2) the retention of a collective memory, a vision of and/or myth of homeland; 3) a belief that the hosting country will not fully accept newcomers; exclusion and alienation; 4) true ethnic and ancestral identity; eventual return to homeland; 5) the commitment and restoration of the homeland; 6) a personal relationship with the homeland as the basis for a collective identity "abroad". In the

---

4 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2012).

following, I will illustrate the appropriateness of these characteristics for the Uzbek diaspora in Russia.

Shuval (2000: 43) argues that "diaspora is a social construct founded on feeling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longings, dreams, allegorical and virtual elements, all of which play a role in establishing a diaspora reality". According to Shuval, it is important that the sense of connection to a motherland must be strong enough to resist forgetting or assimilating. The Osh Uzbeks found themselves excluded and discriminated in Kyrgyzstan; therefore, the Uzbek diaspora culture helps to maintain a sense of community and belonging. In this regard, the notion of 'dispersal of diaspora' posited by Shuval is crucial for an understanding of the migratory expectations, motivations, dreams, memories, hopes and narratives of Osh Uzbeks, which give them a sense of attachment elsewhere. Here, it is important to mention that there is a history of Uzbeks settling in Russia. During the Soviet period, many Uzbeks from Central Asian countries would settle in Russia for education, administrative jobs, military service, scientific careers and marriage. However, the mass movement of Uzbeks from Central Asia started after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Sökefeld (2006: 280) noted that "[t]he development of diaspora identity is not simply a natural and inevitable result of migration but a historical contingency that frequently develops out of mobilization in response to specific critical events". The positions of Uzbek diaspora members towards an imagined "Kyrgyzstan homeland" and their engagement with it may also change over time. I am interested in how Uzbek migrants visualize and balance their home society and their host society, and how conflict contributed to the strengthening of their diaspora reality in Russia.

I look at mobility as a post-conflict coping strategy in the light of social networks and security strategies developed by the Osh Uzbeks. One advantage of post-conflict migrants in this case is that they are able to rely on kinship, friendship, and ethnic networks in Russia in finding accommodation and temporary jobs. Osh Uzbeks develop and maintain multiple social networks with their own diaspora in Russia. Furthermore, the members of the Uzbek diaspora are located in a transnational social space, which is defined as "the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. […] [M]any immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 7).

Post-conflict migrants versus voluntary migrants

Here it is important to highlight the experiences of post-conflict migrants and their agencies in comparison to the seasonal labour migrants who went to Russia before 2010. Some of the motivations of labour migrants for leaving Central Asia are the lack of economic opportunities at home, the inability to find reasonably paid work, difficulties in sustaining agricultural livelihoods in the face of steep export tariffs, and insufficient income for funding life-cycle ceremonies. Some of the migrants have many dependants in their family and thus face multiple demands. For instance, they need to marry off a daughter, pay for their children's education or build (or extend) a house. There is hardly any way to earn the required sums without leaving home (Reeves 2012). Migrants wish to invest in their home countries, and they are closely attached to their place of birth, although they live outside of their country of birth. During my research in Yekaterinburg in summer 2012, the majority of the Kyrgyz migrants I spoke to did not intend to stay in Russia for a long period or permanently. Prior to 2010, Osh Uzbek migrants were mainly men who travelled to Russia as traders or were working in the construction sector or on farms.

However, the motivations of post-conflict Uzbek migrants are different. Migrants' profiles have changed drastically since the conflict in 2010. After the conflict, the ethno-nationalistic politics escalated and contributed massively to the outmigration of Osh Uzbeks. The Kyrgyz government used economic and political pressure to marginalise minority groups. The minorities suffered the seizure of properties, job losses and verbal and physical abuse (Ismailbekova 2013). In addition, negative propaganda – mainly reports of the country's harsh economic and political situation – discouraged people from moving to neighbouring Uzbekistan. Moreover, Osh Uzbeks felt they would not be treated well in Uzbekistan.

