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## **From monuments to mahallas: contrasting memories in the urban landscape of Osh, Kyrgyzstan**

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Walking in a sun-dappled park in the centre of Osh, it is difficult to imagine the violence that engulfed the city in 2010. And yet, tucked away in this quiet leafy park are two memorials to the violence, euphemistically known as the 'Events'. On the day after the third anniversary of the Events, these appeared the perfect visual metaphor for the complex relationship between memory and place in the city since the Events. Sitting at the base of the Peace Bell monument sat a large floral wreath, laid there by the city Mayor and the Prime Minister in a small ceremony the previous day. The bell itself, though, was missing (as it had been for at least four months by that point), leaving the poignant sight of the floral tribute to victims of the Events languishing under an empty structure. This tension between the urge to create commemorative spaces in the urban landscape and the extent to which these spaces are maintained, used and perceived as authentic by the communities they intend to serve is present throughout the cityscape. It reveals much about how communities and the city authorities are experiencing changes in Osh since 2010, and how they are using the built environment to attempt to mediate, and sometimes control, these changes (Figure 1).

*Insert Figure 1 here – Caption “The Osh Peace Bell following the commemorative ceremony, June 2013. Source: Elly Harrowell (2013)”*

This paper interrogates the links between urban space and collective memory in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, in the wake of the events of June 2010. Although in recent years a body of literature has begun to emerge around monuments, changes in urban form and the construction of national identity in Kyrgyzstan (notably in Cummings, 2013; Liu, 2012; Megoran, 2013, but also in Diener, 2013; Marat, 2008; Morozova, 2008), this has largely focused on the capital city, Bishkek, and on elite interventions in the cityscape, with the exception of Megoran and Liu. Cummings (2013) has advanced discussions around the relationship between monuments and official ideology in Kyrgyzstan, but her focus has remained centred on the way that elite narratives are concretised in space, arguing that ‘as observed elsewhere in the Soviet Union, liberalisation has not considerably widened the pool of monument entrepreneurs’ (p. 608). Whilst this may be true, that is not to say that elite narratives are the only ones being written into the built environment in Kyrgyzstan today. On the contrary, this paper aims to show how non-elite narratives of memory and identity are being expressed through the informal, quotidian fabric of the city, and that contrasting these spaces with the kinds of formal monumental spaces Cummings describes enables the researcher to build a richer picture of life in Kyrgyzstani cities now. This investigation is cognisant of the extensive literature regarding the lives of post-Soviet cities and its importance to any understanding of contemporary urban life in Kyrgyzstan (see Diener & Hagen, 2013; Stanilov, 2007; Tsenkova & Nedovic-Budic, 2006), but also situates Osh in another framework – that of a post-conflict city – thereby reminding us of the importance of acknowledging the multiple experiences and identities of any city.

This paper, then, attempts to broaden the debate on two fronts; by examining Osh – a place whose recent bloody history means that identity politics are never far from the surface – and by extending the frame of investigation to consider informal spaces of memory found there. It juxtaposes the ‘top-down’ commemorative perspectives of the municipal government, and the ‘bottom-up’ perspectives of the diverse communities who live in the city, seeking to unpack how these views interact and where they diverge, and what effects this produces. It will show how official commemorative interventions in the city since 2010 have sought to inscribe a distinctly Kyrgyz (rather than Kyrgystani) identity in Osh’s urban space, at the same time as promoting reconciliation through other monuments responding to the June 2010 violence. On the other hand, it also identifies a number of non-elite narratives of memory which speak to issues such as Osh’s industrial heritage, cultural identity and experiences of the violence, and explores the insights that can be gained by considering these narratives alongside those supported by elites in the city. This approach argues for a move away from investigations that focus purely on either ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ views of commemorative spaces, supporting those theorists who have suggested that the richest observations come from examining interactions between the two (Forest, Johnson, & Till, 2004; Irwin-Zarecka, 2007; Olick, 2003).

In the case of post-conflict Osh, such a juxtaposition sheds new light on how interventions in the cityscape are producing different effects on the urban populace, and questions how future urban development may affect the potential for building a sustainably peaceful city. Building on ongoing research in Osh, it interrogates spatial changes in the city that have occurred since the Events, as well as those planned for the future, alongside persistent visions of Osh as expressed by non-elite city residents.

### **The Osh Events**

The largest city in the Ferghana valley, a historically important trading stop on the silk road, Osh encapsulates the region’s diverse ethnic mix and cartographic contradictions (Ismailbekova, 2013; Liu, 2012). Osh is Kyrgyzstan’s second largest city after the capital Bishkek (the 2009 census recorded a population of just over 258,000), and was named the country’s second capital in 2000, being granted republic city status (equivalent to an oblast’, and the same as Bishkek) in 2003 (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2009). It is home to a large ethnic Uzbek population, along with minority groups such as Russians, Tajiks, Tatars and others. This varied ethnic make-up, along with its physical proximity to the border with Uzbekistan, and the cultural and educational legacy of the Soviet era, means that Osh is a trilingual city, where Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek are widely spoken. It became an important industrial centre during the Soviet period, a process which, along with policies of sedentarisation and high rise housing construction, brought about significant changes to the city’s demographic profile (Liu, 2012). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, industry in Osh has followed a similar pattern of decline to that witnessed in many former Soviet states, and the factories that once employed thousands have now closed down. The city has known two episodes of serious conflict in recent years; in 1990, violence broke out, triggered by a dispute over land use in the city, that quickly degenerated into inter-ethnic violence throughout the oblast’ (2012). Sadly, this was repeated just 20

years later, when the city again came to the fore for all the wrong reasons. In the power vacuum following the April 2010 revolution, violence flared in Osh, Jalalabad and the surrounding region on 10 June, pitting ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities against each other, resulting in the death of at least 470 people, the temporary displacement of around 440,000 more within the country and across the border in Uzbekistan, and the destruction of thousands of homes and businesses in Osh, Jalalabad and the surrounding areas (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission [KIC], 2011). Although commonly described as ethnic violence, the roots of the June Events are more complex than this phrase suggests, and without the sense of inevitability such terminology often implies. Indeed, Bond and Koch underline the importance of contextualising such outbreaks of apparent ethnic violence in order to fully understand their causes and dynamics (Bond & Koch, 2010). This is especially important when one considers that in the long history of the Ferghana valley region, inter-ethnic relations have generally been well managed – such violence is the exception, not the norm (Megoran, 2012).

