

Conspiring Elites or Angry Masses?

*The Dynamics of Ethnic Violence in
Southern Kyrgyzstan 2010*

Line Grenheim



Master's Thesis – Peace and Conflict Studies

University of Oslo

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IV

Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to test the contrasting theories of Paul R. Brass and Donald L. Horowitz of ethnic violence as elite-led and mass-driven respectively, through the case of the interethnic violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The rationale for this research is two-fold; through the analysis of Brass' and Horowitz' approaches, it seeks to highlight and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of narratives claiming either that the interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan was the result of the premeditation and deliberate organization of various elite actors from the domestic Kyrgyz scene, or that it is better explained as the result of deep seated tensions inflamed by precipitating events and actuating circumstances.

Findings from in-depth interviews with experts with experience from the field suggest that although views that the violence was premeditated and organized are widespread, a weakness of the top-down approach is its failure to explain how the threshold from political intent to violent mobilization was crossed. Moreover, it fails to accurately explain how such a broad mobilization of participants could take place. Conversely, the research lends support to the bottom-up approach, which views the violence as a relatively spontaneous expression of mass hostility combining both heat-of-the-moment sentiments and underlying feelings of the participants. However, the support for Horowitz does not imply disproving Brass, and certain features of the violence, notably the element of organization, is better captured by the top-down approach.

Acronyms

HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
KIC	The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
OCHCR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United National Development Programme

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All mistakes and omissions in this thesis are mine.

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Oslo, May 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In 2010, the small Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan twice became the center of the world's attention. In April a violent political revolution led to the ousting of the authoritarian president, as well as over 80 casualties. In June 2010, the world again focused on Kyrgyzstan when massive clashes broke out between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the southern part of the country. In the course of less than a week, Kyrgyzstan experienced perhaps the most devastating crisis in its contemporary history, leaving over 400 dead and an estimated 300 000 temporarily displaced as the result of the violence. The causes and dynamics of the violence as well as the linkages to the political developments of April are both still disputed.

This was however not the first instance of ethnically charged violence neither in Kyrgyzstan nor in the densely populated and ethnically complex Ferghana valley. Divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and home to violence stricken cities like Osh and Andijan, the Ferghana valley is frequently categorized as the region's most volatile and dangerous "powder keg" for ethnic and territorial conflicts, and coined by many as a "tinderbox for violence". The southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, epicenter of the 2010 violence, was also the center of interethnic violence between members of the same ethnic groups in June 1990, prompting many to refer to the 2010 violence as history repeating itself (see for instance Reeves 2011).

Among incidents of interethnic violence in Central Asia, the cases of Kyrgyzstan stand out as significant in the region. The extensively violent confrontations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan in 1990 and 2010 constitute some of, if not *the* most grave and violent interethnic confrontations in the region in contemporary times, both in terms of numbers of victims and scale of destruction. Both incidents seemingly started as small local disputes between members of Kyrgyz and Uzbek

communities, but quickly escalated into large-scale conflict, leaving hundreds dead in only a few days.

As neither the full course of events nor the causes of the 2010 violence have been established, a range of different theories has been presented to explain why the violence erupted and how it could escalate to the proportions it did. Early reports tended to be divided in two groups,- one emphasizing the role of the ousted president and his supporters in the south as crucial in inciting violence, and another arguing that a fragile state of long standing ethnic antagonisms in the region inevitably had erupted into conflict again. Two patterns of contrasting and competing narratives thus seem to dominate the explanations of the violence. One narrative argues that the violence was the result of deep-seated underlying tensions that could be triggered into violence in the case of certain preconditions, notably the weakening of institutional constraints. The other narratives builds on the assumption that the ethnic communities live in peace side by side, but that they were exploited by certain leaders, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, who used the population as a tool in order to reach their own political goals.

Explanations seem to diverge also along ethnic lines. According to one observer, in the absence of impartial information the ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in Southern Kyrgyzstan have accepted widely different narratives explaining the violence (Jamestown 2012). As Radnitz (2010) states, people on both sides have internalized mutually exclusive “exculpatory and other-denigrating narratives.” In particular, ethnic Kyrgyz are known to consider the disproportionately high number of Uzbek casualties as a justified consequence of Uzbek aggression. For instance, two dominant narratives encountered by International Crisis Group (2010b: 15) among Kyrgyz officials refer to perceptions among the Kyrgyz of the Uzbeks as well prepared for the violence. One of these narratives holds the Uzbeks responsible for premeditated malice, and claims that the Uzbeks were heavily armed and had carefully planned an uprising in order to strengthen their political position in the country. The other narrative also holds that the Uzbeks were armed, but rather as a way of self protection given their marginalized position. Conversely, among the Uzbeks the memory of

previous violence, signs of rising Kyrgyz nationalism and the lack of a credible guarantee of state protection has exacerbated a feeling of marginalization (Radnitz 2010).

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building on the presence of such divergent explanations for the violence, Kyrgyzstan thus serves as an apt case in point for testing various theories on ethnic violence. Trying to assess the relevance of the above-cited views, I have chosen to focus predominantly on two partly conflicting theories of the nature of ethnic violence as the theoretical framework of the thesis; namely an instrumentalist perspective of ethnic violence as elite-led, represented by Paul Brass, and a more eclectic theory of ethnic violence presented by Donald L. Horowitz. These theories both address features of ethnic violence reflected in the narratives on the Osh 2010 events, and will form the framework for the later discussion of the causes and dynamics of the June 2010 events.

This study has one main research objective; to analyze the theories of Brass and Horowitz in light of the 2010 interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan. This objective is reflected in the research question of the thesis:

To what extent does the case of the 2010 interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan strengthen or weaken Brass' and Horowitz' theories of ethnic violence as elite-led or mass-driven respectively?

The rationale for this research is two-fold; through the analysis of Brass' and Horowitz' approaches, it seeks to highlight and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the narratives claiming either that the interethnic violence was the result of the premeditation and deliberate organization of various elite actors from the domestic Kyrgyz scene, or that it is better explained as the result of deep seated tensions combined with certain precipitating events and actuating circumstances. Although formulated as one research question, I will analyze the approaches of Brass and

Horowitz separately in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

As mentioned, the narratives of the interethnic violence either as instigated and organized by elites, or as the result of deep-seated antagonisms in a tinderbox region, are both commonly invoked as explanatory frames in and outside Kyrgyzstan. In particular, the persistence of interethnic tensions are often referred to as axiomatic and simply implied as “conventional knowledge.” Few attempts are however made to critically categorize and assess the basis of such claims. The analyses of the approaches of Brass and Horowitz therefore serve as a critical discussion of such factors. Moreover, as Brass’ and Horowitz’s approaches diverge in their views of the role of the state in preventing ethnic violence, the character of the linkages between the April revolution and the June interethnic violence is also a central question to be addressed in the analyses.

1.3 DEFINITIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

A common terminological distinction to make is to distinguish between *Kyrgyzstani* as citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, and *Kyrgyz* as a reference to the ethnic group. In such an instance, the Uzbek minority can be referred to Kyrgyzstanis while still being Uzbeks in terms of ethnicity. However, many question to what extent such a common Kyrgyzstani identity exists, and point to this as a factor that contributes to exacerbating the ethnic dimension in Kyrgyzstan.¹ Moreover, some accentuate how the official name of the state, *the Kyrgyz Republic*, suggests the ethnically exclusive character of the state and counteracts the development of a common national identity (see for instance KIC 2011).² In this thesis I will use the denomination *Kyrgyz* both when referring to the ethnic groups and the state structure. Although the official name of the

¹ For a discussion of ethnicity and identity in Kyrgyzstan, see for instance Faranda & Nolle (2010) and Elebayeva et. al (2000).

² In its recommendations to the political leadership of the state, the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (2011: 83) argues in favor of restoring the more inclusive name “the Republic of Kyrgyzstan,” which is considered more responsive to the civic basis of nation building.

state is the Kyrgyz Republic, I will also use the conventionally applied geographical term Kyrgyzstan throughout the thesis.

Pertaining to definitions, ethnic violence is one of the most, if not *the* most common form of collective violence observed in our contemporary era, and by some estimates statistically the most lethal form of violence during the 20th century (Horowitz 2001: 1). However, just as approaches to the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts are many and diverging, there is a range of diverging views on the phenomenon of ethnic violence itself. This thesis will first and foremost address the phenomenon of ethnic violence as a distinct form of conflict, and focus on the mechanisms and dynamics of such violence. It will not address the ontological foundations of ethnicity, nor will it discuss the processes of identity formation, although an analysis of these topics undoubtedly could give some interesting insights to the background for the violence.

The discussion of defining ethnic violence is twofold. On the one level, there is the definitional question of what types of violence may indeed be categorized as ethnic, as opposed to for instance religious or economic. As Reeves (2010) points out, conflicts categorized as “ethnic” often are more in complex nature than their categorization suggests. On another level, definitions of violence may also diverge across other dimensions such as scope and structure. Categories such as riots, pogroms, terror, genocide and ethnic war are often distinguished from each other according to differences in the structure and scope of the violence perpetrated, and each of these categories is attributed characteristics of their own. As the issue of labeling has implications for how we view and analyze an incident, the question of categorizations will be elaborated on in the theoretical chapter of the thesis. For the later discussion, I will however rely on Brubaker & Laitin’s (1998: 428) definition of ethnic violence as

[...] violence perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or a representative of a state), and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded – by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts – as having been integral

rather than incidental to the violence, that is, in which the violence is coded as having been meaningfully oriented in some way to the different ethnicity of the target.

1.4 EXISTING REPORTS AND RESEARCH

Commissions have been established both domestically and internationally to investigate the violence. Additionally, a range of Kyrgyz as well as international organizations have produced papers and reports based on their own research and analyses of the violence. I will not give an exhaustive list of all these reports here, but rather briefly introduce those widely considered authoritative in terms of the various narratives explaining the violence.

Domestically, three official commissions have been established to investigate the violence; a National Commission, a commission of the Ombudsman and later also a Parliamentary Commission. Two members of parliament also produced alternative versions of the report of the Parliamentary Commission. Of the domestic reports, the conclusions of the National Commission have received the most attention, claiming that the violence was instigated by Uzbek community leaders and members of the former regime (The National Commission 2011).

The Kyrgyz government has also voiced its view that violence erupted as a consequence of “protracted policies implemented by former regime” which resulted in an “extreme polarization of the social atmosphere of the societies in the region.” This view is presented through a comprehensive set of critical comments to the report of the international Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (The Government of Kyrgyzstan 2011). In addition, various Kyrgyz human rights NGOs have also analyzed the violence and presented their findings. Of these, the organization “Kylym Shamy” has through its research produced credible statistics of casualties which are commonly cited by international organizations.

By and large, the conclusions of the Kyrgyz government and commissions on the interethnic violence diverge considerably from those of the reports produced by international organizations. Of the international reports, three³ set out to establish elements of a chronology of the events; the reports by Human Rights Watch (2010), International Crisis Group (2010b) and the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (2011). Of these, the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, led by Finnish parliamentarian Kimmo Kiljunen, was established on request of the Roza Otunbayeva, the new president after the April 2010 revolution. However, its conclusions, presented in May 2011, created heated discussions in Kyrgyzstan, and prompted the parliament to declare Kiljunen *persona non grata* in the country. These conclusions included that the violence of June 2010 was reasonably foreseeable, and that many of the attacks committed against Uzbek neighborhoods if proven beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law would qualify as crimes against humanity (see KIC 2011).

Of other international reports attempting a more analytical approach and contextualizing the 2010 violence in the larger historical and political context of the country, Melvin (2011) and Matveeva's (2010) contributions are among those frequently cited. In addition, a more advocacy-oriented approach is undertaken in the reports by Amnesty International (2011) and the follow-up report of Human Rights Watch (2011), both focusing on the widespread violations of human rights in the criminal investigation and legal proceedings of the June 2010 events, notably their disproportionate targeting of ethnic Uzbeks.

1.5 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 defines the analytical framework for the thesis. This chapter seeks to contextualize the case of Kyrgyzstan within the larger theoretical literature on ethnic violence and riots. It also accounts for the main tenets of Brass' and Horowitz' theories.

³ A forthcoming report by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Memorial and Freedom House also aims at establishing a comprehensive chronology of the events in Southern Kyrgyzstan, and goes perhaps further than the others in establishing the timing and circumstances of various events that were part of the riot.

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodology and research design employed in the thesis, and accounts for the methodological choices and challenges pertaining to the collection of data.

Chapter 4 sets out to account for the background and context for the violence. With the emphasis on ethno-politics, it gives a brief contextualization of the main political developments in post-independence Kyrgyzstan. It also briefly accounts for the Osh 1990 violence and gives a rough chronology on the developments from April 2010 onward.

Chapter 5 and 6 serve as the central chapters for the discussion of Brass' and Horowitz' approaches of ethnic violence as elite-led and mass-driven respectively. These chapters seek to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Brass' and Horowitz' approaches in explaining the case of the 2010 interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter 7 sums up the main findings and conclusions of the thesis. It gives a contextualization of Brass' and Horowitz' approaches in light of each other, and makes some concluding assessments on the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. Finally, it briefly addresses certain theoretical implications of the analyses and findings.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to answer the research question, this thesis aims to assess the explanatory power of two theoretical approaches to ethnic violence in the case of the Osh 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan. The instrumentalist perspective on ethnic violence as presented by Brass (1997) represents one of the traditionally dominant paradigms on ethnic violence, and views riots as premeditated and elite-led. The theoretical approach presented by Horowitz (2001) adopts a broader and more eclectic view of ethnic violence as driven both by spontaneous and emotional-laden group sentiment, and to some degree instigated through provocations and precipitants.

First this chapter sets out to define the domain under scrutiny. As an important topic both in terms of the larger theoretical discourse on ethnicity and conflict and in the specific case of the Kyrgyzstan violence, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of definitions. More specifically, it will elaborate on the definition of ethnic violence as applied in this thesis. This section also will serve to contextualize the June events in terms of the larger theoretical literature on ethnic violence and riots, and justify the choice of theoretical framework for the later analysis.

I will proceed by accounting for the main tenets of the approaches presented by Brass and Horowitz. I will focus first and foremost on what they perceive as the underlying driving forces for violence, and on the dynamics and specific features of the process of ethnic violence itself. In particular, I will look at how the approaches diverge with regards to spontaneity, as the question of whether the violence was premeditated or genuinely spontaneous lies at the core of the discussion of the Osh events. Moreover, while Brass' top-down emphasis accentuates the importance of contextual factors such as the role of specific political actors, Horowitz's composite approach justifies a treatment of structural factors such as the longer legacy of interethnic policies.

2.1 THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE

As briefly addressed in the introductory chapter, the discussion of defining ethnic violence can be approached from two different angles, namely one pertaining to the definition of violence as *ethnic* as opposed to for instance religious, and the other focusing on the characteristics of ethnic violence as differing from other categories of ethnically charged violence such as pogroms, genocide and ethnic war. This section will first and foremost address the second type of definitions, notably the characteristics and dynamics of ethnic violence and definitional ambiguities pertaining to the categorization of incidents of ethnically charged violence.

Few attempts have been made at explaining the scale, disproportionate character and explosiveness that tends to characterize instances of ethnic violence, and that was particularly evident in the cases of interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in 1990 and 2010. The discussions of the interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan exemplify some of the ambiguities pertaining to the defining and categorizing of violence. Terms such as pogroms and riots are often used interchangeably, and few attempts are made to address or critically discuss their usage and classification.

Accounts of violence and of conflict have traditionally not been sharply distinguished from one another in the theoretical literature on ethnicity, ethnic conflict and nationalism. Violence has been interpreted not as a form of conflict, but rather as a degree of conflict or even a form of social and political action in its own right (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 425-426). However, viewing ethnic violence merely as a quantitative degree of conflict rather than a distinct qualitative *form* of conflict runs the risk of ignoring how such violence may be characterized by its own set of dynamics. Moreover, violence is often accompanied by social struggles to define and specify its causes, and thus the labels assigned to the violence, - for instance, categorizing it as a pogrom, a riot or a rebellion, may have important consequences (Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 428). Differing categorizations and terms used for the events

in Kyrgyzstan⁴ exemplify an ambiguity both with regards to classification of the events, and with regards to the conceptual nexus of conflict and violence as a qualitative form of conflict.

Despite the preoccupation with the nature of violence in social scientific research, ethnic riots have usually not been singled out as a category for analysis. There has rather been a tendency to subsume ethnic riots under broader categories such as turmoil, unorganized mass violence, aggression, hostile outbursts and so on. However, it can be argued that there are specific patterns of timing, targeting and location typical of ethnic riots that warrant a treatment of ethnic riots as a separate category of analysis (Horowitz 2001: 7).

Building on the abovementioned arguments for a disaggregated approach to ethnic violence, Horowitz thus holds many factors distinguish the ethnic riot from other forms of ethnic or ethnicized violence such as e.g. genocide, violent protests, feuds, pogroms, terrorism and internal warfare. Elaborating on Brubaker and Laitin's previously cited definition of ethnic violence, the ethnic riot can be defined as "an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership" (Horowitz 2001: 1). Accordingly, this includes a "substantial measure of relatively spontaneous physical assault" and the display of high levels of anger, and the violence perpetrated often appears to have a strongly affective aspect for the participants involved. Moreover, the main targets of the violence are usually people and property associated with them, and not impersonal targets such as for instance government buildings (Horowitz 2001: 17). Although spontaneous and passionate in character, this form of mass civilian intergroup violence is highly patterned and not at all a random phenomenon; it has at least one immediate

⁴ For instance, International Crisis Group (2010b) refers to the June events as pogroms, while others such as Human Rights Watch (2010) and Matveeva (2010) refer to the events simply as communal or interethnic violence or clashes.

cause, and it is triggered by events and precipitants considered as sufficient to warrant violence.

Characteristics of the ethnic riot are typically a broader targeting of victims based on group identity, broader public participation, and the scope of casualties, which is usually larger during riots than in other forms of ethnicized violence save for ethnic warfare or genocide (Horowitz 2001: 18-19, 522). Other characteristics of riots are an uneven clustering in time and space, the selection of victims by categorical identity, expressions of intergroup antipathies and often also the mutilation of victims (Horowitz in Brubaker & Laitin 1998: 432). However, as accentuated by Horowitz (2001: 19), the borders separating the various forms of ethnic violence often are porous and hard to distinguish, and that some episodes may fit more categories and overlap or even develop into riot-like events. Horowitz (2001: 1-2) moreover holds that such violent events are structured by implicit rules in all phases of the riot, ranging from provocation to termination of the violence. More specifically, rather than being "an unstructured *mêlée*, in which it is impossible to disentangle attackers from their victims," ethnic riots emanate from a highly patterned set of conditions, and consist of a series of discernible actions, identifiable initiators and targets, attacks and sometimes also counterattacks (Horowitz 2001: 12).

With the abovementioned qualifications on ethnic riots in mind, the terms ethnic violence and ethnic riot will be used synonymously in this thesis. However, while the approaches to the various forms of ethnic violence addressed in the previous sections try to define some more or less objective and descriptive characteristics and patterns of violence, scholars diverge on the question of what the underlying dynamics leading to the specific instances of ethnic riots are, and how these dynamics come to play. For instance, scholars such as Furnivall (1944) and Lijphart (1977) argue that ethnic violence and riots are a latent condition in deeply divided societies, and that any little spark at any time would be a sufficient precipitant for the outbreak of violence. Equally, scholars such as Tishkov (1997), Brass (1997) and Wilkinson (2004) agree on the assumption that political authorities play a part in such riots, although they diverge

slightly on the explanation of *what* part they play. Thus, most theoretical approaches carry with them underlying assumptions and propositions as to what are essentially the causes of riots, and whether these are driven by mass sentiment or instigated by conflict entrepreneurs. This distinction is also reflected in the two dominant narratives of the June events. In the following sections I will look at two contrasting views of the dynamics of ethnic violence, presented by Paul R. Brass and Donald L. Horowitz respectively.