Consequently, because they were not welcome there and did not receive government support, Uzbeks did not move to Uzbekistan.[5] Thus, conflict-affected families and households were forced to find alternative ways to deal with this uncertainty and insecurity and to adopt new and risky coping strategies, which ultimately reinforced their vulnerability. Because the absence of justice created a strong feeling of alienation, many Osh Uzbeks changed their attitudes towards their 'motherland'.

---

[5] Osh Uzbeks did not move to Uzbekistan primarily because the government did not welcome them on account of their open, critical attitudes towards the state. Uzbekistan's government restricted the mobility of Osh Uzbeks, allowing them to stay in Uzbekistan only for a very limited time and making sure that they left right as soon as the conflict was over.

One can now observe how entire families move to Russia. Migrants leaving Kyrgyzstan include not only skilled and unskilled labour migrants as before, but also business people and highly skilled professionals (medical doctors, teachers and engineers) who previously never thought of leaving the country (Abdurasulov 2012). According to Ikbol Mirsaitov, a political scientist and member of the Southern Division of the Kyrgyz Presidential International Institute of Strategic Studies:

> Official statistics indicate that over 37,000 people left the Osh area in the first three months after the Osh clashes. More than half of those who left were Uzbeks, with most of them leaving Kyrgyzstan for places like Russia. Kyrgyz, too, were moving out, but often to the north of the country, where the capital Bishkek is located (Interview with Ikbol Mirsaitov, cited in Yusupova / Ahmedjanov 2012: 1).

However, this post-conflict migration has been ignored in the public discourse because it blends so well into different kinds of conventional mobilities, such as the labour or voluntary migration prior to 2010. Factors influencing migration decisions among Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek minority, namely political and economic motivations, are often hard to distinguish, as post-conflict movement in search of political security morphs easily into broader waves of work-related migration to Russia. As Monsutti (2010: 47) argues, "refugees are not victims of a fate beyond their control, rather they are actors who attempt to respond to difficult conditions by relying on the social and cultural resources which remain under their control." Thus Osh Uzbeks are adapting to the changing context. As 'post-conflict' migrants, they are integrating easily into the flow of mass migration and the Uzbek diaspora in Russia. To do this, they rely on their existing social networks:

> Many Uzbeks lost their houses in Osh because their houses were either burnt or completely destroyed during the violence. We were forced to leave our motherland and move to Russia. We brought our children to Russia. Uzbeks left not only for Russia but also for America, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia. What is a pity is that a large part of the young, smart generation of Uzbeks left Osh. Those who stay behind are old and poor people, but those with potential, such as scholars, politicians, young people and cooks, had to leave in search of a better and more secure life. Some of the Osh Uzbeks are now investing their money in Uzbekistan by buying houses or apartments there. These people usually have relatives in Uzbekistan. (Nodira, Uzbek from Osh, 50 years old)

Post-conflict migrants like Nodira usually live together as a family in Russia and save money collectively to build a house either in Russia or in Uzbeki-

stan.[6] In their current predicament they do not send money home to Kyrgyzstan, but prefer to save it and buy assets elsewhere. Migrating Osh Uzbeks struggle to handle the multiple roles and expectations of being foreigners, supporting their families in Russia and, often enough, family members left behind.

Whether post-conflict or voluntary migrants, they all maintain contact with relatives in Osh. Communication has improved a lot in the last few years, and many migrants can call home through low-cost cell phone networks. In addition, migrant workers can transfer money onto the telephone account of any relative in Kyrgyzstan from telephone boxes in Yekaterinburg. Apart from telephone communication, transportation is also relatively cheap and flexible. Many migrants now find it easy to send goods from Kyrgyzstan to Russia via the Cargo Company, which specialises in transporting goods, generally for commercial gain, by train, van or truck. Nowadays, containers are used in most long-haul transport.