As such, the violence of June 2010 should be situated in the context of the political instability which followed the ousting of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010. Following this sudden political transition – often termed the ‘Tulip Revolution’ – the provisional government found itself unable to effectively respond to rising tensions in the country’s South, with disastrous consequences. These tensions can themselves be attributed to a number of factors, including criminal networks, unemployment and political instability (Freedom House, Memorial Human Rights Centre, & Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2012; KIC, 2011; Melvin, 2011). A crucial element in understanding the Osh Events, though, is the linking of ethnicity, clan structure and the North–South divide that has defined politics in Kyrgyzstan since independence, and possibly before then (Bond & Koch, 2010). To Melvin (2011), this ‘dynamic ethno-political process’ links local ethnic tensions to the wider conflict responsible for the ‘steady erosion of the already weak state institutions in Kyrgyzstan and the growing use of mass popular mobilisation and violence in political struggles’ (p. 6). According to this model, the first post-Soviet President Akayev, a northerner, courted the support of the Uzbek community (resident almost entirely in the Southern provinces of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken) to shore up his support in the country’s South. This formed an informal alliance whereby the Uzbek community was afforded protection and non-interference in exchange for their tacit support of Akayev. The pact fell apart when Bakiyev – a southerner with no need for the Uzbek community’s support – came to power in 2005. Instead, in the five years of Bakiyev’s rule, nationalism rose and the position of the Uzbek community in the South became more difficult (Megoran, 2012; Melvin, 2011). With inter-ethnic relations so intertwined with the North–South struggle for political power in Kyrgyzstan, it is perhaps unsurprising that the 2010 revolution, which brought northern politicians back to the Presidency, should have a destabilising effect on interethnic relations in the South.

Following the fall of Bakiyev, then, the Uzbek community once again turned to northern politicians to guarantee their rights (Bond & Koch, 2010). Leaders of the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan perceived that the arrival of the new provisional government contained opportunities to advance certain community interests (such as language rights) through

consultations around the elaboration of a new constitution (Freedom House et al., 2012; Megoran, 2012; Melvin, 2011). However, public statements and meetings in this regard were perceived very negatively by many Kyrgyz, who feared the spectre of Uzbek separatism in such actions. Such a response is revealing of what Megoran has termed the 'profoundly insecure' nationalism that has come to play a central role in Kyrgyz politics in recent years (Megoran, 2012, p. 16), and also informs the Osh Events. Although former President Askar Akayev initially pursued a politics of inclusion under the slogan 'Kyrgyzstan our common home', this had become less prominent by the end of his rule, and was replaced entirely by the language of nationalism during the Bakiyev era (Megoran, 2012, p. 6). Such nationalism does not readily agree with the aspirations expressed by Uzbek politicians in the Spring of 2010, further increasing tensions in the South.

Since the 2010 violence, progress has been made in the city's reconstruction, with International Organisations, NGOs and donor governments helping to rebuild homes, businesses and cultural venues in the city, as well as funding the rehabilitation of parks and schools. However, this process has been caught up with the introduction of the city Masterplan, which sets out plans for Osh's regeneration, resulting in a somewhat confusing picture of the city's future. This has been muddled even further by the city authorities' reluctance to share the contents of the Masterplan with residents and other interested parties, leading to confusion and apprehension regarding its potential impact on the city. The judicial response to the violence is also problematic, with one Human Rights Watch report warning that this had been marked by torture, harassment and ethnic bias against Uzbeks (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Today, an uneasy peace reigns in the city; whilst daily life may have returned to normal, many residents express fear that the violence that has occurred twice in 20 years may well return to the city a third time.

### **Theories of collective memory: 'top down' versus 'bottom up'?**

Before discussing my results, it will be important to clarify what is meant by 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' conceptions of collective memory and how they come to be inscribed in urban space.

The assertion that the collective memory of a group helps to underpin its sense of identity was originally advanced by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the early twentieth century. As Misztal (2003) has argued, 'his assertion that every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity is still the starting point for all research in the field' (p. 51). Halbwachs proposed, amongst other things, that the social aspects of memory are vital, and that memories exist in the present, where they are constantly being remade and recalled to serve the community's needs at that time (Halbwachs, 1992). Crucially for any geographical enquiry, he also insisted on the spatial aspects of memory (Hebbert, 2005). This theme was further developed by Nora (1996) later in the twentieth century, who identified lieux de me´moire (or places of memory) as the 'material, symbolic and functional' sites (ranging from the tangible, such as a building, to the intangible, such as a song or date) that are home to the many and varied collective memories which underpin the identity of a group (p. 14). By tying these memories into the physical environment which surround us, commonly perceived as solid and timeless, communities therefore lend a sense

of permanence to their own memories and, by extension, identities. As Connerton (1989) has so neatly surmised, 'What better way to underpin your community's claim to a specific, unbroken lineage than by linking it to the material milieu that surrounds us?' (p. 37). These concepts obviously chime with the modernist view of the nation popularised by Anderson (1983) as an 'imagined political community' held together by the glue of shared cultural and mythological resources (p. 6).

This paper draws upon two common ways in which the relationship between memory and space has been conceptualised in geographical literature, which can be generally referred to as the 'top-down' approach (taking its cue from Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) work on the invention of tradition) and the 'bottom-up' approach (which is similarly influenced by Foucault's conceptualisation of counter or popular memory (Bouchard, 1980)). It accepts, of course, that memories can often not be neatly categorised as either 'top down' or 'bottom up' – real life is more nuanced than that – but suggests that using these broad categories together provides an illuminating analytical framework.