2.2 BRASS: AN INSTRUMENTALIST APPROACH TO ETHNIC VIOLENCE

Brass (1997: 7-8) criticizes how what he refers to as “conventional social scientific research on ethnicity and communal violence and riots” generally, aims to either develop descriptive, “objective” and sequential models of riots, or to identify characteristics of the riots that can be analyzed quantitatively. According to Brass (1997: 7-8), these approaches often result in the objectification of social processes and the reification of categories such as class and ethnicity, leading the researchers to ignore the underlying dynamics of the events, such as the significance of the interpretations that are presented to explain them. Perhaps most importantly, this objectification contributes to eliminating agency and responsibility from the explanation, and thus fails to identify the specific persons, groups, organizations and/or state agents who actually are behind the initiation and execution of the violence associated with the riots.

While acknowledging that there may be a presence of inter-group antagonisms, Brass (1997: 9) rejects latent hostilities as an explanation for the outbreak of riots. Abandoning the search for an “objective” explanation, in his research on communal violence and riots in India Brass (1997: 6-8, 14) rather observes that riots generally are *designed* to appear as spontaneous. However, not all events that occur during a violent episode can be preplanned and organized, and there are often elements of spontaneity. In the words of Brass (1997: 14), riots are therefore “partly organized, partly spontaneous forms of collective action designed to appear or made to appear

afterwards as spontaneous expressions of popular feeling.” This element of organization implies that there is a presence of identifiable culprits conspiring to, or committing, acts that are either designed to provoke, or have the effect of producing riotous behavior and violence. Specifically, the riots are intended to convey a diffuse message about alleged popular feelings, and can function as a warning to ethnical or political foes (Brass 1997: 8,14) .

Brass (2006: 3) argues that in places where events labeled as riots are endemic, the riots have become a grisly form of dramatic production consisting of three rough phases: 1) preparation/rehearsal, 2) activation/enactment and 3) explanation/interpretation. While the first phase of rehearsal and preparation is continuous, the second phase often takes place in a context of intense political mobilization or electoral competition, where the riots are used purposefully as a device to consolidate support of e.g. ethnic or otherwise culturally demarcated groups, through invoking the need for intra-group solidarity. In the third phase, multiple narratives compete for primacy in controlling the explanation of the violence (Brass 1997: 3-4).

Brass’ research indicates that incidents precipitating violence and riots often arise out of situations that are not inherently ethnic or communal in nature, and that the elevation of these events from local to large-scale communal confrontations depends first on the attitudes toward them taken by local politicians and local state representatives, and later their reinterpretation by the press and by extra-local politicians and authorities (Brass 1997: 6-7). As Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 434) note, instigative and provocative actions can be undertaken not only by vulnerable incumbents who attempt to redefine the fundamental lines of conflict in order to deflect intra-group challenges to their position, but also challengers to the incumbents who want to discredit the incumbent. Thus, the persistence of events labeled as riots is largely a consequence of their functional utility for leaders of dominant political ideologies, both as scapegoats and in providing insecurity that may justify the exercise of state power (Brass 1997: 6-7).

Elaborating on this point, Brass (1997: 61) notes that the prevailing explanation of a riot simply reveals the dominant discourse, prevailing context or framework in which local events are made meaningful to society, "the filter – constructed by those with control over the flow of information – which selectively reveals and hides local power relations from view". This implies that the prevailing explanation is no more or less valid than other equally coherent explanations, and the most useful function a researcher can perform is to identify the uses to which a construction is put, and the power relations expressed through it (Brass 1997: 61).

2.2.1 Riot as institutionalized

Brass (1997: 9-10) introduces the concept of "institutionalized riot systems," in which known actors specialize in turning inter-communal incidents between members of different communities into larger communal riots. This implies that the kinds of violence to be found during communal riots for the most part is undertaken by conflict "specialists" who themselves profit from such actions, and whose actions also profit other actors who may or may not be paying for the violence to be carried out. According to Brass (1997: 15), riots have characteristic "forms of organization and leaderships" that, although they conversely to other forms of collective violence are not open and formalized entail known persons taking on leadership roles, and pools of people to be mobilized and to participate in the riots. Brass (1997: 16) points to a presence of "regular fire-tenders", so called "conversion specialists" who maintain tensions at a combustible level, and who know how to convert a moment of tension into a larger riot. Moreover, in order to start and spread the riot and ensure a "spontaneous" participation, other specialized roles also come into play, such as so-called "mobile gangs," people spreading rumors, people who shout slogans and people who are designated to instigate violence among the public (Brass 1997: 16). Consequently, it can be argued that all the precipitating events, including the spread of rumors, form part of this system, and ultimately serve the purpose of instigating the riot.

Brass (1997: 9) however notes that other political interests often also contribute to whether riots are allowed to develop, and it is thus the opportunism of political elites that ultimately explains the maintenance of the riot system. When full-fledged riots are being played out, their development may for example signal the incompetence of local politicians and authorities, or more crucially serve as an indication that these authorities have an interest in letting the riot play out (Brass 1997: 9). Elaborating on Brass' idea of ethnic violence as a by-product of political elites' power struggles, Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 433) identify a set of mechanisms and processes of interethnic violence that relate to how *interethnic* violence is reliant on and fostered by *intraethnic* processes (emphasis in original). These mechanisms can be for instance in-group policing, the deliberate staging and instigation of violence, ethnic outbidding and dynamics of encouraging recruitment into gangs and organizations that promote ethnic violence.

Although perpetrators and instigators can be found in all three phases of conflict, Brass (2006: 4) attaches special significance to those actors who sustain and incite intergroup tensions and create a readiness for riots; those who lead and organize riots and rioters; the criminal and poor persons who can be recruited to perpetrate the violence; and ultimately to those politicians and media representatives who by attributing the actions to an inflamed mass public, diverts the attention away from the perpetrators. Importantly, it is the governments and political leaders who ultimately benefit from this displacement of blame (2006: 5).

2.2.2 A top-down approach

As shown, the instrumentalist understanding of the dynamics of violence represented by Brass (1997) asserts that riots are in fact organized by powerful people in order to gain advantage or deflect hostility away from themselves. As Brass (1997: 11) notes, the riots provide “a useful smokescreen to divert attention from the demographic and economic context in which the riots take place,” suggesting that riots often serve a larger political function. This political function can be to cast blame on political rivals, to justify the need for a strong central authority and the use of state power, or to

mobilize various groups in society for example for the purpose of gathering political support in a context of electoral competition. This implies that for these actors, any precipitant for violence is just a convenient excuse.

Viewing ethnicity as a "contingent, situational and circumstantial" identity that can be consciously employed for the benefit of individuals or their leaders, instrumentalism holds that ethnicity is something that must be "triggered," and not something that can cause or explain spontaneous outbursts of violence or hatred in itself (Barrington 2002: 464). Fearon and Laitin (2000: 853-854) point to how Brass' elite theory of ethnic violence draws on a constructivist framework where identities are seen as socially constructed, in explaining why masses follow. Although ethnic violence is presented as both a means and a by-product of the struggle of political elites to hold or acquire power, it is argued that elite interest often foment ethnic violence for the purpose of ensuring political support, creating more antagonistic identities that in turn favor more violence. This also reflects on the very nature of the riot, and of those executing the violence, as the riot is viewed not as motivated by inherent ethnic antipathies, but rather the personal agendas of the ordinary persons perpetrating the violence. Subsequently, the political framing of local disputes as for instance ethnic works to justify people's pursuit of their own agendas under the framing of "communal conflict". Setting the constructivist emphasis on identities aside, what is important is that violence itself is socially constructed as ethnic or communal (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 855, 869). Although Brass' approach is less dogmatic than other traditional instrumentalist views of the conflict entrepreneur as the sole beneficiary of the violence⁵, his views adhere to the traditional elite-based theory of conflict, which focuses on the role of intellectuals and politicians in mobilizing ethnic feelings and interethnic strife.

A weighty criticism to Brass' institutionalized riot system is posed by Wilkinson (2004: 52-53), who argues that Brass fails to properly establish the existence of the riot

⁵ See e.g. Gudkov (2004).

system in the first place, subsequently rendering his analysis of its role meaningless. Wilkinson 2004: 52-53) notes that rather than through proving the existence of such systems over time and across different cities and controlling for other town-level factors that are likely to restrain or lead to violence, Brass infers the existence of the riot system based on a dichotomous variable of whether a riot has taken place or not. Not being able to properly establish or prove the existence of a riot *system* based on this dichotomy, there are thus no grounds for discussing the role played by such a system.

Many scholars have criticized the central tenets of the instrumentalist approach, claiming that by viewing ethnicity as a tool of political elites, instrumentalists simplify the underlying dynamics of ethnic violence. A central critique posed toward the elite-based approach is that it overestimates the conflict generating and organizing potential of elites, and thus that it cannot fully explain the phenomenon of mass mobilization itself, the intensity of emotions among the actors in the conflict, as well as the strength of group desires and readiness to resort to violence (Tishkov 1996). Brubaker & Laitin (1998: 446) and Tambiah (2005: 912-913) view violence as contingent on factors on several levels, and hold that while ethnic riots typically involves the deliberate manipulation and organization described by Brass (1997, 2006), crowd behavior is also contingent on other levels of powerful emotions and compelling collective representations. Addressing what they call the double dynamic of ethnic riots, Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 446) claim that a riot typically "involves at one level deliberate manipulation and organization by a small number of instigators but also, at other levels turbulent currents of crowd behavior governed by powerful emotions and compelling collective representations." The criticism represented by these scholars holds that authorities and elites do neither possess sole capability to define and interpret events, nor to initiate and instigate large-scale mass violence.

2.3 HOROWITZ: A TWO WAY STREET

Although acknowledging the compelling power of group affiliations as well as personal interests, Horowitz (2001: 47) criticizes Brass' emphasis on elites' potential

to manipulate masses and argues that it is not possible to reduce affect to merely instrumental behavior. Horowitz (2001: 18) notes that while few riots occur without any degree of organization whatsoever, the degree to which it is organized is not crucial to its success. Taking into consideration the diverse nature of riots, Horowitz broadly states that most riots appear to be wholly unorganized, partially organized and partially spontaneous, or organized by sporadic leadership that forms in response to the riot. However, conversely to Brass, the theoretical emphasis in Horowitz' approach predominantly lies on the spontaneous and emotion-laden element of the riot. Even in the cases where they are reasonably well organized, the riot builds on a dynamic of angry violence, and its objective is "to further ethnic polarization in an already polarized environment or to take advantage of a hostile mood" (Horowitz 2001: 225).

According to Horowitz (1985: 140), theories on ethnic conflict largely neglect the significance of controversies and symbolic issues to conflict, and there are relatively few attempts to explain the actual intensity and violent character of such conflicts. In an attempt to tackle this task, Horowitz argues in favor of an approach that incorporates group psychology and the importance of symbolic issues, and that links elite and mass concerns into a consistent explanation of "why followers follow." Alongside a necessary presence of antipathies, Horowitz identifies fear as a widely prevalent emotion among ethnic groups in a conflict situation. Together, they constitute "an attribution of hostile intentions to others in order to justify and explain one's own apprehensions" (Horowitz 2001: 87). Emotions such as fear of group extinction ultimately may exacerbate feelings of hostility, and thus become a driving force for ethnic group violence.

2.3.1 Explaining the deadly ethnic riot

According to Horowitz (2001: 13-14), "an amalgam of apparently rational-purposive behavior and irrational-brutal behavior forms the leitmotiv of the ethnic riot and distinguishes it from other forms of violence." The inflicting of violence associated with the riot is a process in itself, governed by its own logic. Horowitz (2001: 524) describes the riot violence as "structured, nonrandom, socially sanctioned, destructive

rather than appropriative, relatively spontaneous, un-calibrated, and yet precisely focused on certain groups”. The deadly ethnic riot can best be explained by the combination of four underlying variables, namely the presence of a hostile relationship between two ethnic groups, a response to events that provoke strong emotions among one of these groups, an experienced sense of justification for killing, and a perception of a risk reduction of resorting to violence that encourage people to act (Horowitz 2011: 524). As riots reflect clear-cut structures of ethnic group relations, they are driven by other dynamics than other forms of organized violence such as e.g. terrorism, and are subsequently more sensitive to intergroup relations (Horowitz 2001: 12-13).

Horowitz (2001: 15) holds that the violence is “neither a perfectly crisp dramatization of antecedent conflict nor a wholly autonomous process that bears no relationship to enduring sources of tension.” As such, riots are particularly violent reflections of an underlying ethnic conflict, and are motivated by collective self-interest and collective passion. As an expression of mass hostility, the riot thus constitutes a statement of group intentions by conduct as it exposes “the malevolence of those intensions, belying the former tranquility inferred from the routine interethnic contact of the marketplace or the government office”. In other words, the spontaneity of the riot behavior is not a response to government orders, but reflects a combination of heat of the moment sentiments and underlying feelings of the participants (Horowitz 2001: 11, 13-14).

The riot is a more faithful expression of group sentiment than what can ever be expressed politically or institutionally, as the spontaneity of the riot removes the institutional constraints that regulate ethnic sentiment in the conduct of official institutions such as the government or the armed forces (Horowitz 2001: 13-14). However, this is not to imply that the institutional setting is unimportant; for instance, features of the political and social climate may, deliberately or not, facilitate the emergence of ethnic riots for example through removing the restraints on violence (Horowitz 2001: 4).

2.3.2 The role of precipitants

The presence of hostility is a prerequisite for riots, as it is in fact underlying ethnic group sentiment that provokes the outburst of violence (Horowitz 2001: 226). The riot is usually preceded by a chain of precipitating events that embody this hostility. The function of these precipitants is to convince people that violence is necessary and appropriate (Horowitz 2001: 71). Horowitz defines a precipitant as “an act, event, or train of acts and events, antecedent but reasonably proximate in time and place to the outbreak of violence and causally related thereto (Horowitz 2001: 269). For an event to precipitate a riot, it must be grave enough to assure each participant that others will act equally violently, and produce enough anger to provoke the participants to resort to violence. A common feature of precipitants is that they are evocative, and emphasize threatening characteristics or behavior among the target group, supporting the idea that violence is necessary. Typical precipitants can be ethnic processions, demonstrations and mass meetings, strikes with ethnic overtones, party and electoral rivalries along ethnic party lines, and official or unofficial changes in relative ethnic status (Horowitz 2001: 268, 271).

One such precipitant often present is rumors. Horowitz (2001: 74) defines a rumor as a “short-lived, unverified report, usually anonymous in its origin”. Rumors appeal to sentiments both on an individual level and on the level of group dynamics, and shift the balance in a crowd toward those proposing the most extreme action, thus moving people toward violence (Horowitz 2001: 71, 75). For instance, rumors in a pre-riot stage often contain stories of concealed threats and secretly committed outrages, actions that are notoriously difficult to verify, that justify the use of violence as a counter measure. Not only do stories of concealed threats justify the resort to counter measures, but they may also work to confirm strengths and dangers represented by the target group, facilitating fear-driven violence (Horowitz 2001: 75).

Rumors that reach broadly enough to contribute to the emergence of violence are seldom just coincidental instances of misinformation. Rather, the rumors are

“structurally embedded in the riot situation,” because they are satisfying and useful to rioters and their leaders, and because rumors are likely to prevail over accurate information and thus are hard to counter effectively (Horowitz 2001: 74). Although the rumors may be deliberately exploited by those who instigate violence, Horowitz (2001: 75) downplays the role of conflict agitators in the spread of rumors. Rather than having a static content created for the purpose of instigating violence, rumors evolve as they spread to become meaningful for the various recipients.

2.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have defined the characteristics of ethnic violence as applied in this thesis, and briefly contextualized the June 2010 events in light of the larger theoretical literature on ethnic violence. Moreover, I have accounted for the main tenets of Brass’ (1997) and Horowitz’s (2001) approaches, particularly focusing on Brass’ concept of the institutionalized riot system and Horowitz’ emphasis on precipitants as a prerequisite for violence.

While both Brass and Horowitz acknowledge that ethnic riots include some degree of organization, their views significantly diverge when it comes to the role of the dynamics underlying and initiating the violence. A crucial difference between the two is their perception of whether the riot is premeditated and *designed* to appear spontaneous, or if it is in fact a genuinely spontaneous expression of mass sentiment. Although adopting a slightly less dogmatic approach than other instrumentalists, Brass adheres to the top down-approach that views riots as contingent on the motives and actions of elite actors and conflict entrepreneurs. Conversely, Horowitz views ethnic riots essentially from a bottom-up perspective, as driven by mass sentiment and building on a precondition of a hostile relationship between the groups. Both emphasize the role of rumors and precipitating events to the outbreak of violence, but Brass interprets these in the framework of conflict instigation whereas Horowitz focus on how such events play into already existing tensions and dynamics.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter will account for and justify the choice of methodology and research design. In particular, it will elaborate on the specifics of the fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan in January 2011, and on challenges posed by the data-gathering and data-analyzing processes.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The case I study is complex and requires attention to various contextual as well as structural factors. As shown in the often diverging conclusions of national and international researchers, the underlying dynamics and causes of both the April events and the June violence are composite and difficult to identify. This is exemplified for instance through I thus apply a qualitative research strategy based on an interpretivist epistemological position that focuses on understanding the world through examining the interpretations of this world by its participants (Bryman 2008: 366).

The primary aim of this thesis being the testing of two theories by analyzing them in light of a specific case, the research strategy of this thesis relies on deductive approach where theory, and hypotheses deduced from the theory, drive the process of gathering data (Bryman 2008: 9). However, as Bryman (2008: 10) notes, the deductive process does not always follow a strict linear sequence where theory dictates the data gathering, but can also contain an element of inductiveness. For instance, a researcher's view of the theory may change following the analysis of the data collected, or the relevance of data for a specific theory may become apparent after the data collection process has been completed. In terms of this thesis, the latter can be said to be the case. Notably, various patterns, mechanisms and processes implicated in ethnic violence were identified through interviews with informants. Building on the findings of this research, the decision was made to use the empirical material as a basis

for testing two theories, each focusing on different and often contrasting aspects of ethnic violence.

3.1.1 The case study

This thesis is designed as a case study of interethnic violence in Central Asia, focusing on the specific case of the 2010 interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan. Gerring (2004: 341) holds that a case study is best defined as “an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena”. Deriving from this view is the assumption of the double function of the case study design, namely that it constructs cases from a single unit while still remaining attentive to inferences that may be drawn with similar units outside the scope of the investigation (Gerring 2004: 353). Moreover, the case study design allows the researcher to analyze qualitatively complex events and take into account numerous variables without being limited to considerations of quantification and measurement issues (George and Bennett 2005: 45). This design is useful in the context of this thesis as it allows for an in-depth examination of the underlying processes and dynamics of the conflict under scrutiny. Although this study does not intend to produce statistically representative conclusions that can be generalized to interethnic violence in general, it adds to the existing literature on the nexus between ethnicity and conflict in Central Asia and may still generate insight about mechanisms and dynamics of ethnicity and violence.

Finally, a case study is more apt for studying whether and how a variable mattered to an outcome, rather than how much it mattered (George and Bennett 2005: 25). This approach is particularly relevant with regards to a central empirical question of the thesis, namely whether and how the April and June events in Kyrgyzstan were interrelated.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

In this study I build on a qualitative methodology. Cresswell (2003: 22) states that qualitative research is exploratory in character, and is particularly useful in uncovering

what factors or variables are important for a specific outcome. As mentioned, this approach forms the basis for the subsequent testing the diverging theories of Brass and Horowitz, seeing ethnic violence as elite led versus mass driven respectively.