Migrant workers usually live in very difficult conditions.[7] To spend less on housing, they attempt to reach an agreement with their employer to secure some form of free housing, or they rent a bed in a room which they share with several other migrants. This accommodation usually has no facilities and not everyone is able to wash. Those who have Russian citizenship find it easier to deal with the police, find a job and apply for university.

Life in the Kyrgyzstani 'motherland' or in a Russian 'step-motherland'?

Osh Uzbek migrants in Russia inevitably reflect on the relationship between their birthplace and their adoptive home – their motherland and step-motherland.[8] They also compare and contrast the different state models and welfare policies adopted by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Russia, and try to find the best alternative for their existence. As mentioned above, their homeland no longer feels like home, as it provides neither support nor

---

[6] Some Osh Uzbeks, in particular those who have good networks (friends, relatives) in Uzbekistan, would prefer to build a house in Uzbekistan rather than Kyrgyzstan.

[7] The Russian police regularly target ethnic minorities, including migrant workers without Russian citizenship, for petty extortion during spot checks on the street. Sometimes, during these inspections, policemen beat or humiliate them (A-News 2013).

[8] Here I use emic terms 'motherland' and 'step-motherland'.

protection. This leaves most Osh Uzbeks feeling that they have little choice but to stay on in Russia and try their luck in that country.

So the question remains: why do Osh Uzbeks choose Russia rather than other destinations, such as Uzbekistan? Many Uzbeks told me that in Uzbekistan Osh Uzbeks are not welcome because of the migrants' open and critical attitudes towards the state. Their decision to move to Russia, mostly to Yekaterinburg, is based partly on the migratory history of Osh Uzbeks, the growing Uzbek diaspora in Russia and historical ties. Many migrants are attracted to Russia because of its extensive labour market, its stable political environment and prosperous economy (Schmidt / Sagynbekova 2008). In addition, they share similar historical memories ('Soviet brotherhood') and the same mentality with Russians. Concerning documents, only an internal Kyrgyz ID card – not even an international passport – is required to enter Russia. They thus move to a country where there are close family members and cultural ties and common systems of transport and communication, Russian as a common language of communication and a similar education system. Russia welcomes the refugees and migrants from Osh because migrants are a crucial source of labour in Russia.

The majority of Osh Uzbeks who arrived in Russia after 2010 sought to apply for Russian citizenship as the first step after their arrival. Entire families, not just male members, tried to change their citizenship.[9] However, the purpose of getting Russian citizenship has also changed. Whereas prior to 2010 those Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks who applied for it did so with the intention of improving their employment prospects, now it is primarily a means of seeking protection. For them, a Russian passport means that they are no longer subject to Kyrgyzstani law, which in their opinion protects only the Kyrgyz.

Migrants with Russian citizenship naturally have better positions in Russia than those lacking Russian citizenship. For example, at the Central Asian market in Yekaterinburg a group of Uzbeks with the Russian citizenships had their own niche within the market, where they sold linen towels and blankets. Some of those with Russian citizenship had opened cafes and restaurants, where they served Central Asian food to market workers from the region. In contrast, many young Uzbeks without Russian citizenship ended up working in low-paid jobs on construction sites or in agriculture. My informant Muhtar, a 53-year-old Uzbek from Osh with Russian citizenship, told me:

[9] I.e., give up Kyrgyz citizenship for Russian citizenship. At the moment, it is very difficult to estimate the number of people who have left since 2010, because people do not report their departure from Kyrgyzstan and some of the migrants do not register in Russia.

> After the conflict we started thinking about staying in Russia forever. Many Uzbeks worked and lived in Russia, only because they wanted to build houses in Osh, but now there is nothing left in Kyrgyzstan. Many people had to change their plans because of the conflict. We have been working in Yekaterinburg almost for the last ten years, and after the conflict we brought all our family members to Russia. Here we can apply for a piece of land in order to build houses. Now our children attend Russian schools and they are happy here. However, we do have relatives in Osh and they report us that the situation is still very bad.