A top-down approach focuses largely on spaces which have been specifically ordained as commemorative, and has been advanced by a number of scholars of memorialisation (see Crampton, 2001; Gillis, 1994; Johnson, 1995, 2002). It suggests that by undertaking what Mitchell (2003) has termed an 'archaeology of power', scholars can uncover detailed information about the society that created a commemorative space, and the narratives of memory they wished to make permanent by writing them into the physical fabric of a place (p. 446). Since it requires a considerable level of cultural, social and economic capital to successfully create a site of memory such as a monument or statue (Jordan, 2006), examinations of 'top-down' commemorative spaces most often reveal how the dominant or elite forces in a community wished to remember, and how this can change in times of conflict and contestation (Forest & Johnson, 2002). Whilst this approach is a powerful explanatory tool, to be sure, Misztal's (2003) assertion that 'people tend to reject any vision of the past which contradicts their recollection and sense of truth' remains important (p. 60). That is to say, it would be a mistake to view collective memory as something entirely manipulated and imposed from above – to do so would wrongly deny the experience and power of memories operating at street level (Irwin-Zarecka, 2007). Moreover, there is a danger in restricting investigations of the memory – space nexus to the quintessential low hanging fruit – places where memory has clearly been codified, instead of digging more deeply to find less-obvious, but potentially more interesting, quotidian expressions of memory. As Schudson (1997) puts it, 'we look for effective public memory at self-conscious memory sites not because that is where we will find what we are looking for, but because that is where the illumination makes looking most convenient' (p. 3).

A 'bottom-up' approach rejects this focus on elite-driven sites of memory, and instead looks at collective memory from a position outside power – what is often termed popular memory (Misztal, 2003, p. 61). This is based on an understanding that popular memory can resist the hegemonic discourses of memory, and other 'regimes of truth', imposed from above (Bouchard, 1980, p. 81; Misztal, 2003). It is a welcome reminder that 'memory is never unitary, no matter how hard various powers strive to make it so. There are always sub

narratives, transitional periods and contests over dominance' (Olick, 2003). The process of unearthing and giving voice to these narratives can itself become an emancipatory exercise (Johnson & Dawson, 1982 in Perks & Thomson, 1998).

Writers such as Hebbert, Blokland and Atkinson have advocated investigations of collective memory that begin at street level and through the experiences of non-elites (Atkinson, 2007; Blokland, 2001; Hebbert, 2005). In investigations of the built environment, this approach examines the everyday spaces in which members of a community meet and participate in the re-telling (and therefore construction) of collective memory – in Atkinson's (2007) words 'the ordinary places where memory erupts' (p. 521). This might include a cafe, a butcher's shop and a street corner (Blokland, 2001), or a new housing development – and its relationship with what previously stood in that space (Atkinson, 2007; Dawson, 2005), investigating how these spaces resist elite discourses.

## **Methodology**

This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in Osh between March and July 2013, as well as preliminary research undertaken in Bishkek and Osh in July and August 2012. Sixty semi-structured interviews (some comprising multiple participants) were carried out with 82 people, 51 of which took place between March and June 2013. Approximately half of the participants were ethnic Kyrgyz, and the remainder ethnic Uzbek, Russian, Tajik and Tatar citizens of Kyrgyzstan, and non-Kyrgyzstani residents in Bishkek or Osh. Participants were identified through key local contacts, and with the aid of my research assistants. These interviews were also supported by ethnographic fieldwork and the collection of secondary documentary and photographic sources, providing a multifaceted image of events on the ground. The ethical and practical challenges of undertaking fieldwork in Osh were numerous, as can often be the case when undertaking fieldwork in the post-socialist context (De Soto & Dudwick, 2000; Pallot, Piacentini, & Moran, 2010). These included the potential antipathy of local security services to researchers operating in Osh (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2012a; Kloop, 2014), and participants' caution regarding audio recording of interviews, which resulted in many being recorded in note form. Although the length and the language they were carried out in varied (interviews were carried out in English, Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek, according to the preference of the respondent, and with the aid of local research assistants fluent in these languages), all discussions centred around a number of key questions. These addressed such themes as how the city had changed over time, how they would like to change the city, and which places they did or did not visit. Whilst these questions do not address some of the key concerns of my research head-on (for example, the Events or the notion of memory), they very often elicited responses that evoked these, and other, issues (for a discussion of the merits of this approach, see Megoran, 2013).

The question of memory can reveal much about life in the city. It can illuminate areas of tension, and concordance, between the hopes and expectations of the city authorities and non-elites. Similarly, it can sketch out some of the varied narratives that animate people's conceptions of Osh as a place in which they live and work, or suggest ways in which changes to the cityscape might impact on the socio-geographical experiences of its inhabitants. So,

how do the relationships between memory and place, between top-down and bottom-up narratives, and between monumental and quotidian expressions of collective memory play out in contemporary Osh? And how can this help us to illuminate the city's recent tumultuous past? The following section will begin by interrogating city authorities' attempts to build their favoured view of Osh into the city from the top down, via the construction of a number of public monuments since June 2010. It will then go on to consider a number of different commemorative narratives that emerged from conversations with non-elite actors during my research, which interact with these officially sanctioned interventions in different ways.

### **'Patriots of the city' – new monuments in Osh since 2010**

Since the 2010 Events, five significant new monuments have been constructed by the city authorities; three statues of heroic figures from Kyrgyz history and culture Manas (unveiled on the second anniversary of the Events), Barsbek and Alimbek Datka (both built in 2011), as well as the 'Mothers' tears' statue (erected on the first anniversary of the violence) and the Osh peace bell (also unveiled in 2011). These statues represent the elite narrative of memory being inscribed in the city. It is important to recognise that in Osh at this time the 'elite' represented the municipal authorities, and in particular the then Mayor, Melis Myrzakmatov. Appointed by Former President Bakiyev in 2009, Myrzakmatov was, until he lost his position in early 2014, the only Bakiyev appointee to outlast his regime. Although the government did try to oust him soon after the June Events, he proudly proclaimed in August 2010 that the decisions of the northern provisional government did not carry the same weight in the south (Kommersant, 2010). When we talk about the elite narrative in Osh, then, this does not necessarily represent the view of a national elite, but rather that of a powerful local elite with the capacity to dictate urban change in the city, centred around Myrzakmatov.

This research suggests that the impact of these monuments in the minds of city residents has not been equal. Indeed, it is possible to sharply delineate between the three larger monuments – Manas, Barsbek and Alimbek Datka – which were repeatedly mentioned by respondents, and the two peace monuments, whose presence appears largely overlooked by city residents. Accordingly, this paper will adopt this distinction whilst examining the nature, position and impact of the new city monuments (Map 1).