George and Bennett (2005:4-6) note that case study research usually implies collecting data from different sources in order to create a deeper and more accurate understanding of the problem being analyzed. Thus, I have decided to base my analysis on a combination of qualitative interviews and existing reports. As the reports variably build on interviews with eyewitnesses and field research and have the aim to uncover the factual chronology of events, these will be used first and foremost to provide the context for the discussion. Findings from the reports will however also be discussed where deemed relevant. The interviews are used to explore in greater detail the aspects of the June events, and place these in the broader context of interethnic relations in Kyrgyzstan.

3.2.1 Qualitative interviews

The topic of the thesis remains a relatively recent incident of ethnic violence, and the range of scholarly contributions with sufficient analytical distance is thus limited. Just as there is a lack of consensus on the underlying causes of the violence, there is also a plethora of competing narratives of both victimhood and blame among various groups and actors in Kyrgyzstan. As mentioned, both the ethnic Kyrgyz and the ethnic Uzbek communities have internalized exculpatory and mutually denigrating narratives with few if any overlap, and the Kyrgyz government's efforts to bridge these dueling versions by investigating the events evenhandedly have been characterized by many as inadequate (Radnitz 2010).

To minimize the challenge of ethnically biased interpretations, I have thus chosen to build my analysis predominantly on the views and experiences of representatives of a broad range of local human rights and civil society organizations, international NGOs, as well as scholars and activists, who have experience and extensive knowledge of the Kyrgyz context. It is this thesis' assumption that experts working in the field may

contribute with arguments and input which are anchored in the local context and discourse. Moreover, it is this thesis' assumption that such experts may represent a different perspective from both that of the state and to that of ordinary citizens, which may be strongly colored by a lack of analytical distance. Moreover, these experts' perspectives may supplement or even counterweigh official narratives and media presentations, which are often subject to various limitations and agendas of their own.⁶ For the sake of including the official narrative I have chosen to include one representative from the Kyrgyz authorities among the informants.

3.2.2 Sampling of informants

As briefly addressed in the previous sections, a series of qualitative interviews with scholars, civil society leaders, activists, political analysts and policy makers constitute the most important source of empirical data in this study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 24) note that the purpose of the qualitative research interview is "to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives". This implies paying attention to their interpretation of the meaning of the phenomena under scrutiny, in this case the dynamics behind the interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan.

The informants were chosen on the basis of purposive sampling, which is a non-probability form of sampling that allows the researcher to select informants on the basis of their relevance to the research question (Bryman 2008: 415). This allowed me to choose informants based on their expertise on the issue and on their experience from the field, while simultaneously balancing the composition of informants to include individuals with different backgrounds, organizational affiliation and professional competence. An advantage from using purposive sampling is the possibility of using snowballing to come in contact with informants. Snowballing entails building up layers of contact through the help of the informants, by asking people relevant to the

⁶ Torjesen (2008: 45) points to how the legacy of official facade making in the Central Asian states is still valid and how information provided by state officials or government agencies can usually be assumed to reflect the official line of the state dogma. Accordingly, such information will rarely admit the existence of facts, practices or processes that undermine this official line. Another challenge in this regard is the institutional culture inherited from the Soviet Union, which makes the access to state officials and civil servants, itself, difficult (Torjesen 2008: 43).

topic of the research to help the researcher establish contact with other individuals of interest (Bryman 2008: 184). While some of my interview appointments were already planned in advance of my field visit, I occasionally relied on the help of informants to come in contact with other persons of interest while in Kyrgyzstan.

Given the potential restrictions on the state information, I have chosen to interview only one expert from the state apparatus. The remaining informants have predominantly been experts and practitioners who work either independently, in educational institutions or in human rights- and civil society organizations. The informants interviewed during the research were Dmitry Kabak, human rights lawyer and president of the Open Viewpoint Foundation; Azamat Temirkulov, Shairbek Juraev, Medet Tiulegenov and Joomart Ormonbekov of The American University of Central Asia; Atyrkul Alisheva from The Institute for Regional Studies; Maxim Ryabkov, director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek; four representatives of the local human rights and civil liberties NGO Citizens Against Corruption; Lilya Ismanova of the Osh based NGO Meerban; Aziza Abdirasulova, founder and head of Kylym Shamy Center for Human Rights Protection; Paul Quinn-Judge, International Crisis Group's Central Asia Project Director; and Zairbek Ergeshev, expert from the Department of Ethnic Development, Religious Policy and Public Relations under the Presidential Administration. A conversation with Finnish parliamentarian and leader of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, Kimmo Kiljunen, was conducted in Astana in January 2012. In addition I have also interviewed five persons/groups of persons who wished to remain anonymous. Among these were practitioners from local and international NGOs, as well as independent political analysts.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, building on an interview guide consisting of six broad topics, each with a subset of questions. The semi-structured interview allows a great degree of flexibility in the interview, as it gives the interviewee leeway in how to reply while simultaneously allowing the researcher to follow up on specific topics addressed by the informant (Bryman 2008: 438). The interview guide and the Russian

translation are enclosed in Appendix 1 and 2. During the interviews I loosely followed the topics of the interview guide, but I also allowed the informants to reflect and elaborate on the topics they felt were particularly relevant to the discussion. Some of them even raised new questions and topics that were included in later interviews.

Most interviews were conducted in Bishkek in the period of January 10-21 2011. Some of the interviews were also conducted during a short stay in Osh on January 17-19 2011. Moreover, a conversation with Kimmo Kiljunen took place in Astana in January 2012. The length of the interviews varied from thirty minutes up to two hours, and they were conducted in an environment chosen by the informants, usually in their offices, work premises or at a local café. All interviews were, with the consent of the informants, recorded in order to be transcribed and translated where necessary afterwards.

3.3 ANALYSIS

The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, while a small percentage was, despite the lacking fluency of the researcher, conducted solely in Russian. In these cases I relied on a translated interview guide, and encouraged the informants to elaborate on the topics as freely as they wanted without many follow-up questions being asked. Two of the interviews were conducted in Russian and English through the help of an interpreter, but seeing as these were not professional interpreters I also relied on the translated interview guide and a tape recorder during these interviews so that the original statements of the informants could be revisited and translated later.

In the further work with the interview data I relied on the process of *open coding*, defined as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin in Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 202). Data from each interview was systematized and analyzed according to themes that emerged during the research. A content analysis was conducted on the basis of emergent themes, and served to identify both patterns and differences of opinion among the informants. Although a range of interesting themes were identified during the analysis,

I have chosen to delimit the discussion to themes particularly salient to the research question of the thesis.

3.4 RESEARCH VALIDITY AND BIAS

There is disagreement among researchers on the importance of research validity and reliability in qualitative research. Research validity generally implies that the research closely reflects the world it describes, while reliability pertains to the replicability of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 245-246). I will not discuss the issues of validity and reliability in depth, but reflections on certain measures undertaken to maximize the research validity is still pertinent.

As Creswell (2003: 182) states, qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, lending great emphasis to the researcher in terms of both collecting and interpreting data. In the words of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 173), “a project’s orienting research questions determine what kind of answers may be obtained”. I have tried to minimize the potential for bias by building the interview guide loosely around several broad topics that would open for reflection among the informants.

Due to time constraints I only transcribed selected parts of the interviews, and with few exceptions I did not send the transcribed material back to the informants before embarking on the analysis. This however led me to pay great attention to working closely with the recordings of the interviews in order to correctly cite and capture the arguments of the informants. Moreover, as the interviews were based on informed consent, informants were also given the opportunity to request certain sections of the interview to be omitted from the analysis if they so wished.

As the range of academic analyses as mentioned is still limited, additional sources such as reports on the June events produced and published by international organizations like International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are used to provide facts and context to the events that are analyzed. Reports by the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission as well as by experts such as Neil

Melvin and Anna Matveeva are also included among the reports used. Additionally, reports and statements by the domestic Kyrgyz inquiry commissions, news articles and other publications and commentaries have been used to provide context. Many of the mentioned reports largely build on the same primary sources⁷ as this thesis, and I will therefore not differentiate strictly between using primary sources and the reports in the analyses. Although the reports also contain a significant degree of assessment and analyses, they will however be used primarily to provide facts and context, while the analyses will be based predominantly on the views expressed by informants.

3.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Measures were undertaken to ensure that participation in the interview was based on the informants' informed consent, and the data gathered during the interview have been stored and protected according to the guidelines of the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Informants were presented with information about the purpose of the study and the use of the interview data before participating, and were asked to give their voluntary consent both orally and in writing. Participants were presented with the option of participating in the research anonymously, and were allowed to withdraw from the interview at any point during or after the interview without any further justification. They were also invited to request sections of the interview to be omitted from the analysis. With some exceptions I have later chosen to retain a certain degree of anonymity of informants throughout the analysis, as I regard the professional affiliation rather than the identity of the specific informants to be of interest with regard to their views. This study has been reported to and approved by the NSD.

3.6 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Certain methodological challenges pertaining to the research were encountered. One methodological challenge pertains to the selection of informants. It is important that the researcher is aware that the informants' status as independent experts does not necessarily preclude the presence of underlying agendas or biases in their

⁷ In addition, researchers or authors behind some of these reports have been interviewed for this thesis.

interpretation of the conflict, for instance through their personal participation or affiliation with the participants. As noted by Torjesen (2008: 46), the information provided by these seemingly impartial agents may be subject to certain limitations and biases. In particular, informants representing advocacy oriented NGOs may be thought to represent certain agendas. Due to lack of contacts and access in the field, I was unfortunately unable to ensure the participation of ethnic Uzbek experts or representatives of Uzbek organizations among my informants. Thus, there is the possibility that particularly the local Kyrgyz informants bring a certain ethnic Kyrgyz bias in viewing the riot. However, as most of the informants with organizational affiliations represent organizations working broadly with human rights and with issues related to the ethnic violence, taking on cases of victims of both Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnicity, it is my impression that these informants retain a relatively unbiased position. In so far as they are not, they often tend to lean toward the perspective of the “underdog” and the victims. Notably, some of the organizations whose representatives were interviewed for this thesis, work actively with issues related to minority rights in the country, and are presumably well informed with regards to the situation of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan.

Another challenge pertains to language issues. As some of the informants had little or no knowledge of English, certain interviews were conducted in Russian with a simultaneous translation into English through the help of an English speaking translator. However, as none of these translators were professionally trained as such, English translations did not always capture the full meaning of the informant, as verified through later transcriptions of these interviews.

4. BACKGROUND

This chapter seeks to provide an empirical background and context to the events to be discussed in the later analysis, namely the developments of April and June 2010. The chapter is organized chronologically, and includes a short historical backdrop in order to give a more coherent understanding of the larger context in which the 2010 June violence took place.

First, it will provide a general backdrop of Kyrgyzstan, focusing on features such as demographic composition and political, cultural and economical dimensions and cleavages. It will proceed by accounting for the general features of the interethnic violence in 1990. Next, it will give an overview of the most important political developments in Kyrgyzstan in the post Soviet period, leading up to the political revolution in April 2010. A short chronology of the April events and its aftermath will also be presented. Finally, it will account for the most important course of events and circumstances of the June violence. The underlying focus of the chapter will be on ethnopolitics and on interethnic relations.

4.1 GENERAL BACKDROP

Kyrgyzstan is a small landlocked state in the heart of Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the west, Tajikistan to the southwest and China to the east. After Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan remains the poorest country in the region. There are significant regional differences also domestically in terms of economic activity, demography and ethnic composition, - and perhaps partly resulting from the latter to some extent also in culture - with the southern provinces of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken at the bottom of the economic indicators (UNDP 2011).⁸

⁸ Although not a problem exclusive to Southern Kyrgyzstan, statistics from UNDP (2011) show that socioeconomic hardship and high poverty rates is a salient feature of the southern regions.

Present day Kyrgyzstan is a multiethnic state with a population of approximately 5,4 million⁹, of which the titular population according to estimates from 2009 constitutes roughly 71% . The Uzbeks and the Russians are by far largest ethnic minorities, with 14,3 and 7,8 percent of the population respectively, while other minorities such as Dungans, Uighurs, Tajiks and Turks constitute one percent or less (National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2009). While the Russian and other Slavic minorities have traditionally resided in the northern regions of the country, the Uzbek ethnic minority is heavily concentrated in the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana valley in the south, notably in the Osh, Jalalabad and Batken provinces, where it forms a majority or a near majority in some cities (Anderson 1999: 42; HRW 2010: 14).

Many point to a domestic division between the north and the south of the country, which is manifest in the political arena (see for instance Anderson 1999). The fulcrum of industry, political and economic power lies in the capital, Bishkek, in Northern Kyrgyzstan, while the fertile south, situated in the eastern reaches of the Fergana valley, has primarily been dominated by agriculture and trade (KIC 2011: 8). Building on the presence and influence of the large minorities, the north is often referred to as more "Russified," while the south, with its proximity to Uzbekistan and its large Uzbek minority, is described as more traditional and religious, with the influence of Islam more pervasive than in the north (Anderson 1999: xii-xiii, 3). Disparities between the country's north and south are also evident in economical indicators, which show that the per capita income of the Northern provinces, notably Bishkek, Issyk-Kul and Chui, tend to be above the national average, while the three southern provinces of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken generally are located below this average (UNDP 2011).

While the importance of this division between the country's north and south remains a topic of discussion, many claim that such a division has been institutionalized in the political system, with the northern and southern political elites alternating in power. There is disagreement among researchers with regards to the source of this

⁹ The latest public census, from 2009, establishes the population to be 5,3628 million (National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2009).

regionalism, and whether it exists only on the level of elite politics or if it is reflected also in the political attitudes of the population. Finally, there is disagreement on whether and how it is related to clan- or tribal identities, which are also a prominent feature in Kyrgyzstan (see for instance Ryabkov 2008). The prevalence of a political north-south division was a particularly salient topic in the discussions of the political struggle in April 2010 and its aftermath.

Alongside this possible north-south cleavage, which is predominantly *intraethnic*, Anderson (1999: 43) also refers to the interethnic dimension as salient in the Kyrgyz context. This dimension broadly relates to demographic features such as the size and concentration of ethnic minorities, and is particularly manifest in the relations between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek minority. According to Anderson (1999: 43.), tensions between ethnic Kyrgyz and the Uzbek minority have persisted partly as result of a perceived long term marginalization of ethnic Uzbeks in administrative and state positions, and partly as a consequence of a differential socio-economic development perceived by the titular population as unfairly benefitting the Uzbek minority.

While the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz both are indigenous to the Fergana Valley, to which Southern Kyrgyzstan belongs, the Uzbeks are traditionally a sedentary and urban-dwelling people, while the Kyrgyz have traditionally been nomadic, migrating with herds on pasture lands or living in villages in the mountainous countryside (Matveeva 2010: 12). As the Uzbeks have traditionally tended to reside in the urban areas where possibilities of economic activity are better, they have come to dominate the urban economy and the business sector in the south. Conversely, the Kyrgyz traditionally dwelled in often impoverished rural areas (Anderson 1999: 43).

4.2 THE OSH 1990 VIOLENCE

The most significant instance of large-scale interethnic violence in modern Kyrgyzstan before the 2010 events took place in 1990, when Kyrgyzstan was still a federal subject of the Soviet Union. On June 4 local police used force to disperse crowds of angry Kyrgyz and Uzbeks who had gathered on a disputed plot of land in the outskirts of

Osh. Fighting however escalated and spread to neighbouring cities and villages. Over the next couple of days, widespread looting, arson, rape, torture and murder were committed by both sides. The riot was quelled only after the declaration of a state emergency and the deployment of Soviet troops to the conflict area (Tishkov 1999: 134-135; Asankanov 1996). Official numbers claim that more than 300 people, including unidentifiable victims and disappeared persons, may have been killed as part of the riot. Estimates reflect a significantly higher percentage of ethnic Uzbeks being victims (Asankanov 1996, Tishkov 1995).

The question of what dynamics, factors or forces led a seemingly communal land dispute to escalate into a large-scale interethnic riot is however still disputed. Some attribute the riot to a general struggle over resources, namely over land or housing. For instance, several sources claim that the riot, triggered by a communal land dispute between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the outskirts of Osh, was a reflection of the significant housing problems of the region as Kyrgyz activists had started making claims for land belonging to a collective farm inhabited predominantly by ethnic Uzbek workers and residents (ICG 2010b: 3; HRW 2010: 15). According to for instance Abazov (1999: 72), the immediate cause for the violence was news that local authorities, in response to the demands of a Kyrgyz nationalist movement by the name of “Osh-Aimagy”, was going to distribute plots of land to landless Kyrgyz at the expense of the Uzbek community. This land dispute took place against a backdrop of a considerable growth in political activity and national self-consciousness of the ethnic groups of Kyrgyzstan, resulting most notably in the increased activity of the exclusively Uzbek organization “Adolat,” which promoted the creation of an autonomous Osh province, and its Kyrgyz counterpart, “Osh-Aimagy”, focusing on economic deprivation and land shortages of ethnic Kyrgyz. Subsequently, some attribute the claims put forward by leaders of these organizations as a principal cause behind the tragedy, indicating that the actions of certain elites played a significant role in provoking a confrontation between the ethnic communities (Asankanov 1996; HRW 2010: 14-15). Moreover, Tishkov (1995: 134) points to indicators identifying the influence of an economic “mafia’s” activities and the situation in the high-ranking

power structures of the republic, where the political changes brought by perestroika had disrupted a balance in the distribution of high-ranking positions between regional clans, as potential factors that could have played a role in fomenting tensions.

Others interpret the events in terms of a bottom-up perspective, focusing on how the violence erupted against a backdrop of tensions and grievances, or claim that it was rooted in the internal social and political conditions of Soviet (see for instance Tabyshalieva 1999). International Crisis Group (2010b: 3) emphasizes how KGB reports written immediately after the unrest noted a perception among poor ethnic Kyrgyz that Uzbeks were becoming more prosperous and “too free and easy” in their behavior and control of the markets. Moreover, the political activity of Adolat and the claims for autonomy created frictions. The Uzbek community on the other side claimed that the predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz police and political officials sided with the Kyrgyz protesters (ICG 2010b: 3). Other experts adopt a broader approach and hold that factors such as increasing intergroup competition over resources, a struggle to gain control over power structures, social differentiation between center and periphery, unemployment and lack of housing all were factors fermenting unrest and violence (see Tishkov 1995: 134). Pertaining to grievances and the competition over resources, Asankanov (1996) in his much cited analysis of Osh 1990 points to economic difficulties, falling standards of living and rising unemployment in the late 1980s and early 1990s as contributing to the rise in interethnic tensions in pre-independence period, creating a competition over resources that eventually amounted to violence. Moreover, McFarlane and Torjesen (2007: 10, 12) claim that significant land and water shortages in Southern Kyrgyzstan have affected both the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek populations in the south and encouraged competition between them, and, to a lesser extent between Kyrgyz and Tajiks, and that these tensions eventually escalated to the violence in 1990.

Finally, rumors formulated as myths were according to Tishkov (1995: 146) a crucial factor in provoking intergroup aggression, and the degree of group thinking among the participants of the violence was extremely high. According to Tishkov (1995: 146.),

myths played a significant role in both securing in-group mobilization and for the escalation of conflict up to the level of violence.

According to International Crisis Group (2010b: 2), all official inquiries on the events were ultimately classified and no attempts were made to address the root causes of the violence, leading existing tensions to simmer and laying the groundwork for the 2010 events.