I talked to another woman in Yekaterinburg, Farida, who came from Uzgen, a neighbouring town of Osh, which was not affected by the unrest in 2010. Her intentions and future plans were completely different to those of Muhtar, who was from Osh. Farida had not applied for Russian citizenship:

> I have three kids in Uzgen and they all go to school there. They live with my mother-in-law and father-in-law in the village. I work here with my husband. We bring goods from Kyrgyzstan and sell them here in Russia. We are here only for our kids and for their future. In Kyrgyzstan I used to work as a school teacher, but the salary was very small, not enough for our families to survive. So I decided to travel to Russia. This year I plan to return to Uzgen and marry off my son. We usually send money to Uzgen so that our children have enough food, clothes and necessary things for school. (Farida, Uzbek from Uzgen, 45 years old)

Farida plans to go back to Uzgen, in contrast to Muhtar, whose intention is to stay in Russia. Their contradictory strategies illustrate two different conflict dynamics in two locations, Osh and Uzgen, and in two different times.[10] However, thousands of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are applying for Russian citizenship, irrespective of whether there is conflict in their home region or not. Thus, people who were immediately affected by conflict have been applying for citizenship alongside other migrants who were not affected.

It is noteworthy that during the 2010 unrest Uzgen residents were able to prevent the emergence of inter-communal fighting by involving the elders of the community. To promote peace and harmony in the town, Kyrgyz elders slaughtered sheep and Uzbek elders prepared a traditional dish, *ash*, and together they urged their respective youth not to succumb to provocation.[11]

---

[10] In 1990, Uzgen town witnessed the first bout of violence when Uzbeks and Kyrgyz rioted over land issues and political and economic influence (Liu 2012: 22; Tishkov 1995).

[11] The author interviewed elders from the Uzgen community in August 2011.

Diverse experiences of 'post-conflict' migrants

As mentioned above, Osh Uzbeks who fled to Russia to escape the violence have merged into a large population of Central Asian labour migrants. Overall, the lives and experiences of post-conflict migrants are diverse. After the conflict, many Osh Uzbeks were invited by close relatives, friends or neighbours, who had previously worked on construction sites, in markets and other places, with the aim of protecting them from police persecution. New opportunities and alternative gateways into Russia opened up for Osh Uzbeks with connections and established social networks. For some newcomers, finding a job, a place to stay or sorting out registration was not a big issue because of support from established Uzbek kinship networks.

An alternative is for some people to remain at home (i.e. elders, children and women), while one or more family members, usually men, are sent to Russia. Once they have found a stable job they then invite other relatives from Osh. One couple I met in Osh in 2012, Rohim and Dilya, have three sons and a daughter. Two of their sons had already been in Russia for ten years. The youngest son used to live with his parents, as Uzbek custom requires, but after the conflict the police started searching for young men, accusing them of participating in the troubles. Rohim decided that it would be better for his son and his son's wife to join the elder brothers in Russia: for the couple it would be safer there than to stay in Osh and pay bribes to the police. The young couple went to Russia, while their two small children stayed behind in the care of Rohim and Dilya, who receive close to 16,000 som (200 euros) from their sons every month and use the money to buy food, clothes and building materials for the reconstruction of their burnt-out home. Rohim and Dilya told me that they were pensioners and would prefer to stay in Osh, but their three sons would probably stay in Russia forever. Recently, the three brothers invited their younger sister and her husband to join them.

Nevertheless, there are also several cases of young men who went to Russia without support from social networks and found themselves in vulnerable positions when trying to find a job and a place to stay and sort out permits and registration. Young men in this position were victims of intermediaries who promised to find them a decent job with steady pay, but instead trafficked them into forced labour. Typically in such cases, an employment agency or another intermediary delivers workers to employers in Russia, who then confiscate their new workers' passports in order to coerce them into working without wages. Some workers are forced to endure long working hours, while others are confined to the work site, given poor or no food and even beaten. Some employers use violence and threatening be-

haviour to force these men to accept these working conditions. Employers in most cases refuse to provide migrant workers with written employment contracts, contrary to Russian law, and such workers are usually vulnerable to the withholding of wages and other abuses and have limited opportunities to seek assistance from official bodies in cases of exploitation.