*Insert Map 1 about here, with caption "Map of Osh with location of major monuments (q OpenStreetMap contributors, with author's edits)"*

The statues of Manas, Barsbek and Alimbek Datka can first and foremost be distinguished by their size. They tower over the roads where they stand; ancient, swordwielding warriors on a grand scale, contrasting sharply with their often crumbling surroundings of post-Soviet decay. Driving past them (or underneath, in the case of the Datka arch) is impressive; to walk by them is arresting – the new monuments dominate passers-by in a way that is only matched in the city by its remaining Lenin statue. All three statues stand at major access points to the city, meaning that the vast majority of visitors to Osh will pass under the gaze of at least one of them – a fact which is not lost on the local population; one taxi driver

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noted that the three stood at the 'doors' to the city, greeting visitors from the airport, Bishkek and Aravan. Legendary warrior and subject of Kyrgyzstan's most famous epic poem, as well as a concerted post-Soviet attempt to build national identity (Marat, 2008), Manas sits astride his rearing horse at the centre of a roundabout near the airport. Here the dramatic red stone plinth rising from the ground (guarded by a growling mountain lion) led one woman to proudly tell me that Osh could now claim to be home to 'the largest Manas in the world' (Figure 2).

*Insert Figure 2 here with caption "Manas monument, Osh, May 2013. Source: Harrowell (2013)"*

Barsbek also stands atop an impressive plinth in the middle of a roundabout, this time at the far end of Sulaiman-Too mountain, on the road to Aravan. Sword raised in one hand, he is flanked by four equally fierce-looking guards, each of whom is accompanied by panels explaining Barsbek's role in the formation of the Kyrgyz state in Kyrgyz and in English. The last of the trio is arguably the most impressive. Whilst the monument to Alimbek Datka [a former leader in the south, to whom this is the second monument in the city, as well as another to his even more famous wife, Kurmanjan Datka, herself a problematic emblem of Kyrgyz statehood (Morozova, 2008)] also includes a statue of the famous figure, pride of place is given to an immense arch, topped with a tunduk – the top part of a yurt, which also figures on the country's flag. This arch stands astride four lanes of traffic entering and exiting the city on the road to Bishkek. Leading up to the monument on either side the street is edged with colourful mosaics seemingly depicting scenes from traditional Kyrgyz life – yurts, horseback warriors, manaschi (traditional Kyrgyz storytellers) and women in traditional headwear (Figure 3).

*Insert Figure 3 here with caption "Alimbek Datka monument, Osh, May 2013. Source: Harrowell (2013)"*

So, what does the placement and form of these monuments reveal to us? First, these are Kyrgyz monuments – they depict a trio of heroes who are inextricably linked to Kyrgyz history and culture, but likely have less resonance for other ethnic groups in the city [although this may be less true in the case of Manas, who was promoted as a symbol of inter-ethnic cooperation during the Akaev era, on account of his diverse family and entourage (Megoran, 2013)]. This is all the more striking when, as in the case of Barsbek, the monument is directly juxtaposed with numerous buildings still clearly bearing the marks of the June 2010 violence.

These three monuments were all completed under the aegis of former Mayor Myrzakmatov. Myrzakmatov is the pre-eminent figure in Osh's political landscape in recent years, a politician as lauded by some as he is hated by others. A self-proclaimed nationalist Myrzakmatov authored a book about the June Events, *In Search of Truth*, in which he placed the blame for the violence squarely on the shoulders of Uzbek separatists, going so far as to claim that thousands of Uzbek troops had massed on the border, ready to support their compatriots in Osh (ICG, 2012b; Megoran, 2012). The international inquiry set up to investigate the violence in Osh noted wryly in its final report that 'The nationalist rhetoric of

the Mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov, was not conducive to the calming of inter-ethnic tensions' (KIC, 2011, p. iv). Whilst some residents praise Myrzakmatov as a strong leader who sticks up for the south and gets things done (as I was told on many occasions), others lament him as a nationalist whose interventions actively marginalise the city's Uzbek population, undermining prospects for sustainable peace in the city (ICG, 2012b). Myrzakmatov used his time in office to 'energetically' pursue the twin policy aims of promotion of tolerance and the development of Kyrgyz symbolism in the city, such as the new monuments (Megoran, 2012, p. 22). Noting that these policies may appear contradictory, Megoran demonstrates how they are in fact indicative of Myrzakmatov's belief that inter-ethnic peace in the city can best be achieved by the development of a strong Kyrgyz state as guarantor, a state that will be underpinned by the kind of symbolic resources he had introduced to Osh (Megoran, 2012).

How, then, are the most visible examples of this Kyrgyz symbolism perceived by the people of Osh? For some, this focus on Kyrgyz heroes is a welcome way of increasing knowledge of the country's history and improving the aesthetic qualities of the town; one Kyrgyz teacher applauded the Mayor's decision to recognise what she termed 'heroes of history' through the monuments, saying 'it is good, you see? He shows the history and it is a sightseeing place at the same time'. For others, however, these monuments seem emblematic of the introduction of a 'new culture' into the town, with its own heroes, stories and rules of behaviour that they must learn anew. One Uzbek respondent lamented the fact that, in his opinion, Uzbek heroes were no longer celebrated in Osh. Pointing towards the statue of Barsbek, he complained that no one had even heard of him before the statue went up, adding mischievously that at least he could be sure of the history of his pet dog, also called Barsbek (Figure 4).

*Insert Figure 4 here, with caption "Barsbek monument, Osh, May 2013. Source: Harrowell (2013)"*

Second, there is their sheer size. These are monuments built to impress passers-by – they are formidable, dominating the space in which they stand. There are no accommodations made to help people to interact with them at a human level (unlike, for example, the monuments to the Second World War and Afghan War elsewhere in the city, which invite the viewer to step into and use their monumental space). Standing at the entrances to the city, these monuments send a message to passers-by that they are now entering a space that has been specifically and symbolically identified as Kyrgyz, through the use of Kyrgyz subject matter and an ethnicised visual language that uses tunduks, yurts and patterns taken from traditional Kyrgyz arts and crafts to underline its heritage. The use of the arch in the Alimbek Datka monument is especially telling here – as Jarman has shown with regards to Protestant 'orange arches' in Northern Ireland, the act of passing through such a structure (especially one topped with a symbol such as the tunduk) is a powerful marker of stepping from one territory to another (Jarman, 2001). Thus, these three monuments fulfil a dual function; on the one hand, they use their size, placement and subject matter to mark the space in which they stand as distinctly Kyrgyz, and by dint of their position at the main gates to the city, they extend this identification to the whole of the city – a vitally important

message in a city with such a contested identity as Osh. At the same time, they appear to fulfil a secondary role of promoting knowledge amongst the populace of certain figures from Kyrgyz history. Both roles are consistent with the experience of other cities such as Dublin (Johnson, 1995), Moscow (Forest & Johnson, 2002) and Pretoria (Crampton, 2001). Strikingly, this dual function of public statuary – to impress and to instruct – is reminiscent of the use of monuments in the Soviet Union. Across the Soviet Union, monuments were erected in public space as part of the process of constructing and disseminating a Soviet national identity in the furthest reaches of the Soviet Union (Forest & Johnson, 2002). Adams (2010) has demonstrated how Soviet ways of inculcating identity into public space – whether through the construction of monuments and buildings, or through the staging of grand spectacles – continue to have important implications on the way that Central Asian elites use the urban environment to narrate national identity. Certainly, Koch (2010) has demonstrated that one needs to look no further than the capital of neighbouring Kazakhstan – Astana – to see another example of how the built environment is being instrumentalised to legitimise the governing elite, and underpin the national image they seek to promote in the post-Soviet era.

If there is any doubt as to how effective such a strategy can be, we need look no further than Osh itself to see the results of a previous top-down intervention whose traces can still be found in the city today – former President Akayev's 'Osh 3000' celebration, initiated in 2000. This initiative comprised of a year-long celebration of Osh's position as one of the ancient cities of the world. Named 'Osh 3000' after the apparent age of the city, Akayev intended this plan to bring Osh more firmly into the Kyrgyzstani political landscape, identifying it as an 'exemplar of longstanding co-existence' in Kyrgyzstan, rather than a 'problematically' Uzbek city (Liu, 2012, p. 67). Today, the city still bears the marks of this celebration – buildings and gates are inscribed with the slogan 'Osh 3000' across the city centre, whilst in other places decorative lights spelling the same drape listlessly across a central street. More strikingly, many respondents took up this theme in our conversations, repeatedly telling me of the Soviet scientist (Y.A. Zadneprovsky) who proved that Osh was 3000 years old, and proudly proclaiming their city 'one of the ancient towns in the world ... older than Rome'. That so many city residents were keen to independently tell me of the ancient nature of the city, using the exact formulas and narrative promoted by the Osh 3000 campaign, is testament to the power of an officially promoted narrative to endure when it has been built into the everyday fabric of the city, from the monumental to the mundane.

The contrast between the three monuments described earlier, and the two peace monuments erected since the Events could not be greater. Both of these structures are tucked away in a small park next to the Municipal buildings on Lenin Street. One, known as the 'Mothers' tears', shows two women crying together, carved from a light stone and identified as Uzbek and Kyrgyz by their headdresses and by the use of traditional patterns drawn from Kyrgyz and Uzbek crafts around the base of the statue. The other, standing nearby, is a metal structure designed to hold a 'peace bell', inscribed with the phrase 'peace in all the world' in English, Russian and Kyrgyz (but not in Uzbek). Neither stands more than a few metres high, in stark comparison with the other new monuments, and with the towering Lenin statue in the nearby square. Whilst the 'Mothers' tears' statue appears to be

in good condition, the peace bell represented a somewhat neglected sight during the period of this research; the bell itself had disappeared entirely, leaving an empty space at the centre of the monument, and the structure had been graffitied with slogans saying 'Chechnya' and 'Caucasus power over all tombs'. By the occasion of the third anniversary of the June Events, this graffiti had been cleaned off, yet the bell was still absent – a trip to the monument on the day after the anniversary commemorations yielded the striking picture of a large floral wreath, placed there by Mayor Myrzakmatov and Prime Minister Jantoro Satybaldiev, laying under the empty space where the peace bell should have hung (Figures 5 and 6).

*Insert Figures 5 and 6 here with captions "The Osh Peace Bell, photographed in late August 2012. Source: Harrowell (2012)" and "The Mothers' Tears monument, Osh, April 2013. Source: Harrowell (2013)."*

Strikingly, during my research, respondents were almost entirely silent about these monuments – they were mentioned only once, during a language class themed around potential tourism sites in the city. This silence speaks volumes – while the new monuments took a central place in respondents' descriptions of the city (for better or worse), the two peace monuments simply do not seem to have struck a chord with city residents. Given the less than prominent form and position the authorities have given to these structures within the cityscape, perhaps this indifference is unsurprising. But if residents' memories of the 2010 conflict are not crystallising in these officially sanctioned spaces, where and how are they being expressed? To try and answer this question, it will be useful to examine the question of memory in the city from another perspective – from non-elite city residents, or the 'bottom-up'.

### **Ghost cities – seeing Osh from the bottom up**

To pinpoint official, top-down interventions in the city was relatively easy; it is far more difficult to identify unofficial narratives of memory. Instead of crystallising around clearly identified and codified commemorative spaces, such memories 'erupt' in spaces of everyday life (Atkinson, 2007, p. 521). Nonetheless, it has been possible to identify a number of compelling conceptions of collective memory from the bottom up.

Like most cities, Osh is overlaid by maps of memories held by its inhabitants; maps which often reveal a different narrative to that prized by local elites. In Osh, these memories manifest themselves in a number of ways. For example, the use of old names for streets and institutions long after they have been officially renamed is common. The central streets of Kurmanjan Datka and Masalieva are still often referred to by their Soviet era names of Aravanskaya and Kyrgyzstanskaya, whilst one student of the now Kyrgyz Social University told me that he found it 'easier' to stick to the 'old habits' of calling the university by its pre-Events name, the Kyrgyz Uzbek University.

This question of the persistence of street names gives a clue, then, to the existence of other persistent conceptions of the city overlaying the official vision. Two of these in particular have come to the fore through this research. First, there appears to be, particularly amongst people from the generations old enough to have experienced the Soviet era as adults, a

persistent and compelling vision of the city's past economic prosperity and stability. Respondents repeatedly mapped out the locations, purpose and workforce of the city's former factories in their interviews, until it became a kind of mantra: the silk factory in Yugo-Vostok that employed thousands of people and now stood as an indoor market (Osh Tataan). The cotton paper factory in KBK district, which at its height employed 11,000 people (Liu, 2012, p. 82) and now stands as a hulking reminder of the city's industrial past. The pump factory that once led the world in technology, but is now home to another indoor clothes market and mall (Kelechek, or 'future'). These buildings are the concrete reminders of how, as one middle-aged respondent put it, 'from an industrial agricultural country, we turned into an agricultural poor country'.

These three factories have become the poles of a memory map which, for many older Osh residents, overlays the city and contrasts unfavourably with the post-Soviet landscape of economic decline. A map which is all the more real for being laid out in bricks and mortar – solid and visible traces of an aspect of the city which now seems indelibly changed. Indeed, it is telling that respondents spoke about these three factories out of the 24 that had been present at the height of Osh's industrial age (Liu, 2012), perhaps because these buildings still play an active role in everyday life in Osh (either through their new use or, in the case of the cotton factory, because they have given their name to an entire neighbourhood). In the words of one despairing resident, now working as a taxi driver 'Before we had factories, we produced textiles and silk, but today there is no work, no money, no future'.

The second street level memory map describes more recent memories – those of the 2010 violence. This map does not look the same to everyone – indeed, every respondent had his/her own set of places in Osh where memory is linked to the bricks and mortar of the city. What is striking, though, is the way so many respondents used landmarks in the city to tell their story of the Events in our conversations. For example, an office building is reframed as the location of snipers during the violence by one young Russian woman; the Lenin statue is where a member of the Tatar community recalled gathering for evacuation to Bishkek; a young Kyrgyz girl points out a kiosk near her home on Kurmanjan Datka Street and recalls its owner sheltering underneath the floorboards. Elsewhere, an elderly Uzbek woman showed me the house of her Kyrgyz neighbour who hid her during the Events, whilst an elderly Kyrgyz man pointed to the corner on which a man was shot, and to the place he and his neighbours built a barricade to keep violent groups away from their homes. In another part of the city, a group of teachers lamented the loss of a school in the Yugo-Vostok neighbourhood – 'a good school, an old school' – burnt during the Events and never rebuilt. Another Uzbek woman wept as she told me the story of her aunt who was forced to bury her son in the courtyard of their home, only to see the home burnt to the ground the very next day.

Across Osh, these and other people are using the built environment as a way of telling their story of the Events, and as a vessel for their memories of this traumatic time. It is as if a ghost city sits on top of the everyday sights of Osh, one in which familiar landmarks and previously unremarkable buildings are simultaneously read as places of danger or sanctuary. By walking through this landscape every day, residents are participating in the reformation

and recollection of these memories, keeping them alive and constantly interweaving the 'now' of a place with the 'then' (Blokland, 2001; Hebbert, 2005). Given how present the past is in Osh, any interventions in the cityscape are bound to collide with these memories, and the people are keeping them alive through their daily routines.

To these two memory maps, I add a third narrative of the city which emerged through my interviews. This recalls Osh's past as a multicultural city, setting it against what is perceived as the mono-ethnic nature of the town today. Numerous respondents saw this as evidenced by the presence of distinctive Uzbek mahalla neighbourhoods in the city's historic centre. One, himself an urban planning professional, explained that Uzbeks were concerned that their homes were being targeted for demolition along ethnic lines, and passionately spoke about the need to preserve this heritage, saying 'The city of Osh is an ancient city ( ... ) its own traditional features have to remain, and a small street – mahalla, such small streets, these small houses – such kind of stuff should be preserved.' Again, this narrative was almost exclusively recounted by members of the older generation (aged 40 and above), from professional backgrounds, across a wide variety of ethnic groups. These respondents remembered studying and working alongside not only Kyrgyz or Uzbek, but Russian, Tatar, German, Greek, Ukrainian and other groups in their youth, and lamented the loss of this diversity in Osh now. One ethnic Tajik teacher fondly recalled how neighbours had all chipped in to help her learn Russian when she arrived in Osh as a child, remarking sadly that 'then nationality wasn't important – no one asked what your nationality was. It's a pity today – everyone wants to know your nationality, but not your personality'. Another elderly Tatar respondent vividly described how the audio geography of the city had changed in recent years, with Uzbek music becoming rarer in the city centre and market sellers falling silent, leaving the city with an increasingly mono-ethnic soundtrack she described vividly as 'a kind of language violence'.

### **Mapping the complex interactions of memory**

This research, then, suggests a compelling picture of the official narrative of memory that city authorities are trying to build into Osh. Through the construction of a number of monuments, and the apparent privileging of three depicting heroic figures from Kyrgyz history, the city authorities are endeavouring to mark out the city of Osh as specifically Kyrgyz territory. This is no mean feat in an area where identity is as keenly contested as Osh. Through the act of monumentalising these figures, and strategically positioning them at entrances to the urban space, the authorities are attempting to inscribe a particular version of history – one which favours the titular nationality, the Kyrgyz – into space, and therefore into the consciousness of city residents. Although these monuments may alienate some groups in the city, they do appeal to others – mainly (though not exclusively) to ethnic Kyrgyz residents of the city, who often expressed pride in these monuments.