4.3 ETHNOPOLITICS AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL HISTORY

After its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has been promoted as a peaceful island of democracy in the region relative to its more volatile and conflict-prone neighbours. Compared to other parts of the Central Asian region, the independent Kyrgyz Republic has carried out deeper economic reforms and created a greater space for civil society and activity of the political opposition than what has been observed among many of the more authoritarian states in its vicinity. However, nepotism, corruption and authoritarianism would become characteristic also of the Kyrgyz regimes, and twice led to violent popular revolts to oust the incumbent president (Anderson 1999: 23; ICG 2010a: 2).

In October of 1990, only months after the events in Osh and while the republic still was a part of the Soviet Union, Askar Akayev was elected president of Kyrgyzstan. Upon independence in 1991, Akayev faced the task of reconciling a country that had recently faced a considerable crisis in terms of the interethnic violence, as well as the process of consolidating the newly independent state. Under the Soviet Union, Kremlin leaders had incorporated numerous representatives of ethnic minorities in the Soviet administrative and political apparatus in the republics, in order to undermine and balance political rivalry based on clan and patronage loyalties (Abazov 1999: 68-69). The nation building process of the newly independent country was however strongly linked to the titular population, and was reinforced by political decisions such as the declaration of Kyrgyz as the state language in 1991 and the replacing of Soviet-era names with Kyrgyz names. Seeking to preserve civic harmony and ethnic peace,

Akayev adopted a political trajectory to balance the prominence of the titular population with protections of the rights of the concerned ethnic minorities (Melvin 2011: 8-9). This became embodied in the official slogan of “Kyrgyzstan – Our Common Home,” and the creation of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, which provided a venue to discuss concerns of minority communities, if only within a tightly structured framework. There were indeed some advances made with regards to the rights of minorities in this era, including new opportunities within the educational sector, and a constitutional amendment of 2001 giving Russian language official status alongside Kyrgyz (Melvin 2011: 8-9). However, there were still clear limits to how far minorities could advance, and integration between the ethnic communities remained limited. According to Melvin (2011: 8-9), Akayev cultivated a loyal Uzbek leadership, while ensuring that the Uzbeks remained without the sufficient unity or leadership to promote stronger claims. Still, the state of interethnic relations and the protection of minority rights significantly deteriorated during his period in power, as the decline in the economy and growing migration of rural Kyrgyz to the cities contributed to increased competition in the public sector.

The first popular uprising, coined *the Tulip revolution*, took place in 2005, and ousted Askar Akayev from power. The charges against Akayev were nepotism, corruption and growing authoritarianism. Replacing Akayev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev ascended to power and assumed presidency of the Kyrgyz Republic (ICG 2010a: 2). Although coming to power on a program of liberal democratic reform, Bakiyev’s regime would come to be characterized by nepotism, corruption and authoritarianism on an even larger scale. In particular, his regime was to be known for the strong control of Bakiyev’s close family and allies¹⁰ over the political, economical and judicial spheres (ICG 2010a: 2). Bakiyev was reelected with over 76% of the votes in 2009, in a snap election strongly criticized by the OSCE for its considerable irregularities (ICG 2010a: 6-7). The election paved the way for a further strengthening of presidential power,

¹⁰ Most notably, Bakiyev’s son Maxim and his brothers Janysh and Marat were considered influential persons in the state apparatus, controlling vital business interests, law enforcement, defense and security, and the judicial system respectively (ICG 2010a: 2).

under the slogan of “consultative democracy” (Melvin 2011: 15).

In contrast to Akayev’s “Common Home”, Bakiyev did not attempt to accommodate the rights and representation of the minorities. Many of the new political leaders were, like Bakiyev, ethnic Kyrgyz from the south, and openly advocated strongly nationalistic views (Melvin 2011: 12). According to Melvin, Bakiyev conversely to Akayev didn’t rely on the political support of the ethnic Uzbeks, and the fact that many of Bakiyev’s close associates and supporters were in direct political and economical competitions with Uzbeks in the south led to an increased pressure on Uzbek communities and businesses. As criminality and corruption spread, also within the police and security forces, Uzbeks started to be pushed out of a range of key areas of employment, notably within the state and public sectors, where the representation of ethnic Uzbeks already was limited. Thus, tensions between the Uzbek community and the regime started to grow. However, the corruption and politics of the Bakiyev regime had increasingly led to public discontent also among the ethnic Kyrgyz (Melvin 2011: 12, 15).

Thus, the representation of Uzbeks in public positions significantly deteriorated under Bakiyev’s rule. Although the key public administration appointments under Akayev were in the hands of the Kyrgyz, there were still some Uzbek deputies, and Uzbeks were also represented in local councils and district administrations. According to Matveeva (2010: 15), in the Akayev era there was an unwritten rule that the ‘number two’ positions would go to minorities, notably Uzbeks. Under Bakiyev the Uzbeks could claim ‘number three’ jobs if they were lucky. Moreover, Melvin (2011: 16) claims that during the Bakiyev era, formal relations with the minorities, especially Uzbeks, were largely ignored, and minority issues increasingly became the domain of the security services and the police rather than the political leadership.

4.4 THE APRIL 2010 REVOLUTION

Demonstrations against the Bakiyev regime started in the city of Naryn in February 2010, after the regime’s decision to privatize an electricity company had led to drastic

price increases (Melvin 2011: 8-9). Demonstrations became frequent and spread also to northern provinces, and on April 6 protesters seized the governor's office in the city of Talas declaring a "People's Government." Bakiyev responded by declaring martial law, and initiated the arrests of the opposition leaders, which infuriated the protesters. On April 7 a mob allegedly consisting of several thousand protesters gathered in front of the White House in Bishkek. The security forces' use of live ammunition to disperse the crowd and stop the protests in Bishkek resulted in 86 people dead and several hundred injured (ICG 2010a: 9-10; KIC 2011: 13). This violent response however did not stop the protests but rather had the opposite effect, and on the evening of April 7 the Bakiyevs escaped to their home town of Jalalabad in the south, before ultimately leaving the country on April 15. A new provisional government consisting of prominent opposition leaders and under the leadership of Rosa Otunbayeva was subsequently declared (KIC 2011: 13).

4.5 MAY: ATTEMPTS AT A COUNTER REVOLUTION

The situation in the country remained tense after the April events in Bishkek, and the epicenter of the political struggle soon moved from Bishkek to the south where the deposed president attempted to rally his supporters and stage a comeback. Himself a southerner, Bakiyev had most of his power base in the south, and still enjoyed considerable support among ethnic Kyrgyz there. Although Bakiyev himself finally fled the country on April 15, attempts among Bakiyev loyalists to disrupt the fragile political balance of the interim government persisted for weeks after the regime change. Particularly the southern city of Jalalabad, home of the Bakiyevs', was hit by a wave of political unrest in May, demonstrating the interim governments' tenuous control over the police and security forces in the south. Most notable of these counter-revolutionary campaigns was an attempt by Bakiyevists on May 13 to seize the regional administration building in Jalalabad, where the help from Uzbek activists was instrumental in restoring order and hindering the old regime from regaining control (ICG 2010b: 7-8).

In particular, the efforts of the southern, predominantly Uzbek party Rodina, headed by the Uzbek businessman and long time foe of the Bakiyevs', Kadyrjan Batyrov¹¹, were crucial in the efforts of quelling the antirevolutionary activities in the south. Prominent leaders of the Uzbek community such as Batyrov had quickly after the revolution declared their support for the new interim government (ICG 2010b: 8). With the provisional government's plans for writing a new Constitution and calling a constitutional referendum as a backdrop, representatives of the Uzbek community allegedly met with members of the interim government and presented claims for wider political and social participation, including representation for ethnic Uzbeks at all levels of government and recognition of Uzbek as a state language (HRW 2010: 20; Melvin 2011: 16). While some hold that the interim government actively negotiated with the Uzbek community for their assistance in consolidating the government's fragile hold on power in the south (see for instance HRW 2010: 20; Melvin 2011: 16), it is uncertain whether the interim government actually requested Batyrov's help or whether he acted independently. Thus, the nature of the relations between the Uzbek community and the interim government remains obscure.

The efforts of Batyrov and his associates were perceived by many Kyrgyz as in the forefront of what was to be regarded as a renewed bid among the ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan for wider political rights (HRW 2010: 20; ICG 2010b: 8). Several incidents involving confrontations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south, including a standoff at Batyrov's Friendship University, led to the declaration of a state of emergency and a curfew in and around Jalalabad city, lasting from May 19 to 1 June. During the events in May four Kyrgyz and two Uzbeks were killed, and 72 were wounded (KIC 2011: 16). Following the unrest in May, prominent members of the interim government distanced themselves from Batyrov, refuting claims of close relations (ICG 2010b: 10). Presumably responding to popular pressure, a trial against

¹¹ According to International Crisis Group (2010b: 8), Batyrov was the most influential Uzbek community leader at the time. In addition to being a former member of parliament and leading the political party Rodina, the wealthy businessman had founded several educational institutions catering mainly to ethnic Uzbeks, such as for instance the People's Friendship University in Jalalabad (ICG 2010b: 8).

Batyrov was launched, and he was found guilty of promoting a separatist agenda, inciting interethnic violence and organizing clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Jalalabad and Osh in June, and convicted *in absentia* to life imprisonment¹² (Radio Free Europe 2012).

4.6 THE INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE OF JUNE 2010

The KIC (2011: 26) holds that the first ten days of June were dominated by an atmosphere of heightened interethnic tensions in the south, with a rise in violent street incidents and local small scale clashes. On the evening of June 10 a fight outside a gambling hall in Osh escalated to large proportions, and led to a rapid mobilization of large crowds of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, of which many armed with sticks, stones and iron bars. The exact nature and reason behind the fight is still unsettled, and it is uncertain to what extent it happened spontaneously or if it was provoked. Attempts by the local police to control and disperse the crowd failed, and shots that were allegedly fired into the air served to further inflame the mood (ICG 2010b:11; KIC 2011: 27). Rumors that Uzbeks had attacked, raped and killed female Kyrgyz at the dormitory of the nearby Osh University¹³, spread via cellphones all around the city and to the surrounding villages at an extraordinary speed, and contributed to a massive mobilization of ethnic Kyrgyz (HRW 2010: 23; ICG 2010b: 11). As the violence spread to other parts of the city and crowds of Kyrgyz mobilized from the surrounding villages, defensive barricades were erected in Uzbek neighborhoods. Violence and attacks persisted from early morning of June 11 throughout June 14, with large scale targeting of Uzbek neighborhoods followed by continued killing, looting, hostage taking, arsons and rape (see e.g. KIC 2011; HRW 2010). Unrest also spread from Osh to the Jalalabad province, with destructions in Jalalabad city and surrounding villages, most notably the village of Bazar-Kurgon. Although the violence in Jalalabad was also of a brutal and destructive character, there were considerably fewer deaths here (ICG 2010b: 11).

¹² According to Radio Free Europe (2012), Batyrov ultimately fled the country, and was granted refugee status in Sweden in November 2011. The life sentence against him was upheld by a Kyrgyz court in Jalalabad province in January 2012.

¹³ According to for instance KIC (2011:28), these rumors have not been substantiated, and it is almost certain that such incidents did not take place.

During four days of violence mobs consisting of mainly Kyrgyz roamed around Osh, Jalalabad and the nearby areas on a destructive rampage, causing massive destruction. According to UNHCR, over 300 000 persons became internally displaced as a result of the violence, out of which most have later returned (UNHCR 2010). Estimates of casualties greatly diverge. While initial accounts claimed that several thousand had been killed, official numbers published by the Kyrgyz Ministry of Health in December 2010 estimate that the number of dead was 418, out of which 266 were Uzbek. The National Commission later reported the total number of dead to be 426. Other later unofficial estimates have adjusted the number to 470 killed, with an even larger percentage of Uzbek victims (KIC 2011: 44). The KIC (2011: 50-51) holds some of the attacks on Uzbek neighborhoods if proven beyond doubt in the court of law, would amount to crimes against humanity.

Questions have been raised about the role of the Kyrgyz authorities in the riot. In particular, rioters' use of military vehicles and the alleged transfer of weapons to Kyrgyz crowds, have raised speculations that some government forces either actively participated in or facilitated attacks on Uzbek neighborhoods (see for instance HRW 2010). According to the ICG (2010b: 14), there were numerous reports that the police either surrendered or voluntarily handed over weapons to crowds of Kyrgyz during the unrest. The nature of the involvement of government forces in the attacks is still unsettled.

5. BRASS: THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH

In this chapter I will analyze to what extent the June 2010 violence in Kyrgyzstan strengthen or weaken Brass' understanding of ethnic riots as elite-led, organized and premeditated. As Brass attaches significant emphasis to the role of conflict entrepreneurs and the actors who sustain tensions and create a readiness for riots, I will focus first and foremost on the discussion of how violence is explained as the result of the manipulation and organization of specific specialized actors.

I will discuss three perspectives of the riot as elite-led. First, I will focus on the narratives arguing that the riot was provoked and instigated by Kyrgyz political elites. This category variably attributes guilt to Bakiyev and the previous regime, and to various criminal elements for their respective roles. Second, I will look at narratives holding Uzbek community leaders responsible for provoking violence. Third and most substantial, I will address the view that violence erupted as a result of the interplay between the actions of various elite actors pursuing their own personal goals and agendas. I will begin the chapter with a brief discussion of *how* the April events and their aftermath created a window of opportunity that could be exploited by various groups and elite actors.

5.1 THE APRIL EVENTS AS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

In a statement on June 15 2010, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay referred to the violence in the south of Kyrgyzstan as seemingly “orchestrated, targeted and well planned” (OHCHR 2010). Some narratives of the June events building on the top-down perspective of ethnic riots variably point to Kyrgyz political elites and Uzbek community leaders as responsible for provoking the violence. Others adopt a more dynamic approach where actors' moves and countermoves shape the dynamics of the riot, and where the outbreak of violence can be explained just as much as a byproduct of domestic political processes as a consequence of underlying motives.

All of these approaches build on the assumption that the events of April 2010 created an opportune situation that could be taken advantage of by certain elite elements to promote or protect their interests.

As indicated, it is pertinent when analyzing the June 2010 riots to look at the political climate in Kyrgyzstan following the developments of April 2010. This can perhaps be viewed as analogous to the preparation phase identified by Brass, which is continuous and thus refers not only to stable, long term characteristics of Kyrgyz society, but also to the situational backdrop specific to the political context preceding and during the riot. More specifically, the top-down approach as argued by Brass focuses on how contextual factors such as the weakening of the state creates a window of opportunity that can be taken advantage of by elites. This perspective is evident in the discussions of the role of Bakiyev and the power struggles in Southern Kyrgyzstan, of the interim government and its efforts to consolidate the power in the south, and of the role and ambitions of Uzbek leaders during the political revolts. These all lend support to the idea that the violence did not erupt solely as an inevitable result of long simmering tensions but rather within a specific context influenced by the political developments in the country. Moreover, the discussion about the linkages between the political developments in April and the interethnic riots in June also relates to the discussion of how intraethnic processes affect interethnic relations, as elaborated on in chapter 3.

As previously cited, Brass claims that while concealing the role and motives of specific actors in provoking violence, riots are generally either designed to appear, or in their aftermath made to look like spontaneous expressions of public opinion. As will be elaborated on in the subsequent sections, the dynamics of the April events created a plethora of potential motives among various actors for letting the June events play out, and for later framing them in ethnic rather than political terms.¹⁴

¹⁴ As stated, this thesis seeks to analyze processes and dynamics leading up to the outbreak of violence. Although a substantial part of Brass' theory of riots as elite led, the question of framing, as exemplified through Brass' third phase of explanation/interpretation, first and foremost refers to processes taking place *after* the execution of the riot, and will therefore not be discussed in depth in this thesis.

When discussing the linkages between the April and June events, it is pertinent to ask whether the interethnic riot in June would have erupted if the political developments in April had not taken place, and to analyze how these events were subsequently exploited by various elite actors. One approach to this question is the view that April led to a lack of control over the south, and that this absence of control contributed to dynamics that ultimately prepared the ground for the June events. According to one informant, the April events led to a decentralization of state power, which created a window for various actors to take advantage of the situation.¹⁵ Central Asia Project Director of International Crisis Group Paul Quinn-Judge also attributes the linkages between April and June to the dynamics created by a weakened state:

I think you can make a causal connection between April and June. The fundamental one I think is the weakening of the state. And naturally what stems from the weakening of the state are various groups that try take advantage of the situation. And these can be legitimate political agendas or illegitimate political agendas.¹⁶

A group of informants agree that the April events caused a lack of control over the south by the interim government, and this lack of control subsequently contributed to the June events.¹⁷ As coined by one informant, the April events created a power vacuum that became a central force in the June events.¹⁸ Pertaining to how this vacuum was exploited, Paul Quinn-Judge observes that "as a result of the weakening of the state there was also an illegitimate political agenda, and that is various groups that were trying to reinforce their position by playing very much an ethnic card".¹⁹ Accordingly, the potential to draw on existing tensions and frame a political conflict along ethnic lines created an opportunity for such actors to move in, especially at a

¹⁵ Kyrgyz academic no.4, personal interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

¹⁶ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, January 21 2011

¹⁷ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

¹⁸ International expert, personal interview, Bishkek, 12 January 2011.

¹⁹ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

time when the control of, and respect for, the central authorities in the south was very low.

While most narratives of the riot as elite-led in the case of Kyrgyzstan rest on the assumption that the dynamics created by the April events and its aftermath opened a window of opportunity for various elites to take advantage of, they diverge on the question of what elites and substantive motivations that took part, and how these motivations transformed from political moves into violent action. Various approaches to this question will be elaborated on in the following sections.

5.2 KYRGYZ ELITES

As elaborated on in chapter 2, Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 434) hold that provocations can be undertaken not only by vulnerable incumbents to deflect intragroup challenges to their position, but also by challengers trying to discredit the incumbents. Judging from the unstable political situation in the country after the April events, and the subsequent struggle between the new and the old political leadership to respectively consolidate and reinstate their power, the latter could be a likely interpretation of the course of events in May and June. This particularly pertains to the counterrevolutionary activities of the Bakiyev clan in the south.

Allegations that the violence in June was instigated by actors associated with the previous regime serve as an example of an interpretative framework placing the interethnic riot in within the framework of a top-down approach. Others emphasize claims that various interest groups with political and thus economic interests in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan found their interests threatened by the regime change in April and therefore had an interest in manipulating existing tensions and destabilizing the region in order to safeguard their own interests (Amnesty 2010: 6). The latter pertains predominantly to claims that certain criminal elements played a part in provoking the violence. Paul Quinn-Judge holds that

On the whole I think it is unlikely that the Uzbeks were trying to push for major

political reinforcement of their political position, and certainly they were not pushing for autonomy. But there were ethnic Kyrgyz politicians who were definitely playing an extremist card, and assumed it was quite an effective thing to do.²⁰

Notably, Brass (1997: 9) as cited holds that when full-fledged riots develop, it can be partly due to either incompetence or lack of will to stop the riots by local politicians and authorities. In the case of the latter, it is plausible to assume that these authorities have an interest in letting the riots be played out, and that they are willing to place a communal, or in this case ethnic, interpretation on the precipitating incidents. Many have questioned the role and complicity of the interim government as well as the police and the security forces in the south, particularly in terms of criticism of the government's efforts to stop the violence once erupted.²¹ One informant observes that

There are claims against the interim government too, who could want to take advantage of eliminating major Kyrgyz parties from upcoming votings, which would improve the interim governments chances of winning more votes, because in the southern parts of the country they didn't have much hopes for much votes.²²

These views support the argument that various actors could have deliberately played on ethnicity as a tool to promote their own interests or otherwise as serving some functional utility.

However, most narratives viewing the events as the result of elites' actions rather focus on the role and interests of the previous regime and of criminal elements in upsetting the balance and weakening the rule of the interim government. As the political turmoil of April 2010 preceded the outburst of interethnic violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan only by two months, speculations were early on posed that the

²⁰ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

²¹ As previously indicated, after April the control of the interim government over police and security forces in the south was tenuous (ICG 2010b: 5). It should therefore not be assumed that the prospective complicity of these forces necessarily implies the complicity of the interim government.

²² Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

violence was a direct consequence, and seemingly a part of, the political struggles for leadership in the country. In particular, building on the counterrevolutionary activities of the previous regime after April, claims that Bakiyev and his supporters played on and exacerbated tensions in the south as part of a scheme to destabilize the interim government and reclaim power, dominated the initial reports on the outbreak of violence.

Elaborating on the argument that elites played role in the violence, one informant refers to the supporters of the former president “who would be interested in anything that would cause trouble in Kyrgyzstan” as an obvious party. This could pertain not only to loyal voters, but perhaps more importantly to various political beneficiaries of Bakiyev’s regime, facing an uncertain future in the face of the new government. The informant holds that “quite frankly, they quite benefitted from this in a way, because some parties, not quite anti-Bakiyev, not quite pro-Bakiyev, took advantage of these events and got some good votes.” Although it is difficult to establish whether the Bakiyev supporters played a role in initiating the violence, the informant finds it plausible that these groups at least sought to take advantage of the chaotic situation once it arose.²³ Paul Quinn-Judge supports the view that there are strong indications that certain provocations were undertaken, although Bakiyev’s role is not provable. As he states, “I still believe there was a strong degree of organization, either waiting for something to happen or looking for a lever to trigger some form of unrest.”²⁴

Some, like the National Commission, still claim that the violence was partly instigated by supporters of the ousted president, who predominantly had his power base in the south (The National Commission 2011). According to the commission, members of the Bakiyev clan were among the central provocateurs of the June violence, as they were discredited after the April uprising and willing to conspire with drug barons, terrorists and leaders of the banned Islamic Movement of Turkestan to destabilize the south. The latter claims of an alleged cooperation between the Bakiyev family and

²³ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

²⁴ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

Islamist forces situated in Afghanistan were also repeated by the State National Security Forces, but appear tenuous and poorly substantiated (ICG 2010b:14-15, Reeves 2011).

Although the Bakiyev family likely had a wish to settle scores with the interim government, another informant however questions the ability of the Bakiyevs' to orchestrate a disruption on a scale as big as the June events.²⁵ This view is supported by Matveeva (2010: 23), who claims that it is unlikely that Bakiyev either had the popularity or saw it as an expedient move to set off the two ethnic groups in the south against each other in the scale seen in June. According to International Crisis Group (2010b: 17-18) there was no significant display of support or allegiance to the deposed president by demonstrators and marauders during the violence, indicating that the ability of the ousted president and his apparatus was limited. Matveeva also holds that the allegations that Bakiyev received support from major criminals to carry out a bigger plan to destabilize the region appear tenuous. In her view, the involvement of the Bakiyevs' was rather related to their role in instigating the disturbances in Jalalabad and Osh in May, where they attempted to stage a counter-coup (Matveeva 2010: 23). Melvin (2010: 22) also refers to the role of Bakiyev loyalists in exacerbating a sense of lawlessness and a feeling that the country was on the edge of chaos and possible civil war in the aftermath of April. However, while he find little evidence to support the claims of a large coordinated conspiracy involving the Bakiyev clan, he holds that elements of the former regime indeed could have been involved in the onset of violence in June through the engagement of "violence specialists" who could inflame the tensions between the two ethnic groups (Melvin 2010: 22).

Notably, accusations that the Bakiyevs or their supporters were somehow behind the June events refer to their alleged linkages to organized crime. The discussion about informal politics and the linkages between politics and organized crime in Kyrgyzstan is of particular interest with regard to the claims that criminal elements played a

²⁵ Independent observer no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 14 January 2011.

central role in the June violence. Such linkages were frequently mentioned by informants when discussing the issue of provocation, organization and conflict entrepreneurs. For instance, an informant claims that it was conventionally known that Bakiyev's government was heavily involved with the criminal underworld, more specifically with drug dealers, with whom the regime traded financial support for impunity. Although this had not been proved, the informant does not exclude that these connections could have been invoked to disturb the balance in the south after the ousting of Bakiyev's regime.²⁶ The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (2011: 71) agrees that criminal groups, often overlapping with other informal non-state groups, most likely maintain close links with the political elites. This especially pertains to the drug trade, where criminal groups allegedly use their political connections to offer impunity to traffickers.

Addressing the role of criminal elements after April, Paul Quinn-Judge holds that

There were also other people who were trying to move into the vacuum that was created by the collapse of the central power, including criminal elements. [...] in the south, or, not only in the south, but in the modern political structures of Kyrgyzstan, the difference between criminal elements and political ones are quite subtle quite often. They have a close interrelationship in many cases, a symbiotic relationship.²⁷

As an informant accentuates, Southern Kyrgyzstan is an area of high crime levels, mainly related to the drug trafficking industry across the borders in the south²⁸. Reports during the recent years have pointed to a growth in organized groups working autonomously within various criminal spheres such as e.g. narcotics and extortion in Kyrgyzstan, especially in the south. According to Melvin (2011: 21-22), there is widespread agreement that the Tulip revolution of 2005 triggered an expansion of criminal activity in the country, closely associated with or even led by the Bakiyev

²⁶ Independent observer no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 14 January 2011.

²⁷ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

²⁸ Kyrgyz academic no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

regime. As an informant coins it, “if you want to rule in Kyrgyzstan you have to have some relations to the drug traffic industry. Everyone knows this.”²⁹ The research conducted by International Crisis Group (2010a: 15) lends support to the claim that such linkages between the previous regime and the drug industry existed, and holds that it was no secret that elements of the regime benefitted from the drug trade. Moreover, it accentuates how the spheres of politics, business and crime in Kyrgyzstan are interconnected and often overlapping. This overlap can be found for instance in the term “businessman,” which in the Kyrgyz context conventionally covers a range from effectively criminal authority figures to respected entrepreneurs (ICG 2010b: 6).

One informant points to Bakiyev’s affiliation with the Uzbek criminal leader and drug lord Aibek Mirsidikov – aka Black Aibek, who was murdered only a few days before the June violence erupted. Black Aibek was according to the informant known for his friendship with Bakiyev’s brothers and his long-standing conflict with Uzbek community leaders. Black Aibek is believed by several to have played a role in fomenting the protests in May, contributing to an atmosphere of heightened tensions that could easily be exploited by various actors. Some claim that it was initially Black Aibek who attributed blame to Batyrov an episode involving the burning of Bakiyev family’s estates in their native village of Teyit, knowing that this incident would provoke the ethnic Kyrgyz ³⁰ (see for instance Shermatova 2010). According to the informant, the murder of Black Aibek could indicate that covert struggles between criminal groupings were taking place, and suggests that some criminal groups “simply lit the fire.” As people were quite ready to accept the rumors, the events rapidly escalated. Whether these rumors were planted deliberately remains uncertain, but the informant however maintains that “the trigger was quite well organized.”³¹

²⁹ Independent observer no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 14 January 2011.

³⁰ As will be elaborated on later, this particular episode allegedly played a central role in provoking ethnic Kyrgyz, and is described by International Crisis Group (2010b: 9) as a “Rubicon in ethnic relations.”

³¹ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

5.3 UZBEK ELITES

For many in Kyrgyzstan, determining who initiated the violence has become synonymous with who is to blame for the whole conflict. Initiative in the initial phases of violence is by several sources identified as lying with ethnic Uzbeks turning on ethnic Kyrgyz, with Uzbeks allegedly responsible for many of the first attacks (Melvin 2011: 25; HRW 2010: 23). Additionally, discussions about the increased activity of Uzbek community leaders and the alleged secessionist ambitions created fertile grounds for speculations that the events were an expression of a bigger plan among Uzbek community leaders to take advantage of the situation in the country after April. This pertains to the previously mentioned narrative referred to by ICG, which holds the Uzbeks as well prepared and responsible for premeditated malice. As mentioned, according to this narrative the Uzbeks were heavily armed and were planning to strengthen their political position by taking the political leadership by surprise.

In particular, the National Commission goes far in attributing culpability to Uzbek community leaders alongside the previous regime, and holds that the riots constituted a “planned, large-scale provocation, oriented towards the splitting of Kyrgyzstan and disrupting the unity of its people”. Allegedly, the events had been planned already from mid May when several instigators had made provocative statements. In the words of the commission, behind the provocation was notably “nationalistically-minded leaders of the Uzbek community” seeking to take advantage of the power vacuum after the April revolution to advance their own political demands (The National Commission 2011; Reeves 2011).

While many point to the increased activity of Uzbek community leaders after April as a factor that significantly influenced interethnic tensions, opinions diverge on to what extent this increased political participation was driven by a conscious strategy of Uzbek community leaders to become a political player pursuing their own agenda, or whether they simply became a pawn in a domestic political power struggle. Some informants adhere to the first view, and claim that the engagement of Uzbek political leaders in the interim government’s struggle to consolidate power in the south

reflected an underlying strategy of the Uzbek community leaders, expressed in the form of a renewed bid for political rights. For instance, a state representative claims that the domestic power struggles provided Uzbek community leaders with a window of opportunity, in which they thought they could position themselves in the political sphere and appear as a third power. The wish to interfere in the political landscape ultimately turned fatal.³² Another informant attributes the Uzbeks' motivation to get involved to other dynamics:

Finding themselves continually disadvantaged in case of a change in the political system, it could be that the political uncertainty of the April events had created a desire among the Uzbek leadership to create a base of its own and "play independently."³³

One observer claims that certain elite actors, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, are at fault for trying to exploit the situation to further their interests and political goals, and used the population as a tool to implement or at least try to implement these goals. According to the observer, "we have this factor since some leaders of ethnic groups tried to come to power." The informant holds that

I live here, I've lived here for a long time, and I have neighbors [...]. I mean, yes, there are some [who supported the violence], but if you look at it on the general level, kind of, general population, they're against. They don't want to have this. Even after this.. I interviewed a lot of people [...] including Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, and most of them, these humble people, they said "we don't need this kind of -", and some ethnic Uzbeks, they even blame their own leaders, Uzbek leaders, for this conflict. And they perceive themselves, ethnic Uzbeks, as victims of their leaders. They might say these kinds of things because they are afraid of blaming Kyrgyz because they are in a bad position, but maybe it's true because they don't really want any conflict with neither Kyrgyz or the other ethnic groups, and these guys came and used them as a tool.³⁴

³² State representative, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

³³ Academic no. 4, personal interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

³⁴ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

Another informant problematizes the role of Uzbek elites vis-a-vis the Uzbek community, and points to the obscure relations between the sphere of politics, business and crime as a factor complicating the involvement of the Uzbek community in the domestic power struggle. According to the informant,

The Uzbeks probably for certain leverage or certain purposes decided to support the government. I don't think it was the Uzbek community but certain community leaders, and in Kyrgyzstan, be it Uzbeks or Kyrgyz, usually all leaders are semi-bandits, gangsters, semi-businessmen, semi-politicians. Usually they always have tens or hundreds of young guys, sportsmen. And it was said that the Uzbeks had that in that case.³⁵

This contributed to doubts about the motivation of the Uzbek community, and of Batyrov in particular, for actively siding with the interim government after the revolution in April. In addition, other episodes also gave fuel to the fears among many Kyrgyz that there was a bigger agenda underlying the Uzbeks' involvement. For instance, interviews with Batyrov broadcast on the Uzbek language channels Osh TV and Mezon TV in May were interpreted by many Kyrgyz, including high ranking Kyrgyz politicians, as inflammatory (Melvin 2011: 17; Matveeva 2010: 20). Despite the fact that claims for autonomy was never pronounced in these interviews, rumors contributed to coining them as a call for autonomy (KIC 2011: 22-23). According to Matveeva (2010: 19), many perceived the efforts by Batyrov and the Rodina party to quell the attempted counter-revolution in the south as "an Uzbek display of force and a statement of their political intent". The question of whether there existed secessionist ambitions among Uzbek leaders has been a central issue in this regard, and has been an important basis for many of the allegations against the Uzbek community and its leadership for provoking the violence.

³⁵ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

5.4 ACTION – REACTION: A RESULT OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ELITES

While the sections above focus on narratives of culpability and entrepreneurship of specific actors, another approach to the interethnic violence still within the realm of the instrumentalist approach is the view that the violence did not erupt within an isolated context of one actor's motivations and actions, but rather as a result of a composite interplay between various elite actors and motivations. This builds on the assumption that elites' motivations and actions do not take place in a vacuum, but is rather dynamically evolving in response to the actions of other elites. Although certain actors as shown could plausibly have had both an agenda and the opportunity to create chaos and incite violence, some focus on how the motivations and actions of specific actors and groups arose from, or were reinforced by, a chess-like pattern of action-reaction where the move by one player affects the subsequent moves of the other players. As will be discussed, many observers point to exactly such interplay between various actors as a factor precipitating the outbreak of violence.

Before approaching the discussion of how the combined actions of elite actors intentionally or unintentionally led to the outbreak of violence, I will however elaborate on to the question of to what extent the violence was perceived as premeditated. This pertains to features of the violence itself, as well as the prevalence of rumors in the preceding and early phases of the violence. Many informants point to the violence appearing systematic and well organized as evidence that certain specialized actors must have played an important role in the unfolding of the events. This relates to the presence of so-called “fire tenders” and conversion specialists as argued by Brass, which influence not only the initial outbreak of violence, but also its rapid escalation once started. Referring to the role of rumors in provoking violence, one informant holds that

[...] the rumor was there, and the rumor consistently reports about people shooting both against Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, so-called snipers. [...] That's really the case of

purposeful escalation of the violence. You kill both of them, and then they start killing each other.³⁶

Another informant who was living close to the Cheremushki micro-rayon³⁷ in Osh at the time of the riot, tells how the rumors had spread and gained ground already a month before the violence broke out. When going to work in a neighboring region, he repeatedly started getting questions from his colleagues of whether “a war in Cheremushki had started,” and although reassuring them that the situation was as normal there, the rumors persisted for the whole month.³⁸ This could indicate that the violence was in fact expected and did not erupt spontaneously. A Kyrgyz NGO representative also cites various witness accounts referring to an unexplained presence of extra-locals in the mainly Uzbek village of Bazar-Kurgon in Jalalabad in the period preceding the violence. This also lends support to the view that some degree of organization and preparation was in place. According to the NGO representative, observations were made by local human rights activists that a group of strangers had arrived in the village, organized some people and set up arms provisions. Allegedly, similar reports had also been made from Osh.³⁹ Another informant refers to claims from witnesses in Osh that a lot of non-local people came to the city in June, people who “looked not like citizens of Osh,” and who participated in the violence. The identity of these people was unknown, and the locals referred to them simply as “not ours.”⁴⁰ The informant interprets the presence of these extra-locals as an indication that the riot to some extent was planned and organized.

Pertaining to the latter, Melvin (2011: 26-27) holds that the evolution of the violence suggests there was some degree of preparation and mobilization by both

³⁶ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

³⁷ Cheremushki micro-rayon is a predominantly Uzbek neighborhood in central Osh. Cheremushki was one of the worst affected *mahallas* in Osh during the violence (Amnesty 2010).

³⁸ State representative, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

³⁹ Representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, group interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

⁴⁰ Kyrgyz human rights activist, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

ethnic groups, as well as by parts of the local administrations and the security forces in the south. This predominantly relates to the patterns of the violence, namely factors such as the selective targeting of persons, properties and settlements on the basis of ethnic identity, reports of pre-emptive strikes and the local availability of weapons in some areas. ICG (2010b: 12) also observes that the mobs that roamed around Osh during the days of the violence, for the most part were not just mindlessly set on random destruction, but rather appeared well organized and well supplied. Some of this perceived mobilization is attributed to the presence of provocateurs who were seemingly not members of the local communities.

As indicated, rumors of possible riots started spreading already in May, and contributed to exacerbating tensions in the south. Most substantial is the claim that the spread of rumors and subsequent mobilization as soon as the violence had started, was of such a speed and scope that it is hard to imagine that there had been no level of planning and organization involved. For instance, an unsubstantiated rumor of rape and murder of a Kyrgyz girl by ethnic Uzbeks rapidly escalated to widespread accounts of mass rape and murder of female Kyrgyz by male Uzbeks in the female dormitory of the Osh State University, and provoked a mass mobilization by ethnic Kyrgyz from the neighboring villages around Osh (HRW 2010: 26; KIC 2011: 28). To what extent this rumor was planted deliberately or simply arose in all the confusion surrounding the initial phases of the violence is uncertain. However, it is established that these rumors played a crucial part in mobilizing people, and in the subsequent escalation of violence. According to the KIC (2011: 28), “the speed with which the rumor of this incident spread throughout Osh city and Osh Province in the very early hours of 11 June was, even in the age of mobile telecommunications, extraordinary.” Moreover, Amnesty International (2010: 8) cites reports claiming that large crowds had been brought in to Osh and Bazar-Kurgon from surrounding villages, and that there were allegedly recruiters travelling around Kyrgyz neighborhoods to mobilize the Kyrgyz, providing them with food, shelter, weapons and pay. According to information provided to

Amnesty by unofficial sources, the mobilized men were also supplied with alcohol and in some instances narcotics. This could indicate that a certain degree of organization was undertaken in order to strengthen and encourage mobilization, and to weaken inhibitions to violence.

Some factors indicate that the violence did not erupt as a result of one actor's isolated actions but rather as a result of several factors, notably the interplay between various elite actors. For instance, some observers are ambiguous when it comes to seeing the mobilization of the Uzbeks merely as an expression cynical opportunism of certain elite actors. Rather, they emphasize how the increased activity of parts of the Uzbek community after April led the Uzbeks to become a player in a domestic political game, which subsequently changed the dynamics of the field. Moreover, as mentioned some observers focus on how this mobilization was rather *perceived* and perhaps even misread by ethnic Kyrgyz as reflecting an underlying agenda of the Uzbeks. An informant views the mobilization of parts of the Uzbek community as contingent on the structure of the political system:

I think one of the reasons why this inequality came to the extent we have seen in Kyrgyzstan now is because elites and leaders of these ethnic groups, they were trying to find certain proper channels to be included in the political system, but the whole rules of the game and the structure of these channels were decided by the core of the political system, which was created by Kyrgyz as an ethnic group.⁴¹

The KIC (2011: 22) claims that Uzbek community leader Kadyrjan Batyrov's successful attempt to inspire parts of the Uzbek community, especially youths, to take an active part in the Kyrgyz politics inadvertently created divisions in society through differentiating between a "them" and "us", which was easily interpreted by Kyrgyz as having an ethnic connotation. This also led Batyrov's calls for the Uzbeks to organize themselves in order to guarantee a sense of public order and security that the state security services had failed to produce in May, to create suspicion about his motives.