There have also been some cases of young Uzbek men who were unable to make a living in Russia and therefore decided to return to Kyrgyzstan, despite all the potential difficulties with the Kyrgyzstani authorities once back in Osh. On their return, these young Osh Uzbeks found jobs on construction sites or rebuilding burnt houses in their neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, many young Uzbeks complained that they were under constant surveillance by the police, who demanded bribes or forced them to speak 'proper' Kyrgyz.

Gendered experiences of migration in Yekaterinburg

Male and female migrants typically have different experiences in Russia. Men usually decide to leave after consulting with their family, or families send their sons or husbands away as a way to protect them from state persecution after the conflict. Usually it is easier for men to migrate, because they can rely on their brothers, co-villagers and other relatives. Women, on the other hand, often make the decision on their own, and the ones who leave alone to find work are usually unmarried, divorced or widowed. Often they are helping their parents to bring up their younger siblings or children. However, women's migration in the aftermath of conflict is a way not only to escape patriarchal domestic arrangements at home, but also to search for a better life, to find security in Russia from potential police persecution and to provide financial support for their own families. The position of women in the aftermath of conflict is twice as hard as that of men. Because of potential rape, many young Uzbek women are forced to marry to avoid family shame (Ismailbekova 2013). Their mobility is constrained not only by their families and husbands, but also by entire communities. Women have to deal with complex personal, family and community constraints (shame and honour). Therefore, they are often more vulnerable than men in terms of relying on extended kinship ties, even in Russia. They face shame, disapproval and rejection from their families both at home as well as in Russia. Despite all these constraints, there are some strong women who have sacrificed their own families in order to live in peace, provide security for themselves and survive the harsh realities of life.

One such example is Maya. After the Osh violence, Maya moved to Yekaterinburg. Because Maya's mother was afraid that she would be "spoilt by men",[12] she forced Maya to marry her cousin. Unfortunately, Maya found her husband very unattractive, and because her mother would never have accepted the fact that she liked neither her husband nor his family, the only way she could escape from the family was to leave for Russia secretly. She decided to fly to Russia from Osh. She took her passport, borrowed 10,000 som (125 euros) from friends and left Osh on a plane for Yekaterinburg. She had also observed how many of her friends had left for Russia, especially after the conflict, and how her father was marooned in Russia as a result of the troubles in his home city. Maya had been unable to escape Osh immediately after the violence because her movements were controlled by her family and the community – in sharp contrast to the situation for men, who were free to flee to Russia without hindrance. In fact, men were often encouraged to go to Russia. In his discussion of gendered out-migration in eastern Uzbekistan, Reeves (2011: 555) also argues that the movement of men can either constrain or enforce the mobility of women. In order to move to Russia in the aftermath of conflict, Maya had to divorce her husband, not only to save herself from life in a forced marriage, but also to avoid potential rape in Osh[13] and to find a job in Russia. Her case shows that a determined woman can escape the threats posed by a patriarchal Uzbek community and by male dominance. In addition, it highlights the position of young Osh Uzbek women in general: their restricted mobility, their suffering during and after the violence, their experience of forced marriage, their fear of potential rape and social exclusion, and finally their inability to avoid conflict as easily as men.

Maya has become very religious since arriving in Russia, and she reads the Quran by downloading its scripts to her cell phone via the internet. She has also started to cover her face and decided to focus on religious knowledge. Maya has been in constant contact with the leaders of the Uzbek diaspora in Russia. According to Maya, many Uzbeks who came to Russia

---

[12] i.e., my informants meant that their daughters might be raped by men during and after periods of acute violence.