At the same time, three strands of bottom-up or non-elite memory have emerged through the course of this research; first, the ghost of Osh's past as a successful industrial city, in which familiar landmarks in the cityscape carry a double identity as former places of work for many city residents. Second, the mapping of memories of the 2010 conflict onto the city by practically every respondent shows how residents are using the cityscape to store and

order their memories of that traumatic time. The third strand of memory repeatedly identified by older residents recalled Osh as a previously multiethnic city, as symbolised by the mahalla neighbourhoods in the city centre, that had increasingly lost this diversity. All three strands seem to support Liu's assertion that:

“Viewed from the streets, Osh presents a complex social, political, economic and religious reality. It shows that issues of wide import, such as the trajectories of post-socialist economies, the effects of state power, the nuances of inter-ethnic relations or the new public presence of Islam need to be examined through the details of everyday lives within actual public places” (Liu, 2012, p. 25)

Whilst this in itself is revealing about life in Osh since the Events, this paper argues that more can be learned by bringing the top-down and bottom-up approaches into the same investigatory framework (see Irwin-Zarecka, 2007; Olick, 2003; Rolston, 2010; Schudson, 1997). This approach does not deny that elites attempt to construct and privilege certain narratives of collective memory, neither does it ignore the narratives being created and popularised by non-elite actors. Instead, it looks at the dynamic interactions between these narratives to try and shed light on the processes through which one narrative becomes widely accepted as truth, and how this changes over time (Misztal, 2003; Rolston, 2010). It is important to note that this approach does not assume that all expressions of memory will fit neatly into either a 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' categorisation – life is often too messy for such binaries – rather that applying such an analytical framework has the potential to reveal previously unremarked linkages, oppositions and silences in the narratives of memory being expressed there.

This seems particularly appropriate for investigations of the relationship between collective memory and the built environment, since this often provides the space in which top-down and bottom-up expressions of collective memory interact. For example, some writers have begun to detail the changing ways in which people interact with monuments and statues – exemplars of top-down collective memory – showing how people's everyday use of monumental space can often be highly subversive (see Forest & Johnson, 2002; Mitchell, 2003). Of course this process works both ways, and Rolston's (2010) consideration of the future of murals in Northern Ireland shows how elite groups have tried to use the street-level vernacular of mural painting to portray a more peaceful past and future.

Such a dynamic approach to understanding collective memory does not negate the experiences of non-elites, and the way they use and experience the built environment from day to day. Neither does it deny the power of elite groups to manipulate and shape the built environment to reflect the narratives of collective memory they favour, or underplay their motivations to do so. It does, however, encourage researchers to think in wider terms than simply one paradigm and to pay attention to the processes and negotiations that occur when differing narratives of collective memory, formed in different contexts, from different materials and by different groups, collide in the same space. As Forest, Johnson and Till eloquently put it, simply opposing the so-called 'public' and 'elite' versions of memory is reductive; in reality;

“different social groups, functioning as distinct “publics” and counter-publics may interact with officials or choose other actions that influence the remaking of these [commemorative] places ( ...) public memory is an activity or process rather than an object or outcome” (Forest, Johnson, & Till, 2004, p. 358)

The situation in Osh demonstrates this point amply; different strands of memory weave in and out of one another in a complex pattern, sometimes coming together in harmony, sometimes opposing each other, and sometimes not reflecting the same concerns at all. Examining this commemorative picture in one framework brings to light a number of points that may otherwise be missed if we only considered the top-down or bottom-up spaces of memory.

For example, while many residents seem to be engaged in a process of mapping out the city’s industrial past as they walk through its mercantile present, this narrative does not feature at all in the city authorities’ attempts to narrate Osh’s past and future. Perhaps the authorities do not wish to draw attention to this divergence, brought about by the city’s economic decline since the end of the Soviet era. Or perhaps this narrative is simply not their most pressing concern in a city where challenges are legion, and resources scarce. Crucially, this narrative recalls the existence of challenges and contrasts in Osh beyond those brought to light by the 2010 Events. If the Events focused attention on Osh, there is a concomitant risk that researchers, authorities and local and international organisations focus on this violence to the exclusion of other long-term challenges which continue to define Osh residents’ lives. This economic decay is likely not something Osh’s governing elite wishes its citizens to focus on. The Soviet era pride in industrial achievement – still visible in the urban fabric through the huge murals that have survived on residential buildings – has been replaced in the symbolic language of the city by pride in the figures of Barsbek, Manas and Alimbek Datka. The current official silence regarding Osh’s industrial identity is made explicit, then, when it is contrasted with the non-elite narratives being expressed by people using the city’s post-industrial landscape.

In other cases, bringing together elite and non-elite narratives reveals clear opposition. The vision of Osh being promoted by the city authorities through their monumental interventions in the city is that of a distinctly Kyrgyz city taking its place in the greater arc of Kyrgyz history and mythology. This runs counter to the memories expressed by some respondents, who see Osh not as a historically Kyrgyz city, but a traditionally diverse and multicultural place. This narrative resists city authorities’ efforts to inscribe an exclusive sense of Kyrgyzness in space. It demonstrates just how these efforts are causing nonKyrgyz residents (and to some extent, older Kyrgyz residents) of the city to feel displaced and under pressure in the very place they call home. Certainly, this seems a long way from former Mayor Myrzakmatov’s stated aim of building tolerance in the city. And yet it is important to note that this was overwhelmingly expressed by older residents of the city, and rarely by the young. This suggests that this resistance might decline further in future years, as the new officially favoured narrative of public memory in Osh takes root, and comes to resonate with the lived experience of a generation that has grown up since Soviet times. Already, many city residents I spoke to actively expressed their support for these monuments and the

history they celebrate, a reminder that neither elite nor non-elite narratives should be presumed to be unitary or stable.

When it comes to the 2010 Events and memories of violence, there is a clear attempt from all quarters to commemorate and situate these memories in the physical fabric of the city, giving them a sense of permanence. However, the places this is being done do not match up with one another: although peace monuments have been purposefully constructed by city authorities, they do not appear to have been incorporated into the commemorative vernacular by non-elites. Indeed, most people seem more comfortable locating their memories of the Events in places that form part of their daily routine, and do not interact with the official spaces of commemoration (even though they are mere steps from other frequently visited sites). This can partly be attributed to the kinds of narratives these spaces represent; whilst the official monuments support messages about reconciliation and peace, the unofficial spaces are often used to express memories of violence, fear and trauma (though this too is not exclusive – one Uzbek teacher described her neighbourhood as a place of mutual aid during the violence, insisting attackers came from elsewhere). Thus, attempts to commemorate the same event do not always tell the same story. This is more than a simple mismatch or misunderstanding between citizens and the city authorities: such a situation privileges and protects the official sites, leaving informal sites actively being used by people at risk from future development, a risk that will be explored in the final section of this paper.