⁴¹ Kyrgyz academic no. 4, personal interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

As one informant argues, the developments of April seemed to have the effect that the Uzbek leadership no longer managed to communicate clearly to the wider public their prospective role in the new political system, thus creating insecurity among ethnic Kyrgyz.⁴² Additionally, an informant identifies another exacerbating factor, namely that "there was a part of the population in Southern Kyrgyzstan not accepting this interim government, seeing it as an usurpation of power."⁴³

As indicated, several observers see the June events as results of the interplay between various factors, where the mobilization of the Uzbek community was only a constituent factor. Moreover, several informants accentuate that the Uzbeks didn't initially play a role in April, but first became active later, when the position of the interim government was threatened. One informant states that

[...] It was obvious that after April they became active, and the reason was that in Southern Kyrgyzstan the new government was very weak. President Bakiyev flew to Southern Kyrgyzstan, and even if he was not extremely popular there, the inacceptance of this interim government in the south was huge, and during those events in May the Uzbek community became the main supporter for this new government against the Kyrgyz in Southern Kyrgyzstan who did not like this interim government. Many explain the escalation of violence exactly in this context.⁴⁴

Central Asia expert Neil Melvin is one of the people who view the interethnic violence in the context of a broader political conflict. In an interview with Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), Melvin states that despite existing tensions, the source of the violence was rather the power struggle between different political factions over control of the state and the domestic, essentially intraethnic struggle to remove the former president and his allies from power. When the opposition called on Uzbek community leaders for help, the violent confrontations provoked by the domestic power-struggle spilled over into ethnic relations and the violence became ethnicized

⁴² Academic no. 4, personal interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011

⁴³ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁴⁴ Academic, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

(Mukhametrakhimova 2011). The KIC (2011: 13) holds that the political vacuum in the south after the fall of Bakiyev's regime resulted in a three-way power struggle between supporters of the provisional government, supporters of the ousted president and representatives of the Uzbek community, where the provisional government actively sought the support of the Uzbeks in the south to secure a stronghold in the region. The question of how the threshold was crossed from political mobilization to violent mobilization in these arguments however remains uncertain. The same pertains to the dynamics of heightened interethnic tensions, notably how these translated into an outbreak of violence.

Many informants point to an informal alliance that allegedly was formed between members of the interim government and leaders of the Uzbek community, as particularly influential with regards to the subsequent developments. According to one informant, the political elites in Kyrgyzstan were playing a very situational game of incorporating ethnic minorities and alienating them, and these two strategies of incorporating and alienating them went hand in hand.⁴⁵ Regarding the participation of Batyrov and Rodina in quelling the Bakiyevs' counter-revolutionary activities in May, researchers like Melvin (2011: 16-17) and Matveeva (2010: 19) claim that an informal agreement was made between Batyrov and members of the interim government, where the participation of Uzbeks to help ensure the control of the interim government over the south was to be exchanged for a promise of the consideration of Uzbek rights and aspirations in the areas of language and education in the drafting of the new constitution. As addressed in chapter 4, Kyrgyz political leaders would later deny any such connections with Batyrov. One approach to the violence is thus that the Uzbeks became a pawn in domestic political game. If such a tacit agreement indeed took place, the subsequent reaction by the interim government could thus signal that its initial outreach to the Uzbeks was one driven by self interest rather than by a genuine intent to promote interethnic accord and to include the Uzbek community in the political sphere. This seems particularly plausible judging from the fact that the Uzbeks' claims

⁴⁵ Kyrgyz academic no. 3, personal interview, Bishkek, 12 January 2011.

were not ultimately included in the new constitution. Thus, this lends support to the perspective that the violence can be explained as a by-product, if not means, of the political elite's struggle to stay in power.

Although a thorough discussion of the importance of patronage networks and informal politics in Kyrgyzstan is beyond the scope of this thesis⁴⁶, a few observations made by informants serve as a useful backdrop for understanding the potential and opportunities for criminal networks to exploit the power vacuum. For instance, one informant holds that while politics in Kyrgyzstan previously was dominated by informal competition between various patronage networks outside of the official institutions, today the patronage networks have been institutionalized in the political system in the form of political parties. This, according to the informant, implies that the political parties today to some extent are ruled by personal ties and interests rather than by ideology.⁴⁷ Another informant observes that the phenomenon of personalized politics leads to influence in the political sphere being the most efficient means of protecting business. This ultimately contributes to obscuring the boundaries between politics and business, and reinforces a dynamic where political power becomes a subsidiary of personal interests.⁴⁸ Stemming from these dynamics, a Kyrgyz human rights NGO claim that there is no bridge connecting the state and the people, leading for instance to law enforcement organs not serving the interests of the people, but rather the interests of the state apparatus. This lack of accountability has resulted in the emergence of various interest groups, including criminal networks.⁴⁹

One informant identifies the redistribution of resources in the south as one of the underlying causes of the riot, as reflected through the seizure by ethnic Kyrgyz of Uzbek property and businesses during and after the violence.⁵⁰ This redistribution of

⁴⁶ An elaboration on the dynamics informal politics and patronage networks in Kyrgyzstan can be found in Collins (2006).

⁴⁷ Kyrgyz academic no.1, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁴⁸ Independent observer no.1, personal interview, Bishkek, 10 January 2011.

⁴⁹ Representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, group interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

⁵⁰ Representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, group interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

resources can be viewed as linked not only to the interests of ordinary people, but also those of criminal groupings. As pointed out by another informant, it is likely that criminal actors triggered or at least exploited the situation.⁵¹ International Crisis Group (2010b: 6) holds that a regime change in Kyrgyzstan implies a whole network of patronage to be restructured, covering not only politics, but also often business and the criminal underworld. Local experts interviewed by EurasiaNet suggest that the breakdown of state authority in the south after April sparked an “underworld turf war” which contributed to inciting the interethnic violence. An interpretation is that gangs aiming to alter the local criminal balance-of-power didn’t initiate, but rather used the violence as a cover for their own actions (EurasiaNet 2010). Building on the alleged linkages between politics and business, as well as the potential motives of a range of elite actors, several informants point to interests predominantly of southern Kyrgyz and of criminal elements to rearrange the ethnic and financial balance in the south in order to gain ownership over Uzbek owned businesses in the south.

It is possible that the chaotic period in the south after April was perceived by criminal groups as a time of threat, and prompted them to engage in preemptive violence in order to protect or further their interests. Elaborating on the idea of a turf war, some experts believe that the breakdown of state authority after April destroyed a fragile balance between criminal groups that had been created during Bakiev’s rule, and led to a power struggle which in turn contributed to inciting interethnic violence (Melvin 2011: 21). The Kyrgyz Government supports the thesis that the internal criminal redistribution of influence had a direct impact on fomenting the conflict and organizing provocations and holds that these criminal groups, allegedly closely linked to the previous regime, “perceived a threat to their interests and to this end used the interethnic conflict to redistribute their spheres of influence” (The Government of Kyrgyzstan 2011).

⁵¹ Academic no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

In addition, International Crisis Group (2010b: 10) claims that a perceived competition by a “Batyrov-backed popular militia” to ambitious politicians and businessmen who wanted to take advantage of the power vacuum after the fall of the Bakiyev clan, could also have influenced the dynamics in the south. It has also been suggested that actors who wanted to incite tensions in the south could have “set Batyrov up” and encouraged him to “a level of activism that would provoke many Kyrgyz nationalists” (ICG 2010b:10). This view supports the approach that several interests and motives could have been in play and contributed to the June violence.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have tried to address to what extent the interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan is explained as the result of the premeditation and instigation of various elite actors. The analysis of the 2010 interethnic violence as top-down and elite instigated builds on the precondition that the events of April created a window of opportunity that could be exploited by various elite actors. I have discussed narratives focusing on the actions and motivations of Kyrgyz elites, notably the former regime and criminal elements; Uzbek elites and the interplay between the actions and motivations of various elites respectively. I have discussed perspectives on how the various interests of elite actors can have created a motive for these actors to exploit the window of opportunity created by the events of April. Such motives can for instance be a desire among the previous regime to reinstate its power, a wish among Uzbek elites to enter the domestic political scene, or an internal turf war between various criminal groups. I have also elaborated on to what extent rumors and other indicators of organization are interpreted by observers as evidence that the violence was premeditated.

6. HOROWITZ: THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

In this chapter I aim to discuss Horowitz' bottom-up approach to ethnic violence in light of the case of Kyrgyzstan. More specifically, building on Horowitz' view of ethnic violence as a genuinely spontaneous expression of mass sentiment taking place within the frames of already existing tensions, I aim to analyze to what extent underlying hostilities between the ethnic groups served as a precondition for the June violence, and how such hostilities may have deteriorated into violence as a result of specific triggers and contextual conditions.

To approach the question of whether the June 2010 violence can be explained as spontaneous and mass led, I will first analyze the presence of a precondition of a polarized atmosphere with underlying ethnic tensions, as hypothesized by Horowitz. Factors that will be discussed are notably demographical factors, socioeconomic disparities, ethnopolitics and integration. As the understanding of the reasons behind the tensions is crucial to the analysis of how the violence could erupt and how it could escalate like it did, emphasis will be on the discussion of these reasons. Second, I will analyze the mechanisms through which an underlying ethnic conflict could transform into spontaneous violence. In particular, I will discuss the presence of the three remaining variables identified by Horowitz, namely a response to events that provoke strong emotions among one of the ethnic groups, an experienced sense of justification for killing, and an assessment of reduced risks of violence encouraging people to act.

6.1 DIMENSIONS OF UNDERLYING TENSIONS

While rejecting the crass deterministic view of ethnic violence as an inevitable result of interethnic tensions, Horowitz (2001: 15) as previously cited holds that ethnic riots are "neither a perfectly crisp dramatization of antecedent conflict nor a wholly autonomous process that bears no relationship to enduring sources of tension." Rather,

Horowitz' approach to violence as mass driven implies the presence of a polarized environment building on an underlying ethnic conflict, expressed through hostile sentiments and triggering actions. Another implication of Horowitz' approach is that the normal condition in a society is conflictual, and that in a condition of relative peacefulness, the underlying conflict is simply being kept in check by the institutional constraints provided by the state. Thus, the weakening of these institutional constraints serves as a precondition for tensions to escalate and lead to violence. This forms a fruitful point of departure for discussing the role interethnic tension, more specifically how various factors may have affected interethnic relations over time, and to what extent such factors have contributed to creating a polarized environment with underlying tensions between the two ethnic groups.

Observers point to significant similarities between the violence of 1990 and that of 2010. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that these riots erupted in the very same region, both with Osh city as the epicenter of violence. Moreover, both shared features in terms of dynamics and scope of the violence. As pointed out by Reeves (2010a), international media were quick to categorize the outbreak of violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 as an "interethnic conflict in which deep-seated national antagonisms have erupted in a tinderbox region." Paul Quinn-Judge holds that one of the most striking points in common between the riots is that both took place at the time of the major weakening of a previously strong central state.⁵² Leader of the Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, Kimmo Kiljunen, also refers to this power vacuum as an obvious common denominator for the events in 1990 and 2010. According to Kiljunen, it could indeed be said that underlying problems had still not been dealt with after 1990, which ultimately lay the grounds for a continued presence of interethnic tensions today.⁵³ One informant argues that the 2010 events was one of the consequences of 1990 because the underlying conflict that eventually escalated into violence in 1990 was never properly solved, but merely frozen by the Soviet invasion. According to the informant, the "ethnic issue" was politically overlooked since the 1990s, leaving

⁵² Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

⁵³ Kimmo Kiljunen, conversation, Astana, 13 January 2012.

tensions to simmer and ultimately laying the foundations for a new violent confrontation in 2010.⁵⁴ The cited views lend support to the view that there is a jungle beneath the civilized surface, a readiness for conflict to erupt in the absence of a state structure to contain tensions. Moreover, they suggest that the events of April did indeed play an important role with regards to the later developments in the south.

There is relatively broad agreement among informants and in reports about the existence of significant tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities before June 2010. Many of the informants hold that certain aspects of the country's contemporary history have served to institutionalize differences and inequalities between the titular population and the Uzbek minority in the political and economic spheres, laying the foundations for a social stratification along ethnic lines. Some informants refer to year-long tensions simmering between the two ethnic groups, claiming for instance that "Kyrgyz and Uzbeks always had some conflict of interest in the south, and the differences were not only language, traditions and culture, but also economic way of life".⁵⁵ Even in the case of a provocation by elite actors, an informant states that "if there weren't these existing tensions, any kind of trigger, anybody trying to settle something wouldn't have caused a fire".⁵⁶

The explanations for the persisting tensions are however various, and although rarely diverging, they tend to emphasize different aspects of interethnic relations, ranging from socioeconomic disparities to demography and urbanization. Although the reasons are seemingly many and composite, some factors are frequently cited as particularly important in influencing the interethnic relations. These factors are for instance migrational patterns and demographic composition, historical, cultural and socioeconomic differences, grievances and dynamics created by previous conflict. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, many of these factors appear linked. As the scope of this thesis does not allow for a thorough discussion of all such factors, I will focus predominantly

⁵⁴ Independent observer no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 14 January 2011.

⁵⁵ Kyrgyz academic no.1, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁵⁶ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

on to what extent interethnic relations have been influenced by demographical features, socioeconomical disparities, ethnopolitics and level of integration.

6.1.1 Demography and socioeconomic disparities

Many refer to factors such as the different traditional orientation of the two ethnic groups, that is, the Kyrgyz as a traditionally nomadic people and the Uzbeks as sedentary and urbanized, as having created and institutionalized a legacy of interethnic tension. Those identifying the nomadic-settled dimension as the underlying cause of interethnic tensions refer first and foremost to the implications of these differences with regards to sociopolitical and economic development. More specifically, they argue that differences in the orientation of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have led to a differential development among the ethnic communities with regard to economic- and political positions. In short, the argument goes that the historical divide between the nomadic Kyrgyz and the sedentary Uzbeks has translated into a wide class distinction, creating increased pressure and competition over resources and engendering resentment and even jealousy among the ethnic communities. Thus, it is economic disparities that lie at the core of persisting tensions between the two ethnic groups, and ultimately led to the outbreak of violence in 2010 (see for instance Sanghera 2010).

An informant draws the line from historical differences to contemporary Kyrgyzstan, notably to the groups' respective domination of different spheres in society, and argues that the historical orientations have led to not only economic disparities, but also a differential access to and participation in different spheres of society. According to the informant, such a division exists in Osh today, where the Uzbeks dominate the sphere of business while the Kyrgyz dominate the state structure, and both groups are restricted in their rights and opportunities to penetrate into each others' spheres. This has accordingly caused considerable tension between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks locally in the south⁵⁷. This argument refers to the commonly cited point that the ethnic Kyrgyz population over years and through various ethnopolitical processes has come to

⁵⁷ Representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, group interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

dominate state structures and the political sphere, with very limited Uzbek participation in this domain, while the Uzbeks have come to dominate the business sector in Southern Kyrgyzstan. Several informants relate this to how patterns of settlement have left the two groups with different preconditions for access to markets and other fora of economic development, and thus in competition over economic or material resources.

Another factor identified by an informant as exacerbating tensions is related to the settlement patterns of the ethnic communities, and focuses on the urban migration of ethnic Kyrgyz in search of work in the cities.⁵⁸ Starting in the 1980s, the wave of spontaneous and uncontrolled urbanization of young Kyrgyz, often ending up as squatters on unoccupied land, is described as an important component in reinforcing social problems and heightening interethnic tensions, resulting in increased pressure, grievances and heightened competition due to the resulting resource- and land shortages. According to Anderson (1999: 43), it was such urban immigrants who subsequently played a key role in the interethnic riot of 1990, and who many feared might later facilitate a repetition of the riot.

Although many informants as indicated identify socioeconomic differences between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz as a salient feature in Southern Kyrgyzstan, Esenaliev and Steiner (2011) in their research on the relative economic welfare of Kyrgyz and Uzbek households however argue that there is in fact little evidence for a higher welfare of Uzbeks compared to Kyrgyz in urban areas and in the south where the violence took place. This according to Esenaliev and Steiner, clearly contrasts with both the image presented in the national media as well as the common perceptions held by ethnic Kyrgyz. Elaborating on the view that socioeconomic conditions affect interethnic tensions and exacerbate a proneness to conflict and violence, some refer to the overall economic situation in Kyrgyzstan and in the south in particular, as the basis for grievances and tensions. For instance, Paul Quinn-Judge points to the overall

⁵⁸ Kyrgyz academic no.1, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

economic situation as influencing the interethnic relations in the south. However, these tensions are exacerbated not only by the collapse of the economy, but also factors such as educational level and the high number of young persons in the population. In the words of Quinn-Judge,

Anecdotally it is reasonable to assume that the continuing grim decline in the economic situation in the south helped to sharpen tensions between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Moreover, tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks I feel were strongly exacerbated by not just the collapse of the economy, but also the collapse of the educational system. So essentially, when you have a large mass of young people – demographically the country is young – who have education that gives them no skills whatsoever, no reasoning skills, they have the absolute basic education. The system was atrocious. And they're unemployed. So you already have some very unpleasant background, fertile ground for tensions.⁵⁹

Pertaining to the level of education and unemployment, he claims that

[...] because of the collapse of education, because of the lack of employment, you do have people who think relatively primitively, we're going into the lowest common denominator of ethnic perceptions because of the deterioration of the economy and the social deterioration of the south. So you don't have to take very sophisticated arguments.⁶⁰

One informant refers to corruption as a problem that has reinforced the tensions between the groups. The informant argues that the relative wealth of the Uzbeks vis-a-vis the Kyrgyz is not only the source of jealousy, but it has also semented differences in terms of opportunities available to the groups, notably through to the access to corruption. According to the informant, as the Uzbeks generally are better positioned economically, they can for instance afford to pay bribes to municipality leaders to undertake measures in order to improve their living conditions, which the Kyrgyz

⁵⁹ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

⁶⁰ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

often cannot. Differences become very visible when communities living side by side have significantly different living conditions, and these differences, although caused by the prevalence of corruption, ultimately end up being framed in ethnic terms. As the informant illustrates:

[..] Imagine this community not having any water system for example, it's a village and there's no gas supply, there is no canalization, nothing. And the Uzbeks, they were very hard working so they have money, so they would just go to this head of the community municipality and say "so we have this money, so why won't you help us to have these gas pipes or water pipes in our neighborhood, in our mahalla?" for example. "And of course we will pay you." So he gets bribed by the Uzbeks, and he will of course do in return what he was asked to, to improve their living conditions. But at the same time it's not happening for the Kyrgyz, they live in the same communities, the same village, but they still live without any gas, without any water, without anything. Because they can't afford bribing the Kyrgyz head of the municipality, but Uzbeks can.⁶¹

Building on the example above, it is plausible that factors such as corruption are not only likely to lead to jealousy, but can also contribute to a feeling of injustice among the disadvantaged parties.

6.1.2 Ethnopolitics and integration

Just as unemployment is conventionally believed to cause grievances, limited possibilities to influence the political system and attain elite positions are also widely regarded as a cause of grievances and subsequently tensions⁶². Pertaining to the situation of the Uzbek minority, their underrepresentation in key administrative positions and certain sectors of the public sector is portrayed by many informants as one of the main grievances of the Uzbek community, and a factor undermining a full

⁶¹ Independent observer no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 14 January 2011.

⁶² For an elaboration on the correlations between employment, youth and proneness for conflict, see Urdal (2004).

integration of the ethnic minority.⁶³ As an informant states, “for example, Uzbeks are less represented in government structures. This is a problem, because many ethnic Uzbeks graduate from University and they can’t find any employment in this government. This really is a problem for them.”⁶⁴ Paul Quinn-Judge also refers to a narrative of a fairly constant trend that ethnic Uzbeks are being squeezed out of their positions, mostly in the south but also in the north.⁶⁵

Research conducted by McFarlane and Torjesen (2007: 13) confirms that there is a clear underrepresentation of Uzbeks in local administrations and at the national level, which is a central factor exacerbating continuing animosity between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. As briefly addressed in chapter 4, the Uzbeks’ access to the political apparatus has tended to be more limited than that of the titular population, some of which is attributed to the ethnopolitics of the post Soviet era, and particular that under Bakiyev. Although Kyrgyzstan according to the 2007 Electoral Law has reserved quotas for minorities which guarantees the Uzbek community some degree of participation⁶⁶, Uzbeks still lack access to the decision-making functions of the executive branch (KIC 2011: 18). For instance, the period preceding the June violence was characterized by a significant underrepresentation of Uzbeks in higher administrative positions both locally and nationally. There are also limited numbers of Uzbek officers in the police, army and national security service, and even lower representation in the judicial and prosecution services, particularly in the south (KIC 2011:18). As the KIC also accentuates, it is difficult to establish whether this

⁶³ According to the KIC (2011: 18), there are for instance limited numbers of Uzbek officers in the police force, army, national security services and judicial and prosecution services, and certain barriers allegedly exist both in the judiciary, prosecution, law enforcement and intelligence services toward employment of ethnic Uzbeks.