[13] Many reports on the June 2010 conflict document the accounts of rape that intensified conflict and perpetuated sexual violence against women. Whether Kyrgyz or Uzbeks, women's bodies were used by enemy groups as the weapon to take revenge, assert their power, dishonour and punish. Central Asian men define their masculinity in terms of "honour". The guardian of that honour is a man. Therefore, if a woman is sexually assaulted, a male relative believes he has been insulted as well as his community, and he finds himself less masculine.

before the conflict were now bringing their families to Russia and intended to stay there permanently.

Reeves (2011) mentions that "honour and respect are also spatialized: materialized in the very architecture of the home, the mahalla and its public spaces as well as articulated through the arrangement of bodies in space – from the sacred [...] to the most mundane" (2011: 564). Consequently, Maya's family honour depended not only on her behaviour, but also on where she should be: her place was within her husband's family and within the yard, not outside the house. However, Maya decided to stay in Russia for many reasons. The first reason derived from the humiliation and exclusion meted out by her extended family networks in Osh and the strong negative stigma that attached to her after divorcing her husband. In addition, she knew she could not rely on support from the Kyrgyz state if she ever returned to Kyrgyzstan. She acted and stayed alone, although her father was planning to bring the rest of his family (his wife and his married daughters together with their husbands) to Uralsk in Russia, where he used to work. Apparently, he found a stable job, a house, the support of his company to bring his family and possible jobs for his extended family members when they came to Russia. Many more Osh Uzbeks had similar thoughts of moving to Russia in search of security and a stable life. This new form of mobility encourages Osh Uzbeks to compare their lives in their Kyrgyzstani motherland with life in the step-motherland of Russia.

Conclusion

The Osh conflict in 2010 caused the displacement of many thousands of Osh Uzbeks to Russia, their first choice of destination due to the existing Uzbek diaspora. In order to minimise risks surrounding security and survival, Osh Uzbeks sought support from their extended kinship and friendship networks in their cities of destination in Russia. For them, mobility has always been a strategy to cope with difficult living conditions and constrained opportunities. In addition, it has now become a way to cope with the intra-communal conflict. The new mass migration of Uzbeks has exacerbated already existing difficulties in Osh, e.g. the absence of young men in Kyrgyzstan and the challenges confronting women who have stayed behind in Kyrgyzstan. The question remains: What does the future hold for Osh Uzbeks?

Safran's (1991) term diaspora fits the situation of Osh Uzbeks in Russia. There has twice been intra-communal conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan, in 1990 and 2010. Due to their minority status in their country, the Osh Uzbeks felt isolated and discriminated. However, the belief or hope of Osh

Uzbeks that they will one day return to the motherland once the situation improves is crucial to defining the collective identity 'abroad'. At the same time, one can also observe Uzbeks' attempts to grasp new alternatives in Russia such as citizenship, land and access to education and the health care system. I argue that Osh Uzbek migrants contribute to strengthening the reality of their diaspora in Russia.

Different Uzbeks, depending on their social status, have different priorities and visions for the future. At this point, it is hard to determine where Osh Uzbeks will settle, but they are in the process of searching for places to live. There is a triadic relationship between the diaspora group, the host country and the homeland. The attitudes of members of the Uzbek diaspora towards Kyrgyzstan are ambivalent – a combination of detachment and yearning. As my informants told me, at least in the near future 'it is difficult to imagine any sort of optimism for Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan'. At the moment, Kyrgyzstan is perceived by Uzbeks as 'not welcoming Uzbeks politically, ideologically, and socially'. According to Osh Uzbeks, the former social model, under which they could operate successful businesses and live peacefully with Kyrgyz in the Kyrgyz Republic, has been destroyed. Thus, at this point, it is unclear what is left, but people are thinking of alternative motherlands, among them Uzbekistan. However, they are also aware that in Uzbekistan Osh Uzbeks are currently not welcome because of the migrants' open and critical attitudes towards the state. Those migrants who still have social networks that extend into the Fergana Valley are at least opting to invest in Uzbekistan. People have a future, virtual and utopian vision of returning to the Fergana Valley and hope that someday it will come true. The idea of a motherland is crucial, especially while living in exile, since this gives a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group.

References

Abashin, Sergei (2011): Natsii i postkolonialism v Tsentralnoi Azii dvadtzat let spustya: pereosmyslivaya kategorii analiza I praktiki. Vremya Vtorogo mira. Imperskie revolutsya I kontrrevolutsii (Nations and Post-colonialism in Central Asia after Twenty Years: Rethinking of Categories of Analysis and Practice). *Ab Imperio* 3, pp. 193–210.

Abdurasulov, Abdujalil (2012): The Quest for Home. Open Democracy. http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/abdujalil-abdurasulov/quest-for-home (accessed 25 March 2013).

A-News (2013): Situation with Migration Policy in Russia to Grow Worse. A-News. http://www.eurodialogue.eu/Situation%20with%20migration%20policy%20in%20Russia%20to%20grow%20worse (accessed 30 May 2014).

Camm, George (2011): Kyrgyzstan Votes for Intolerance, Bans Finnish Investigator. EuroAsiaNet.org. http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63559 (accessed 30 May 2013).

Finlan, Alastair (2004): *The Collapse of Yugoslavia 1991–1999*. Essential Histories. Oxford, UK: Osprey.

Glick Schiller, Nina / Basch, Linda / Szanton Blanc, Cristina (1992): *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy of Science.

Hegland, Mary E. (2010): Tajik Male Labour Migration and Women Left Behind: Can They Resist Gender and Generational Hierarchies? *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5(2), pp. 16–35.

Hirsch, Francine (2005): *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Isabaeva, Eliza (2011): Leaving to Enable Others to Remain: Remittances and New Moral Economies of Migration in Southern Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian Survey* 30(3–4), pp. 541–554.

Ismailbekova, Aksana (2013): Coping Strategies: Migration, Public Avoidance, and Marriage in the Aftermath of the Osh Conflict, Fergana Valley. *Nationalities Papers* 41(1), pp 109–127.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2012): Kyrgyzstan: Internal Displacement in Brief. http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/kyrgyzstan/summary (accessed 30 April 2013).

Kharashvili, J. (2001): Georgia: Coping by Organizing: Displaced Georgians from Abkhazia. In: Marc Vincent / Birgitte R. Sorensen: *Caught Between Borders: Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced.* London: Pluto Press, pp. 227–249.

KIC (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission) (2011): Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry into the Events in Southern Kyrgyzstan. http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/KIC_ReportoftheIndependentIntlCommissionofInquiryintotheEventsinSouthrn Kyrgyzstan.pdf (accessed 30 May 2014).

Liu, Morgan (2012): *Under Solomon's Throne. Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Marsden, Magnus (2010): *Village Cosmopolitans, Urban-rural Networks and the Post-cosmopolitan City in Tajikistan. A Post-Cosmopolitan City*? Oxford / New York: Berghahn Books.

Monsutti, Alessandro (2005): *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan*. New York / London: Routledge.

Monsutti, Alessandro (2010): The Transnational Turn in Migration Studies and the Afghan Social Networks. In: Dawn Chatty / Bill Finlayson (eds): *Dispossession and Displacement: Forced Migration in the Middle East and North Africa*, British Academy Occasional Papers 14. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 45–68.

National Census (2009): National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyz Republic, Vol. III (tables). Regions of Kyrgyzstan, Osh City. Bishkek: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Piadukhov, Grigoriy (1996): Kirgiziia: politicheskii faktor kak prichina vynuzhdennoi migratsii (Kirgizia: Political Factor as the Main Reason for Forced Migration).

In: Galina Vitkovskaia (ed.): *Migratsiia russkoiazychnogo naseleniia iz Tsentral'noi Azii: prichiny, posledstviia, perspektivy* (*Migration of Russian Population from Central Asia: Reasons, Consequences, and Perspectives*). Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.131–143.

Reeves, Madeleine (2005): Locating Danger: Konfliktologiia and the Search for Fixity in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands. *Central Asian Survey* 24(1), pp. 67–81.

Reeves, Madeleine (2009): Beyond Economic Determinism: Microdynamics of Migration from Rural Kyrgyzstan [in Russian]. *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 66(4), pp. 262–280.

Reeves, Madeleine (2011): Staying Put? Towards a Relational Politics of Mobility at a Time of Migration. *Central Asian Survey* 30(3–4), pp. 555–576.

Reeves, Madeleine (2012): Black Work, Green Money: Remittances, Ritual, and Domestic Economies in Southern Kyrgyzstan. *Slavic Review* 71, pp. 108–134.

Roberts, Sean (2010): Why is Ethnic Violence Erupting Between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan? Roberts Report on Central Asia and Kazakhstan, weblog. http://roberts-report.blogspot.com/2010/06/why-is-ethnic-violence-erupting-between.html (accessed 30 May 2014).

Ruget, Vanessa / Usmanalieva, Burul (2010): How Much is Citizenship Worth? The Case of Kyrgyzstani Migrants in Kazakhstan and Russia. *Citizenship Studies* 14(4), pp. 445–459.

Safran, William (1991): Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. *Diaspora* 1(1), pp. 83–99.

Sanders, Rita (2010): Why Did They Stay Behind? Identities, Memories, and Social Networks of Kazakhstani Germans in Taldykorgan/Kazakhstan. Dissertation, Martin Luther University, Halle (Saale).

Schmidt, Matthias / Sagynbekova, Lira (2008): Past and Present Migration Patterns in Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asian Survey* 27(2), pp. 111–127.

Shuval, Judith T. (2000): Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and Theoretical Paradigm. *International Migration* 38(5), pp. 41–57.

Sökefeld, Martin (2006): Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora. *Global Networks* 6(3), pp. 265–284.

Starr, Frederick / Beshimov, Baktybek / Bobokulov, Inomjon / Shozimov, Pulat (2011): *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia.* Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Thieme, Susan (2008): Living in Transition. How Kyrgyz Women Juggle Their Different Roles in a Multi-local Setting. *Gender Technology and Development* 12(3), pp. 325–345.

Tishkov, Valery (1995): Don't kill me, I am a Kyrgyz! An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research* 32(2), pp.133–149.

Tishkov, Valery (1997): *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict after the Soviet Union.* London: Sage.

Tölölyan, Khachig (1991): The Nation-state and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface. *Diaspora* 1(1), pp. 3–7.

Uehling, Greta L. (2007): Thinking about Place, Home and Belonging among Stalin's Forced Migrants: A Comparative Analysis of Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian

Turks. In: Tom Trier / Andrei Khanzhin (eds): *The Meskhetian Turks at a Crossroads: Integration, Repatriation or Resettlement?* Berlin et al.: LIT Verlag, pp. 610–631.

Werner, Cynthia (2004): Feminizing the New Silk Road: Women Traders in Rural Kazakhstan. In: Carol Nechemias / Kathleen Kuehnast: *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition: Nation-Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 105–126.

Werner, Cynthia / Barcus, Holly (2009): Mobility, Immobility and Return Migration: The Impact of Transnational Migration on the Kazakh Diaspora in Mongolia. *Migration Letters* 6(1), pp. 49–62.

Yusupova, Anara / Ahmedjanov, Isomidin (2012): Proekt po pravam cheloveja v Tsentralnoi Azii. Konflikt na yuge Kyrgyzstana privel k razdeleniu (Human Rights Project in Central Asia. Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan Led to the Division). Bishkek: Institute for War and Peace Reporting. http://iwpr.net/report-news/deep-rifts-remain-conflict-torn-kyrgyz-south (accessed 1 May 2012).