Reading across these narratives also allows us to see how understandings of public memory can be nuanced by factors such as time, place and subject matter. For example, an individual may resist elite narratives through their insistence on recalling the city's industrial past in their everyday practice, whilst supporting the city authorities' monumental attempts to bolster ethnic Kyrgyz identity in Osh's urban fabric. In other cases, the meaning of symbols inscribed in the cityscape has changed over time. Just as older Osh residents may remember that Manas once represented a commitment to multiculturalism in the immediate post-Soviet era, they now read that the new Manas statue as symbolic of Kyrgyz nationalism. Perhaps most interesting, though, is what happens when these commemorative spaces intersect. The peace monuments, with all their imagery of inter-communal reconciliation, immediately abut the place where one Tatar woman recalled waiting in fear to be evacuated from the city during the June Events, along with other members of her community. Similarly, the positioning of the monument to Alimbek Datka in the middle of an Uzbek neighbourhood which was seriously damaged during the June violence leads to a layering of physical expressions of commemorative narratives of Kyrgyz nationalism, multiculturalism and violence onto the same physical space. These spaces, through which people move on a daily basis, are saturated with narratives of memory; narratives that city residents respond to in different ways as they interact with the spaces. It is this commemorative saturation that leads Liu (2012) to suggest we 'think with' the city of Osh as an analytical framework, rather than simply about it, in order to understand the effects of these densely layered spaces on the people who use them (p. 13).

### **Looking to the future – writing memory out of the city**

Planned changes to Osh could also have far-reaching consequences for the way people currently remember in the city. Whilst the city Masterplan for development remains a closely guarded secret (one international organisation representative based in Bishkek ruefully described it as being like the Loch Ness Monster – everyone has heard of it, but no one has seen it), former Mayor Myrzakmatov's office did publish a policy note on its website – *The Renaissance of Osh* – which set out its aims for the city in broad terms. The document sets out a range of interventions in the city's urban landscape, notably that 'single storey dwellings, which do not meet the basic requirements of building regulations (solidity and seismic resistance, sanitary and fire prevention standards) will be exchanged for comfortable buildings and structures, situated outside the seismic danger zones', and that housing needs would be met by the 'construction of modern multi-storey buildings and structures' (*The Renaissance of Osh*, 2013). These changes, it goes on to say, will 'permit a gradual change from the "village structure" into an urban way of life and into business of a contemporary nature' (*The Renaissance of Osh*, 2013). These changes in building types would also be accompanied by work to widen key arterial roads in the city to alleviate traffic congestion, and the renovation and expansion of green spaces in the city centre. These plans were first mooted in the weeks following the June violence, when the then Mayor Myrzakmatov suggested that destroyed housing be replaced with multiethnic high-rise blocks to encourage ethnic mixity in the city (Megoran, 2012; Satybaldiev, 2010). Under pressure from international donors, though, the idea of promoting interethnic harmony through high-rise housing was shelved (Melvin, 2011). However, the emphasis on building multi-storey buildings in Osh remains, now expressed via a discourse of sanitation (as seen in the quote above) and modernisation. As one representative of the city Architect's office explained, it is time for the city to take advantage of new advances in building techniques to become like a 'little Hong Kong'.

Such a logic of development could have a number of effects on memory in the city. First, if the city Masterplan is to be implemented, many parts of the city centre would be remodelled. Indeed, numerous houses and businesses have already been demolished as part of the street widening in Monueva Street and in the central bazaar. By officially proclaiming the two peace monuments as the official commemorative spaces for the Events, even though these do not appear to resonate with the wider population, the authorities are failing to acknowledge and safeguard the multitude of meaningful commemorative spaces in the everyday fabric of the city. Such spaces may find themselves at a very real risk of demolition or transformation in the near future, and the bottom-up memories of the June Events written out of the city.

Second, if carried out, these steps will have one clear consequence for the urban landscape of Osh – the removal, or at the very least reduction in size, of historical mahalla neighbourhoods in the city centre, largely inhabited by ethnic Uzbek families. To remove this highly visible symbol of Osh's identity as a diverse city brings the city authorities into direct conflict with the memory of multicultural Osh set out above, and expressed by numerous city residents. Removing mahalla neighbourhoods in the city centre could fatally undermine the Uzbek community's memories of belonging in Osh, built into the very fabric of their homes which, as Bevan has noted elsewhere, could leave them not only physically

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displaced, but disconnected from their networks of memory identity (Bevan, 2007). Given this possibility, it becomes easy to understand why one Uzbek respondent likened his situation to that of a refugee in his own city. This feeling can only be exacerbated when it with the city authorities' grand scale interventions in the urban landscape so far, in the shape of the three distinctly mono-ethnic monuments that now mark the gateways to the city.

Although the reality of Osh's future urban development is still unclear – whether the city authorities will have the money, political stability and support from Bishkek to carry out their plans is a decidedly moot point – it is clear that these decisions could have important consequences for the construction of a sustainably peaceful city. Without taking account of the way different groups in the city use everyday elements of the built environment to express their memories of the city, the authorities risk destroying these street-level commemorative spaces, and in doing so alienating and marginalising many city residents, further reducing Osh's prospects of sustainable peace.

Interrogating the interplay of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' public memory in post-Events, Osh has proved a fruitful approach: it has demonstrated that whilst memories of Osh's industrial past are being relived by many city residents through their daily routines, there has been little or no attempt to acknowledge this commemorative narrative in elite commemorative interventions. It has revealed agreement between elite and grassroots actors over the need to express memories of the 2010 violence through the built environment, yet laid bare the divergence of opinions on how and where this could best be done. Finally, it has shown how some citizens use the cityscape to dispute the narrative of mono-ethnicity being expressed in top-down monumental interventions in the city (popular with other residents), presenting an alternative vision of Osh as a historically multiethnic place. Understanding the ways in which elite and non-elite narratives of memory are expressed and interact in the built environment, then, enables the researcher to build a fuller picture of life in the city than would emerge from studying either phenomenon in isolation.

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