⁶⁴ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

⁶⁵ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

⁶⁶ The provision holds that at least 15% of the parties’ candidates must be of non-Kyrgyz ethnicity. However, it does not regulate where these candidates should be placed numerically on the party lists, nor is a proportional division of such mandates between the minorities prescribed (see ODIHR 2010). According to an informant, this provision however only ensures minority representation on party lists, and does not provide any insurance that minorities must in fact be represented in the parliament as well (interview with representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, Bishkek, 13 January 2011).

underrepresentation is because of formal or informal barriers to participation or merely disinclination.

Pertaining to the limits to employment for highly educated Uzbek in the state structures, an informant holds that the Uzbeks are effectively denied access to certain kind of resources, including administrative resources and representation in the state apparatus. This most likely has led to a feeling among the Uzbeks that they are victims of this situation. However, the informant holds that there exists a similar feeling of injustice among ethnic Kyrgyz as well:

[...] Whereas ethnic Kyrgyz, they feel themselves as victims of the situation as well, because of the fact that they are, at least in their perception, in a lower economic position in comparison with ethnic Uzbeks, because many ethnic Kyrgyz live in remote areas, and when they come into these big cities they have to kind of rent apartments from ethnic Uzbeks, and they live much worse than ethnic Uzbeks. And since nationalism since the breakup of the Soviet Union has grown, especially after these ethnic events, they feel that “well, we’re living in Kyrgyzstan, and we are living much worse than people from other ethnicities. If you look at for instance Russia, when you go there as gastarbeiter, you see that Russians, well, it’s unimaginable that Russians live worse than others, including Kyrgyz. [...] And here we come to our own country, and we cannot live better. And they perceive themselves as victims of this situation, and they at least try to find someone that is responsible for their bad condition.”⁶⁷

Such feelings are likely to have contributed to exacerbating tensions, and perhaps laid the foundation for a feeling among ethnic Kyrgyz that they were unfairly treated and disadvantaged in their own country. As will later be discussed, it is plausible that such an underlying feeling of injustice could have led to the later resort to violence being regarded as justified.

⁶⁷ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

Another issue of contention arising from the ethnopolitics is language, notably the status of Uzbek language vis-a-vis the official languages, Kyrgyz and Russian. For instance, a language law adopted in 2004 resulted in the exclusion of the Uzbek language from public notifications, and created a link between proficiencies in Kyrgyz language and civil service employment. This has been a cause of complaint among the Uzbeks, who have argued that the law undermines their standing in administration and public life (KIC 2011: 19). Language rights for Uzbeks has been an important political demand among Uzbek community leaders, and was one of the topics addressed by Batyrov during the rallies in Southern Kyrgyzstan in April and May 2010, in the form of claims that the Uzbek language be given legal status in areas in the south where the Uzbeks constitute a majority (ICG 2010b: 8).

Language is also often viewed as closely linked to integration, and several of the informants refer to language issues as a barrier to the integration of the Uzbek community. In light of the language law of 2004, a Kyrgyz NGO describes the position of the Uzbek language in the south as a factor that not only counteracts integration, but ultimately contributes to preventing social climbing of the Uzbeks.⁶⁸ A government official points to the strong influence of Uzbekistan in the south, which he claims is both enhanced and reinforced by several factors. These factors are notably the strong influence of religion and the fact that the religious educational centers are located in Uzbekistan, across the nearby border; the poor media infrastructure in the country, which only five years ago implied a limited access to Kyrgyz state TV in the south, so that the Uzbek minority as well as rural Kyrgyz in the south mainly relied on Uzbek TV for information; and ultimately the differences in curriculum between the minority schools and those of the majority population.⁶⁹ Pertaining to the latter, another informant refers to how Uzbek schools rather than receiving support for teaching material from the Kyrgyz state, receive their educational books from Uzbekistan. This subsequently leads young Uzbek children in Kyrgyzstan to be

⁶⁸ Representatives of Kyrgyz human rights NGO, group interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

⁶⁹ State representative, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

educated with textbooks referring to Uzbekistan as their motherland and Islam Karimov as their president.⁷⁰

Arguing that the lack of a common language has a negative impact on the level of integration, one informant holds that

The general observation is that the country has quite poor integration of various ethnic groups with each other. Of course they have a long history of living without major violence against each other in many parts, but at the common every day life level you don't really see much integration, because the common language is somehow waning, Russian was the common language, and it kind of survived in Bishkek only. Outside Bishkek it's hard with Russian only.⁷¹

Moreover, several experts point to the ethnically segregated living patterns in Osh as a factor counteracting integration and thus significantly exacerbating the polarization between the two communities. For instance, one informant holds that marriage and some other indicators suggest that Uzbeks live in their own society, somewhat analogously to what is seen among Chinese in Chinatowns in the UK and the US.⁷² This particularly pertains to the tendency of the Uzbeks to live in largely self-contained monoethnic communities known as *mahallas* (see for instance KIC 2011: 20). One informant holds while different ethnic groups tend to live in different, segregated regions of Osh, there was however a notable tendency during the June events that violence did not occur in the areas that had mixed populations.⁷³ Although rejecting the claim that such areas were completely violence free, HRW (2010: 32) also refers to stories of interethnic cooperation during the violence, showing that many Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Russian protected and saved the lives of neighbors of other ethnicities, often at great risk to themselves. This can perhaps be taken to imply that integration reduces the risk for conflict, thus supporting the argument that the

⁷⁰ Kyrgyz human rights activist no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 13 January 2011.

⁷¹ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁷² Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁷³ Kyrgyz academic no.1, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

segregated lives of ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Southern Kyrgyzstan contributes to sustaining a polarized environment.

6.2 EVENTS THAT PROVOKE STRONG EMOTIONS

While the sections above focus on the presence of tensions and a hostile mood as a precondition for ethnic riot, the question of how underlying tensions may develop into spontaneous violence remains. This pertains to contextual factors such as triggers and circumstances facilitating violence, notably the spread of rumors and the opportunities created by the removal of institutional constraints. As previously cited, Horowitz holds that ethnic riots simultaneously reflect the underlying feelings of the participants and heat-of-the-moment sentiments. While an analysis based on Brass' theory of riots as elite-led concludes that the immediate actions of various elites constituted the motor behind the outbreak of violence, Horowitz' approach thus focuses on how existing tensions led to mass-led violence through various precipitating events and factors. As also seen in the top-down analysis of the linkages between April and June, many hold that events in the aftermath of April facilitated and perhaps created a readiness for riot. However, whereas the elite-led approach focuses on how these dynamics could be exploited by various elites, Horowitz's approach emphasizes how they had an influence on interethnic relations and exacerbated already existing tensions.

Although most informants agree that the violence in June would perhaps not have gained ground as it did had it not been for the dynamics created by the developments in April, opinions diverge on the question of *how* these dynamics created a readiness for violence on a mass level. Although there is broad agreement that the June events were most likely caused by not just one but rather a broad range of factors, several informants point to the political instability after April as a trigger for the outbreak of violence.

One of the underlying variables identified by Horowitz as contributing to the process of transforming tensions into violence is the presence of precipitating events that

provoke strong emotions among the implicated parties. This can for instance refer to a provocation, or an action perceived as a provocation, whether or not actively intended as such. Pertaining to the linkages between April and June, most observers point to an episode in Bakiyev's home village of Teyit in mid May as the turning point when the domestic political conflict first acquired a "color of ethnicity". Following the violent clashes between Bakiyev supporters and supporters of the interim government in Jalalabad, where Uzbek community leader Batyrov and his party Rodina were central in preventing a pro-Bakiyev seizure of the regional administration building, a mob proceeded to torch down several houses belonging to the Bakiyev family in their native village of Teyit. Batyrov was accused of having provoked the arson, although personally denying the charge. On the reactions among Southern Kyrgyz to the attack on Bakiyev's estates, an informant holds that

[...] in the perception of the ethnic Kyrgyz [Bakiyev] was the president, he's bad, but he's ethnic Kyrgyz, and the ethnic Uzbeks, they don't have any right to burn a Kyrgyz' [house], and especially not *the president's*, house. Even though many ethnic Kyrgyz were against him, Bakiyev, they didn't approve the actions of ethnic Uzbeks who burned his parents house.⁷⁴

Although far from all southerners supported Bakiyev, and many even regarded him as a bad president, they regarded the burning as unjustified. As an informant states, "it was unacceptable that Uzbeks came to a Kyrgyz village, even if he was a bad president, it was unacceptable."⁷⁵ Thus, the episode was very negatively perceived by ethnic Kyrgyz in the south, and they argued, as cited by an informant, that "he's a [son of a] bitch, but he's *our* [son of a] bitch".⁷⁶ As mentioned, International Crisis Group (2010b: 9) refers to the burning of the Bakiyevs' houses in Teyit as a "Rubicon in ethnic relations," and claims that it was crucial in forming a Kyrgyz aggressive mass among the population as a whole. In the opinion of the same observer, the arsons in Teyit and the alleged burning of a Kyrgyz flag as part of the campaign, was perceived

⁷⁴ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

⁷⁵ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁷⁶ Representatives of Kyrgyz and international NGOs, group interview, Osh, 19 January 2011.

by southern Kyrgyz as a symbolic attack by the Uzbeks on the Kyrgyz, - or as stated by the KIC (2011: 22), even an aggression against Kyrgyz statehood. From the Uzbeks side, it is possible that the prosecution of Batyrov following the events in Teyit, and interim government's failure to take into account the interests of the Uzbek community as expressed by e.g. Batyrov in the new constitution, could have provoked parts of the Uzbek community.

Rumors constitute a substantial part of Horowitz's approach to violence as mass-led. As indicated in chapter 5, the role of rumors is emphasized by many as an important factor that contributed to provoking violence. International Crisis Group (2010b) indicates that the violence, although taking place against the backdrop of existing tensions, may initially have erupted spontaneously as a result of rumors of atrocities. The origin of these rumors however remains unknown. In his analysis of the 1990 events, Tishkov (1995: 146) argued that rumors formulated in terms of myth proved to be the most important factor in provoking intergroup aggression, and played a significant role in securing in-group mobilization and escalating the conflict up to the level of ethnic violence. Several observers hold that the same applies to the June 2010 events. While the top-down approach emphasize rumors to the extent that they are planted purposively, Horowitz's approach however entails that such rumors appear virtually "out of nowhere." The nature and origin of the rumors that spread in the time preceding and in the early phases of the violence are hard to establish. It is however certain that these rumors served as a provocation to many, and prompted a rapid mobilization of ethnic Kyrgyz from not only Osh city, but also from neighboring villages and far-off regions. In particular, the previously cited rumor about an attack by Uzbeks on a Kyrgyz dormitory in the Osh University according to Human Rights Watch (2010: 26-27) served to mobilize large crowds of ethnic Kyrgyz from the village side, allegedly to come to the rescue of their family and co-ethnics.

The prevalence of this and other virulent rumors of atrocities could perhaps be invoked to explain the often grotesque character of the violence, which subsequently could be interpreted as an expression of anger and vengeance. Certain factors indicate that

rumors and myths could have been central both in creating an aggressive mood among the ethnic communities, and in creating a perception that resorting to violence was a necessary and justified means of fear-driven preemption and self-defense. The perception that “the others are mobilizing” could likely have created a fear among members of both ethnic groups and prompted them to act.

Several reports point to often mutually exclusive narratives of preparation and mobilization by both ethnic groups, indicating that the violence was well organized. Rumors of violence at an early stage could have laid an early foundation for narratives that both groups were under threat, thus justifying a later resort to preemptive or retaliatory action. However, vengeance motives are usually linked to the actions and feelings of the ethnic Kyrgyz, who despite the question of who initially resorted to violence is often portrayed as the more aggressive party in the 2010 interethnic violence.⁷⁷

For instance, the stories of the alleged attack on the Osh University coupled with the rumor of the alleged presence of snipers shooting indiscriminately at both ethnic groups, could have led both groups to believe that they were under siege by the other and prompted them to resort to violence as a means of self-defense. As an informant coins it, “the fact is that those rumors about Kyrgyz girls being raped in the dormitories quickly spread among Kyrgyz villagers and the initial rumors were that Uzbeks were really well armed and just shooting.”⁷⁸ In addition to provoking the ethnic Kyrgyz, such rumors could have led to a deep-seated feeling of fear among the Kyrgyz population that they were under threat by the Uzbek minority.

Additionally, International Crisis Group (2010b: 10) points to a narrative that developed among ethnic Kyrgyz, according to which Uzbeks had been planning revenge ever since the events in 1990. This “theory” claimed that the Uzbeks were

⁷⁷ As indicated, the majority of victims during the 2010 violence were of Uzbek ethnicity. Moreover, the widespread mobilization of ethnic Kyrgyz from neighboring villages, the character of the violence and the systematic attacks on Uzbek *mahallas* contribute to supporting this view.

⁷⁸ Kyrgyz academic no. 2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

hiding weapons in their mosques while waiting for a time to strike. It was claimed that the Uzbeks had been preparing by stocking up weapons, and that fireworks fired from the Uzbek mahallas as well as the *azan* (call to prayer) in some Uzbek mosques in Osh were signals calling Uzbeks to mobilize and attack (Amnesty International 2011: 9). A deeply entrenched fear of an Uzbek political revival deepened suspicions at any sign of Uzbek mobilization, and even terms like "equal rights for Uzbeks" suddenly played into the hands of a "Kyrgyz nationalist paranoia" (ICG 2010b: 10). According to the KIC (2011: 28), many witnesses in this period referred to the incidents not simply as violence, but as a *war*, indicating that a comprehensive and large-scale conflict was expected.

6.3 A SENSE OF JUSTIFICATION FOR KILLING

While the section above refers to events provoking strong emotions, the third variable identified by Horowitz focuses on the factors reducing the barriers to resort to violence through creating a feeling that violence is justified. As elaborated on in the theoretical chapter, Horowitz claims that precipitants for violence must simultaneously produce enough anger to provoke participants to resort to violence, and emphasize how characteristics of the target group are invoked to support the idea that violence is necessary and justified. An approach to this is that underlying feelings among the participants could have motivated violent action as a way of revenge or rectification of perceived injustices. This broadly relates to the common perceptions the groups have of each other, and how these perceptions influence the interethnic relations. Some informants point to common perceptions of the groups toward each other, and more specifically the development of cultural stereotypes as an important source of interethnic tensions. These stereotypes may be helpful in understanding the polarized situation.

According to one informant, the cultural differences between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are not of such a nature that they necessarily lead to any conflicting interests between the two ethnic communities. However, in a context of economic grievances, perceived

economic disparities between the ethnic groups may play a part in enhancing other differing characteristics, notably cultural differences, and engender tensions based on emotional responses such as discontent and jealousy.⁷⁹ This appears to be the case particularly in the case of the ethnic Kyrgyz. I will therefore in the following sections focus predominantly on how attitudes among ethnic Kyrgyz toward the Uzbek minority may have created a feeling of justification for violence.

Paul Quinn-Judge accentuates how certain attitudes and perceptions to the Uzbeks existing among the ethnic Kyrgyz could have produced for instance jealousy. According to Quinn-Judge,

Certainly the Uzbeks are also seen as very dynamic business people. The Kyrgyz are not. So you did start to get an exacerbation of the general resentment among people that the Uzbeks were doing too well. [...] Allegedly they flaunted it.⁸⁰

Matveeva (2010: 12) supports the claim that urbanization ultimately created a stereotype among Kyrgyz urban migrants that “the Uzbeks are rich and privileged,” judging from their living conditions and lucrative jobs. According to Anderson (1999: 43), due to the different traditional orientations of the ethnic communities there is thus a general sentiment among the titular population that the Uzbek minority is unfairly better off.

One informant points to the Uzbeks not being recognized by Kyrgyz as full-fledged citizens but rather as “guests”, whereas the Uzbeks themselves, although different from the Kyrgyz in terms of culture and background, do not consider themselves as guests or a diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, but rather as a population historically settled in these lands.⁸¹ The KIC (2011: 20) also refers to the existence of a stereotype among ethnic Kyrgyz that the Uzbeks are outsiders “who are not sufficiently grateful for the

⁷⁹ Kyrgyz academic no.2, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

⁸⁰ Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

⁸¹ International expert, personal interview, Bishkek, 12 January 2011.

well-being that they have achieved in Kyrgyzstan and for the extent to which their cultural and other preferences have been accommodated.” This relates to the question of whether the Uzbeks are to be viewed as a diaspora or as *Kyrgyzstani* – namely the view of both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks of the status of the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan. It is likely that the perception of the Uzbek minority as a diaspora also shapes the titular population’s level of attentiveness to Uzbek political demands. Thus, while the Uzbeks as citizens of Kyrgyzstan make political claims for their rights and culture to be protected, these demands can be framed by the ethnic Kyrgyz as autonomy ambitions and in the worst case as a threat to Kyrgyz statehood.

There are indications that attitudes among the Uzbeks could be the source of tensions. For instance, Paul Quinn-Judge refers to a view allegedly common among Uzbeks and Russians in Southern Kyrgyzstan:

[...] I think among Russians and Uzbeks there was a certain sense of superiority vis-a-vis the Kyrgyz, who were viewed as if not still nomads, certainly with a nomad mentality, as not being terribly smart, whereas the traditional urban dwellers of Southern Kyrgyzstan, the Russians and the Uzbeks, thought themselves to be somewhat superior.⁸²

The KIC (2011: 20) supports the claim that the Uzbeks are considered to under-value Kyrgyz culture, and draws attention to the self-perception of the Uzbek community as “the original urban residents and cultural guardians of Osh,” with the Kyrgyz merely as outsiders. An alternative approach is that the tendency of the Uzbeks to live in monoethnic *mahallas* and their relative prominence within the trade and business sectors in the south may have been seen as a way of emphasizing this feature, and be perceived negatively by ethnic Kyrgyz. Thus, it is plausible that such perceptions, alone or combined, led to not only a feeling of threat but a general sense among ethnic Kyrgyz that the Uzbek minority were unjustly privileged, whereas the titular population, seemingly economically disadvantaged and underprivileged in

⁸² Paul Quinn-Judge, personal interview, Bishkek, 21 January 2011.

comparison, were merely “underdogs in their own country.” This in turn could have led to a feeling that violence was justified as a counter measure against the provocation provided by the increased activity of Uzbek community leaders after April.

6.4 PERCEPTIONS OF REDUCED RISKS

The last of Horowitz’ underlying variables also pertains to the reduction of barriers to resort to violence, and relates to for instance dynamics of mass mobilizations and the opportunities that resulted from the significant weakening of the state power. The latter pertains to the previously cited point made by Horowitz that features of the political and social climate, notably the removal of institutional constraints regulating ethnic sentiment, may facilitate the emergence of ethnic riots (Horowitz 2001: 4, 13-14).

An informant attributes the mass mobilization to a rise in patriotic sentiments following the political revolutions in 2005 and 2010, and holds that the collective efforts of mass mobilization created a feeling of a collective identity among the ethnic Kyrgyz.⁸³ In his analysis of the 1990 violence, Tishkov (1995: 146) held that the degree of “group thinking” was extremely high, and identified this as a key factor lowering the threshold of comprehending reality and deforming the respect for common norms among the participants. This was further exacerbated by the widespread use of stimulants such as alcohol and drug intoxication, which contributed to lowering inhibitions and allowing the violence to take on an often explicitly grotesque character (Tishkov 1995: 141).

A relevant factor in this context is the role of the authorities, which some have characterized as that of a tacit approval of the violence. Referred to as authoritative social support, Horowitz maintains that such a tacit approval, which is a characteristic feature of ethnic riots, serves the function of creating an air of impunity and legitimacy of the violence. This can in turn serve to lower the inhibitions among the masses to

⁸³ Kyrgyz academic no. 1, personal interview, Bishkek, 11 January 2011.

resort to violence. As previously indicated, the interim government has been severely criticized for its failure both to prevent and stop the violence, and many observers have questioned their political will to do so. Thus, it is for example possible that a combination of the weakness of the interim government in the south - in particular the ambiguous loyalties of the police and security forces - and the chaos created by the alleged interference of criminal networks and the previous regime, led to an atmosphere where the participants of ethnic violence felt that the authorities' will and ability to address violence was tenuous. Moreover, it is likely that the comprehensive mobilization within both ethnic communities and the presence of rumors and triggers and a perceived sense of righteousness, ultimately led to a collective feeling of erosion of personal agency. Moreover, it is possible that the lack of institutional restraints after April, enabling tensions to rise considerably and perhaps facilitating a violent outburst of interethnic antagonisms, encouraged a perception among various actors that their actions would proceed unpunished.

6.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter I have discussed to what extent Horowitz' underlying variables for ethnic violence were present in the case of the 2010 ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan. Most substantially, I have argued that there existed underlying interethnic tensions that formed the backdrop for the violence. I have discussed to what extent such tensions are founded on and reproduced through various factors, namely demographical factors, socioeconomic disparities, the legacy of ethnopolitics and the level of integration. Moreover, I have discussed to what extent certain events could provoke strong emotions among the ethnic groups prompting them to resort to violence, and an experienced sense of justification for killing. Ultimately, pertaining to the last of Horowitz' variables, I have argued that certain contextual factors, such as an atmosphere of chaos and the tenuous control of the interim government in the south coupled with organized recruitment procedures and the use of intoxicants, can have led to a feeling of elimination of personal agency.

7.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have sought to address to what extent the case of interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 strengthens or weakens the theories of Brass and Horowitz of ethnic violence as elite-led and mass-driven respectively. In the context of the 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan, these theoretical approaches are embodied in the contrasting narratives that the interethnic violence was either the result of the premeditation and deliberate organization of various elite actors in the domestic scene, or the result of deep-seated tensions combined with certain precipitating events and circumstances. More specifically, this thesis' undertaking has been to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these narratives in light of the empirical material, notably expert interviews and reports.

In the following sections I intend to highlight some of the main findings and conclusions from the analyses of the interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan as elite-led and as mass-driven respectively. I will look at the theoretical implications of these findings, notably to what extent they serve to strengthen or weaken the approaches of Brass and Horowitz respectively. Finally, I will briefly reflect on the theoretical implications of these findings.

7.1 FINDINGS #1: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH

As shown in the analysis in chapter 5, there are ample claims that a range of elite actors in Kyrgyzstan had certain interests that benefitted from the descent into chaos in the south, and that putatively could have served as motivations to incite violence. However, the question as to what extent these actors actively instigated the violence or exploited a chaotic situation once the violence erupted remains largely unanswered.

For instance, while many believe that the Bakiyevs had a significant influence on the dynamics in the south and conspired in various ways to stage a counter-revolution, claims that Bakiyevs directly instigated or organized the riots remain largely

unverified and by many observers and informants even discarded completely. The same pertains to the alleged cooperation between the previous regimes and criminal elements; although it is likely that linkages between these actors existed, no credible evidence has been presented to substantiate the claim that these actors conspired to unleash the violence in the south. Moreover, as mentioned, according International Crisis Group (2010b: 17-18) there were few signs of support for the deposed president among demonstrators and marauders during the violence.

It is plausible to assume that on the Uzbek side particularly the events of May contributed to a feeling among the Uzbeks of being marginalized, which could have created a sense of justification for the use of violence. Events like the attack on Batyrov's "Friendship University" in May in Jalalabad, which left several persons dead and prompted the declaration of a state of emergency, and the subsequent prosecution of Batyrov following the events in Teyit, may have incensed parts of the Uzbek community and contributed to a perceived sense of injustice. At the same time, underlying interethnic tensions, whether related to past ethnopolitics or other factors, may also have been one factor why the Uzbek elites decided to engage in a renewed bid for political rights. While this approach can perhaps explain the processes through which interethnic tensions escalated in the south, the leap from political to violent mobilization remains unaddressed, and the extent to which perceived injustices actually translated into violence unanswered. Moreover, it does not fully account for the processes of mass mobilization, notably how such a rapid and widespread mobilization could take place. Additionally, both International Crisis Group (2010b) and other international organizations maintain that the claim that the Uzbeks were heavily armed and guilty of year-long planning and preparation appears unlikely, and holds that there is little evidence to support the claim that Uzbek elite leaders either harbored separatist ambitions, or stated such demands publically.

At the same time, many of the informants find it plausible that a domestic political conflict spilled over onto interethnic relations through the gerrymandering of various elite actors. However, although the argument that violence erupted as the result of

interplay between the actions of various elite actors may perhaps capture well the dynamics of the developments in the initial phases, it too fails to identify the mechanisms through which such motivations ultimately tipped over into violence. As elaborated on in the discussion, various observations and accounts suggest that there was a significant degree of organization underlying many of the violent attacks, reflected in the at times purposeful conduct of the attackers and the systematic character of the attacks. This is perhaps one of the most significant strengths of Brass' approach in the case of Kyrgyzstan 2010. However, to establish the intent to initiate violence, who was behind this organization and to what extent an initial provocation, was organized has so far proven to be beyond the ability of the top-down approach.

7.2 FINDINGS #2: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

While Brass' approach to ethnic violence as elite-led and premeditated seems apt to capture some of the dynamics relating to how parts of the violence apparently displayed a significant degree of organization, it fails to explain the intensity of the violence and account for how it could assume such a large scope and brutal character. Moreover, it fails to explain how the mass mobilization could occur, and the processes through which the masses resorted to violence. These elements are better addressed through an analysis of the interethnic relations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and how these relations have evolved over time.

Pertaining to the analysis of Horowitz' approach to the violence as mass-led, there is widespread agreement among observers about the fulfillment of Horowitz's first premise, that is, the presence of underlying tensions between the two ethnic groups. The informants identify a range of dimensions along which differences between the ethnic groups align, which according to the informants are the basis of persisting tensions between the groups. These differences not only create fertile grounds for conflict, but could also perhaps constitute a motive or motivation for violence. Such tensions are defined as an integral feature of the relations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, and serve to contextualize how the violence could erupt and

quickly escalate to the proportions that it did. Informants variably identify factors such as demography, socioeconomic disparities, ethnopolitics, the level of integration and the resulting perceptions of each other as the foundation of these tensions. Particularly economic disparities, ethnopolitics and the lack of integration are described as important foundations for interethnic antagonisms and tensions. Most likely, the answer lies somewhere in-between, with tensions arising as a combination of all of the cited factors.

The presence of underlying tensions as a precondition for the outbreak of violence is one of the strengths of Horowitz' approach. In addition, the research undertaken for this thesis also shows support for the other preconditions identified by Horowitz, notably precipitating events provoking strong emotions among the groups, a sense of justification for killing and an assessment of reduced risks by resorting to violence. In particular, informants suggest that various events connected to the developments in April and May served to exacerbate tensions and inflame parts of the ethnic communities. From the Kyrgyz perspective, such provocative events were notably the burning of the Bakiyev family estates in Teyit and the rumors about attacks on Kyrgyz students in the Osh University dormitory. As regards the Uzbeks it is possible that the persecution of Batyrov and the interim government's failure to include the claims of the Uzbek community leaders could have served to provoke parts of the Uzbek community. However, the extent to which such a provocation may have motivated violence remains uncertain.

As shown in the analysis, experts also argue that the prevalence of rumors of severe atrocities could have contributed to motivating preemptive action and thus creating a sense of justification for the resort to violence. Finally, the views expressed by the informants indicate that the processes of mass mobilization and the perceived removal of institutional constraints could have contributed to a feeling of impunity among the participants, lowering their inhibitions to resort to violence. However, the exact causal linkages between the precipitants and the actual crossing over the threshold into violence are difficult to establish.

7.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Building on the thesis' analyses, the case of the 2010 interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan appears to provide support for Horowitz' approach, which views the violence as a relatively spontaneous expression of mass hostility combining both heat-of-the-moment sentiments and underlying feelings of the participants. Notably, the presence of interethnic tensions and the occurrence of events that could serve to ignite such tensions constitute a plausible explanatory frame for the violence, and appear to account for the character and intensity of the violence.

However, the support for Horowitz' approach does not imply that Brass' top-down perspective of ethnic violence can be discarded altogether, and with regards to certain factors he may even provide a more convincing explanation. In some cases Horowitz' approach seems to lead to ambiguous conclusions. For instance, although the empirical data suggests that the violence erupted relatively spontaneously, there are indications that a significant degree of organization of and among the participants played an important part in the development and escalation of violence. Even though Horowitz' approach also has room for some degree of organization, this is a factor most adequately captured by the top-down perspective as argued by Brass. Additionally, the unknown origin of rumors contributing to the widespread mobilization implies that the possibility that a trigger was both planned and well organized cannot be excluded.

Both Brass' and Horowitz's approaches build on the premise of a weakened state. However, while Horowitz implies that violence and outright conflict are only kept in check by the institutional constraints of the state, Brass focuses on how the lack of a strong state creates a window of opportunity that can be exploited by various actors for their own gains. Building on the findings from the analyses, notably the presence of deep-seated tensions and the political developments of April and May, a combination of the above seems like a plausible interpretation in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, in some instances where it is still difficult to establish the actual chain of events, certain features of the violence could be explained through the top-down and bottom-up perspectives alike. This pertains to for instance rumors, which constitute a central

mechanism in both Horowitz' and Brass' approaches. It has been established in the analysis that rumors played an important role in mobilizing the communities to fight, and perhaps also in motivating the initial resort to violence. The question of how these rumors were started however remains unanswered. If Brass is correct, the rumors were planted deliberately as a part of certain elite actors' schemes; if Horowitz is correct, their origin is likely of a less conspirational nature. The same pertains to preemptive action, which is also described by many informants as a factor that characterized the initial phases of violence. If Brass' approach holds water, preemptive mobilization was undertaken as part of an elite-led plan, while Horowitz' approach implies that fear was the driving force behind such actions.

In order to fully assess the weaknesses and strengths of the discussed approaches in the case of the Kyrgyzstan, this thesis has attempted to investigate the dynamics and causes of the 2010 interethnic violence. As the analyses illustrate, this also implies taking into account the longer legacy of interethnic relations in Southern Kyrgyzstan, as well as contextual factors specific to the situation in the country following the revolution in April 2010. Several attempts at a thorough and comprehensive investigation have been made, and more will undoubtedly be undertaken in the future. This thesis is an attempt to add to the theoretical literature on the dynamics of ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan, in the hope that such analyses of the underlying dynamics will eventually contribute to preventing new outbreaks of violence.

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Appendix A: Interview guide (English & Russian)

Topic 1: Personal experience with the field/topic

- Formal position?
- Background and professional experience with the regional politics and with Kyrgyzstan specifically?
- Experience from the field (Kyrgyzstan and/or the region)?
- Experience from situations of “inter-ethnic conflict”?

Topic 2: Kyrgyz society: cleavages, inequalities

- How would you characterize Kyrgyz society? (characterized by equality/inequality, homogenous, divided, etc)
- What, in your opinion, are the most salient domestic dimensions/cleavages (if any) in Kyrgyz society?

Topic 3: North-south dimension

- In your opinion, what does the north-south dimension entail? What does it consist of, what are its causes?
- Do you perceive this dimension as salient in the domestic political landscape of Kyrgyzstan?
- Is this dimension in your opinion popular or elite rooted? (meaning do possible north-south differences reflect differences in the regions as a whole, or is the dimension confined to a smaller political sphere?)

Topic 4: Ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan

- To what extent do you based on your experience from the field, perceive ethnicity as an important dimension in social life in Kyrgyzstan?
 - Is the Kyrgyz-Uzbek dichotomy in your opinion, more volatile and explosive than ethnic Kyrgyz’ relations to other significant minorities?
 - Are there in your experience, significant cultural or societal differences between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan, that may explain or create potential for conflict?
- In your experience, do you perceive that nationality is an important demarcation among the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan? Does the Uzbek minority perceive

themselves predominantly as Uzbek nationals living outside of Uzbekistan's borders, or as Kyrgyz citizens of Uzbek origin?

- To your experience, has ethnicity been instrumentalized or been a topic in domestic politics?

Topic 5: June violence

- What do you believe was the cause of the inter-communal violence of June 2010?
- Who and what initiated the violence? Was it premeditated?
- Were the 2010 violence linked to the Osh 1990 events? If yes, in what ways?
- Why do you believe that the violence escalated to such proportions?
- Was this an *ethnic* conflict or were other factors more salient?
- In your opinion, did the Uzbek community play any role in the political struggles of April 2010?
- In your opinion, was the inter-communal conflict in the south related to the domestic political struggle between the northern based interim government and the southern supporters of the ousted president?
- How have the events of summer 2010 been portrayed in the Kyrgyz media in their aftermath?
- How have the events been addressed on a political level?
- Do you believe the events have or will lead to a further polarization in terms of ethnicity between the communities in the south?

Topic 6: Additional comments?

Тема 1: Личный опыт, связанный с данной областью/ темой

- Официальная должность?
- Образование и профессиональный опыт работы с региональной политикой и с Кыргызстаном в частности?
- Опыт работы связанный с данной областью (Кыргызстан и / или регион)?
- Опыт работы связанный с "межэтническим конфликтом"?

Тема 2: Кыргызское общество: расколы, неравенства

- Как бы вы охарактеризовали кыргызское общество? (равенство / неравенство, однородный, разделенный и т.д.)
- Что, на ваш взгляд, являются наиболее важными внутренними аспектами /расколами (если таковые имеются) в кыргызском обществе?

Тема 3: Север-Юг

- На ваш взгляд, что влечет за собой аспект север-юг? Из чего он состоит, каковы его причины?
- Видите ли вы этот аспект, как основной на внутреннем политическом ландшафте Кыргызстана?
- Является ли этот аспект, по вашему мнению широко распространенным или внедренный элитой? (То есть деление на север - юг отражает различия в регионах в целом, или деление ограничивается только политической сферой?)

Тема 4: Этничность в Кыргызстане

- В какой мере Вы, основываясь на своем опыте в рамках данной области воспринимаете этническую принадлежность как важный аспект в жизни общества в Кыргызстане?
- Является ли кыргызско-узбекская дихотомия на ваш взгляд, более непостоянной и взрывоопасной, чем отношения этнических кыргызов с другими значительными меньшинствами?
- Есть ли в вашем опыте, значительные культурные или социальные различия между этническими кыргызами и этническими узбеками, проживающими в Кыргызстане, которые могут объяснить или создать потенциал для конфликта?
- Исходя из вашего опыта, вы считаете, что национальность является важным разделением среди узбекской общины в Кыргызстане? Чувствуют ли себя узбекские меньшинства преимущественно как узбекские граждане, проживающие за пределами Узбекистана, или, как граждане Кыргызстана узбекского происхождения?
- Из вашего опыта, этничность служила инструментом или была темой во внутренней политике?

Тема 5: Июньские насилия

- Как вы считаете, что была причиной межобщинного насилия в июне 2010 года?
- Кто и что служил инициатором насилия? Было ли это преднамеренным?
- Было ли насилие 2010 года связано с Ошскими событиями 1990 года? Если да, то каким образом?
- Как вы считаете, почему насилие дошло до таких размеров?
- Было ли это этническим конфликтом или были другие более важные факторы?
- На ваш взгляд, играла ли узбекская община какую-нибудь роль в политической борьбе апреля 2010 года?
- На ваш взгляд, был ли межобщинного конфликт связан на юге с внутривнутриполитической борьбой между основанным на севере временным правительством и южными сторонниками свергнутого президента?
- Как события лета 2010 года были описаны в средствах массовой информации Кыргызстана в их последствии?
- Как события были рассмотрены на политическом уровне?
- Считаете ли вы что события имеют или приведут к дальнейшей поляризации в этническом плане между общинами на юге?

Тема 6: Дополнительные комментарии?

Appendix B: Consent to participate (English & Russian)

Request for participation in interview (formal)

My name is Line Grenheim, and I am a master student of Peace and Conflict studies at the University of Oslo. I am currently writing my MA thesis on ethnicity and domestic politics in Kyrgyzstan. The preliminary project title is "*Ethnicity and politics – the case of inter-communal violence in Kyrgyzstan.*"

My aim is to supplement my literary analysis with interviews with persons who have extensive knowledge of and experience with Kyrgyz politics and society. My aim is to interview approximately 10 such persons for their input on the political situation and the inter-communal violence of summer 2010. The informants will be recruited on the basis of their experience from the field. They will not be given any financial benefits by participating.

The interviews will last between 30 mins-1 hour, and I will use a tape recorder. The interviewee may choose location for the interview, to the extent possible for the researcher to travel. Statements from the interviews may be cited in the thesis, and will not be anonymized unless the informants specifically request anonymization. The idea is that statements and insights from informants will provide a supplement to the theoretical analysis, and the focus during the interviews will be the informants' perceptions and experiences from work in the field and not their personal opinions about the topics in question. When the thesis is completed in mid 2011, all information from the interviews will be deleted. The data material will be stored and handled according to the Personal Data Act, and the project has been reported to The Privacy Ombudsman for Research, The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).

Participation in the project is voluntary. Consent may be withdrawn even after the project start without further explanation, and all the information you have provided will in such case be deleted immediately.

If you have questions, you may reach me by phone +47 47053826 or email grenheim@gmail.com.

Declaration of consent

I have received all necessary information about the project and agree to participate

Name:

Location and date:

Phone:

Signature:

Запрос на участие в интервью (формально)

Меня зовут Лин Гренхайм, и я магистрант по изучению мира и урегулирования конфликтов в Университете Осло. В настоящее время я пишу магистерскую диссертацию по этничности и внутренней политике в Кыргызстане. Предварительное название тезиса "Этничность и политика - кейс межобщинного насилия в Кыргызстане"

Моя цель состоит в дополнении моего анализа исследования интервью с лицами, которые имеют обширные знания и опыт работы в кыргызской политике и обществе. Моя цель состоит в интервьюировании около 10 таких лиц для их вклада о политической ситуации и межобщинного насилия лета 2010 года. Информаторы будут набраны на основе их опыта в данной области. Они не будут иметь финансовую выгоду от участия.

Интервью продлится от 30 минут до 1 часа, и я буду использовать магнитофон. Собеседник может выбрать место для интервью, такое чтобы исследователь имел возможность добраться до него. Изложенное в интервью может быть приведено в диссертации, и не будет анонимно, только если собеседники специально не попросят об анонимности. Идея состоит в том, что утверждения информаторов обеспечат дополнение к теоретическому анализу, и внимание в ходе интервью будет уделяться восприятию и опыту работы информантов в данной области, а не личным мнениям о темах, о которых идет речь. По завершении Диссертации в середине 2011 года, вся информация из интервью будет удалена. Данные материалы будут храниться, и обрабатываться в соответствии с Законом о личных данных, и проект был сообщен Омбудсмену Конфиденциальности в Науке, Норвежской службе данных социальных наук.

Участие в проекте является добровольным. Согласие может быть отозвано даже после начала проекта без объяснения причин, и вся информация, которую вы предоставили будет в таком случае немедленно удалена.

Если у вас есть вопросы, вы можете связаться со мной по телефону +47 47053826 или по электронной почте grenheim@gmail.com.

Заявление о согласии

Я получил всю необходимую информацию о проекте и даю согласие на участие

ФИО: