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# **Reconstructing to what?**

## **Urban Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy in Southern Kyrgyzstan**

## **Introduction**

In June 2010 the cities of Osh and Jalalabad in southern Kyrgyzstan were struck by a wave of ethnic violence. In just four days approximately 400 people were killed, 2 800 buildings destroyed, 300 000 people were internally displaced and an additional 100 000 people fled to neighbouring Uzbekistan (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2011). According to the international independent investigation conducted by Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC), the majority of victims were Uzbek and Uzbek owned properties were structurally targeted throughout the cities (KIC, 2011:52).

In the aftermath of the violence, several efforts for the cities' physical reconstruction have emerged. The immediate efforts were made by international aid organizations in cooperation with the government of Kyrgyzstan, however different plans for reconstruction have been expressed by the local authorities and the national governmental agency for reconstruction; the State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development (SDRD) (SDRD, 2011). The local authorities have expressed their will to implement an old unfinished master plan, originally formulated in 1978, and the national government appears to be equally concerned with constructing apartment buildings as well as reconstructing old housing (Golos Ameriki, 2011). The SDRD has articulated its intention to construct "multi-ethnic" apartment buildings for victims of the June violence, as the SDRD views the "monoethnic" *mahalla* neighbourhoods (compounds of traditional one-storey houses), where Uzbeks traditionally live, as a form of segregated residence which is considered, by the SDRD, as a root cause of the inter-ethnic tensions in the cities (SDRD, 2011). The reconstruction effort made by the SDRD is interesting from a conflict prevention perspective as it contains explicit arguments for causes of inter-ethnic tension and solutions to inter-ethnic conflict. It is also interesting to analyze as the reconstruction policy intends to physically "build away" a division allegedly caused by homogeneity of neighbourhoods.

## **Aim and questions**

This essay aims to illustrate how reconstruction efforts for rebuilding housing in a post-conflict setting may be based on assumptions of conflict causes and solutions and its implications on peace-building. Furthermore, its objective is to analyze in which way urban planning policy can be understood as a tool for peace-building in the post-conflict context of southern Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of 2010. In order to examine these peace-building efforts through reconstruction of physical infrastructure, this paper will draw upon the

conceptual framework by Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey for analyzing and examining urban planning policy in cities divided by ethnic or sectarian conflicts. This, while “planning for peace” may arguably be considered as conflict prevention as it, in this case, contains tools and aims to refrain from renewed conflict. In order to examine this subject further, the following question is asked: *How can the SDRD’s reconstruction efforts be interpreted through the conceptual framework for urban planning policy by Gaffikin and Morrissey?* Secondly, the conceptual framework is based on addressing root causes in urban planning policy, and therefore an additional question is asked: *In which way has the SDRD addressed the root-causes of the conflict through its planning policy?*

## **Method and sources**

The following is a case study of the reconstruction efforts made by the SDRD in Osh, Kyrgyzstan and its inherent perspectives on conflict prevention and peace-building. The study has been conducted through a literature study, the main sources of information are reports published by various organizations with presence in southern Kyrgyzstan, as well as a report published by the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission investigating the June violence, articles published by Central Asian news agencies and announcements made by the State Directorate for Reconstruction and Development of Kyrgyzstan. The actual planning documents set out by national authorities has not been retrievable, therefore, information on reconstruction plans and efforts by the national governmental agency has been collected from both international reports, news agencies and announcements made by the SDRD in order to create a holistic picture.

## **Theoretical framework**

Gaffikin and Morrissey begin with distinguishing two forms of contested cities based on the cause of their contest: *pluralism* or *sovereignty*. Naturally, this poses another dilemma – deciding what is actually the root cause – something which is overcrowded with perspectives and theoretical points of departure. As Ramsbotham et al argues: *“If historians cannot agree on the causes of a war, how can anyone agree on what policy might prevent a potential war?”* (Ramsbotham et al, 2005:110). However, in the specific categorization made by Gaffikin and Morrissey, one may conclude that Osh is a space contested due to its *pluralism* as it *”centres on disputes about imbalances in power, welfare and status between the distinctive rival groups”* as opposed to being *“interlocked with an ethno-nationalist conflict about the*

*legitimacy of the state itself*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2006:874). The imbalance of power, in resource allocation and status may be termed “relative deprivation”, which is the perceptual or absolute notion of inequality between groups. In determining the root causes we may also look to other examples of divided cities: “*Inter-ethnic violence in a divided city is sparked off by relative deprivation, rather than by conditions of hardship measured in objective or absolute terms. Legal restrictions on employment, housing and education that were imposed on disenfranchised ethnic minorities preceded and intensified ethnic tensions in Belfast, Beirut, and Jerusalem*” (Calame, 2007:42). In the case of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, both Human Rights Watch and the Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission have noted relative deprivation as a foregoer to the June events (HRW, 2010:15 & KIC, 2011:20).

During and after conflict, the geography of the cityscape will most likely become more separated, and ethnic divisions will be further marked through spatial borders – Gaffikin and Morrissey argue that: “*When local ethnic antagonisms are intensified by macro nationalist disputes, the city moves from being ‘divided’ to being ‘polarized’ (Benvenisti, 2001), and this is spatially expressed in forms of balkanization that foster exclusive ethnic enclaves*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2006:874-875). However, this segregation mustn’t inevitably have negative implications for the communities concerned, as spatial segregation may: “*include the nurturing of group solidarity and cultural preservation (Peach, 1996), the promotion of ethnic entrepreneurship (Boal, 2001), the generation of economies of scale for local services, and the provision of relative safety in an insecure environment*” (2006:875). On the other hand, there are measures other than urban planning policy for mitigating the segregation symptom: “*Certain civic instruments such as the welfare state can have an equalising and integrating effect despite high levels of residential segregation [...] some insist that urban policy in contested cities has an exaggerated focus on segregation*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011:92). This again, points us in the direction towards politics based on inclusion, rather than physically “building away” what is perceived as “mono-ethnic” neighbourhoods through a top-down reconstruction policy.

In the question of how this actually plays out in the culture markers and cityscape, Gaffikin and Morrissey refer to the argument presented by Keirse and Gatrell, namely that: “*in contested spaces, competing culture groups [...] strengthen and legitimise themselves and their efforts through the development of adaptive spatial practices*” (2006:875). Moreover, they argue that symbols of tradition or culture in the contested cityscape will: “*serve to simultaneously proselytize to the believer, while inciting the infidel. Thus, ‘the political culture intentionally invests cultural landscape with contentious*

*ideological messages [...]*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2006:875). Planning for peace in a contested public space, whether it is the public sector or a public park must hence be comprehended as a space of politics both in the sense of structural context and agency of the planner: *”in all societies, particularly in deeply fractured ones, space itself is an actor and not simply a stage. Thus, as argued earlier, the social shaping of space is central to the contest, and thereby planning is bestowed a leading role”* (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2006:884).

## **Root-causes to the June violence**

In the aftermath of the June violence, the National Democratic Institute conducted a survey in the cities of Osh and Jalalabad in order to investigate the local perception of the reconstruction efforts (NDI, 2011). The survey concluded that residents of conflict-affected areas perceived the following issues as contributing causes of the violence: *“political instability and lack of order, an increase in food prices and low pay, growth of unemployment and a surge of labor emigration”* (NDI, 2011:7). However, as root causes they listed: *“the weaknesses of the government and nationalism – and to a lesser extent, predetermined acts, criminal turf wars, and ethnic Uzbeks seeking autonomy and rumors”* (NDI, 2011:14). However, Morgan Liu argues that it is *not* a dispute regarding sovereignty: *“with repressions happening next door in Uzbekistan (culminating in a massacre in 2005), many Osh Uzbeks had begun to value being citizens of Kyrgyzstan”* (Liu, 2012:8-9). This would place the conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan in the category of a “pluralist” conflict, however, a conflict may not be entirely restricted to one category.

Ranging from unemployment to higher food prices, the causal link between cause and violent effect are hard to determine. Nevertheless, one may argue that all socioeconomic issues mentioned may be mitigated or moderated by political means. In addition, the issues are also tightly intertwined with allocation of resources, social equity and refraining from relative deprivation – subsequently – we may analyze the politics of pre-violence Kyrgyzstan. The game of political power has always been one of the Kyrgyz. Uzbeks are principally excluded from positions within the public sector since fluency in the Kyrgyz language is a basic criterion. This has resulted in the fact that the police force, the military and the judicial system are all close to homogenously Kyrgyz. Furthermore, this exclusion from the public sector has driven Uzbeks and other minorities towards entrepreneurship in the private economical sphere, resulting in apparent perceived or actual differences in income between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz – in the sense that Uzbeks earn, or appear

to earn more than Kyrgyz (Human Rights Watch, 2010:14-16). The Kyrgyz Inquiry Commission concluded, regarding what is usually termed relative deprivation, that: *”The reality in southern Kyrgyzstan is that by June 2010 both communities considered themselves to be deprived and unfairly treated in various respects in relation to the other”* (KIC, 2011:20).

## **Reconstruction efforts made by the SDRD**

The reconstruction efforts made by the SDRD are plentiful. They range from assisting UNHCR in its immediate work for setting up transitional shelters, to conducting its own reconstruction. However, the approach of the SDRD towards reconstruction of housing has gradually changed since the summer of 2010. Initially, the agency offered victims two possibilities to retrieve construction funds; one was a grant of \$1 000 and the second was a loan of \$4 200. The vast majority of externally and internally displaced persons chose the grant upon their return (IDMC, 2011:5-6).

In 2010 Voice of America published an article on the reconstruction plan of Osh and Jalalabad presented in July the same year, and more specifically the options given to victims: *“a) live in high-rise apartment complexes, which will be built in the former Uzbek neighborhoods, and b) to obtain financial compensation and build new housing on their own in exchange for their destroyed houses get a plot land in another part of town”* (Khamidov, 2010). The UNHCR was concerned with this plan and a consultation with victims resulted in the conclusion that: *“People want to re-build their homes on their own plots of land, even on the foundations of their previous houses. Most people do not want to live in multi-story buildings. The plan may jeopardize property rights, and given the lengthy construction period for large buildings, many people may not have warm, suitable shelter for the winter”* (UNHCR, 2010). The SDRD has also had round-table discussions with local NGOs with regard to the reconstruction work (UNDP, 2010).

In February 2011, Central Asia Online writes that: *“The State Directorate for the Restoration of Osh and Dzhahal-Abad (Directorate), which the government created last summer, is supervising the construction of multi-storey housing for southern Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic riot victims”* (Ibraimov, 2011). However in July 2011 the government published the following on its webpage: *“The general director said there is a misunderstanding on one issue: the State directorate is not engaged in the construction of new houses, but only the reconstruction of the victim ones”* (SDRD, 2011). Nevertheless, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August in 2011

the SDRD posted a status update on its webpage on the progression of its construction projects in Osh and Jalalabad, out of the 35 new constructions five were explicitly constructed for victims of the June events (SDRD, 2011).

### ***Planning for peace through urban reconstruction policy***

In statements made by the head of the SDRD, Jantoro Satybaldiev, the emphasis on “multiethnic” neighbourhoods is evident: *“As new apartment blocks went up, he said, ‘We are trying to put people of various ethnicities in each block. We take the view that this will avoid the growth of mono-ethnic neighbourhoods and solve a problem that hasn’t been tackled in the last 20 years.’ However, he said, ‘Some people who are given apartments don’t want to live alongside people from another ethnic group. We’re trying to educate them, but without success. There’s palpable tension in the relationship’ ”* (Yusupova and Ahmedjanov, 2011). The intention of the governmental planning agency – to enable a new social fabric through renewed policy and spaces – may be considered a structural prevention measure. In addition, the SDRD is not alone in its notion that mono-ethnic neighbourhoods are an obstacle to peace-building. An investigation conducted by the U.S. Office of Conflict Prevention drew upon similar thoughts in its conclusion, mentioning mono-ethnic neighbourhoods as an obstacle to reconciliation (2011:8).

### **Examining the reconstruction plan**

The SDRD’s reconstruction plan is exceptional due to its explicit desire to form “multi-ethnic” space by constructing apartment buildings. A fundamental flaw in this intent is that the housing is intended to exclusively house victims of the June violence, which naturally would lead to the overrepresentation of Uzbeks in these buildings. Subsequently, this would create a new form of mono-ethnic neighbourhoods on a vertical scheme, instead of a horizontal one. In addressing the causes of why this particular question is not simply ethnical, but also political, one may look to the arguments put forward by Morgan Liu, as to why the mahallas carry a political territoriality. He portrays the Uzbek mahalla as an expression of territoriality which becomes fiercer at times of threat: *“during the two major episodes of interethnic conflict within the city; the postwar reconstruction boom, when mahalla residents were displaced as factories and apartment blocks rose on the razed ruins of mahallas; or the Kyrgyzstani government’s gerrymandering of the city’s limits to increase the percentage of Kyrgyz counted. In such moments, the mahalla was treated as a manifestation of Uzbek territoriality”* (Liu, 2012:6-7). If we consider the argument of Liu, then the construction of

apartment buildings in Osh and Jalalabad will open up a new geography for immigrating Kyrgyz, namely, that land shortage will no longer be a problem, and the alleged “gerrymandering” will now be managed by the frequent influx of Kyrgyz rural-to-urban immigration.

Secondly, the articulated unwillingness of Uzbeks to reside in multi-storey apartment buildings appears to have been overlooked. In despite of “round-table” sessions with local NGO’s, the SDRD has still constructed new apartment buildings instead of allocating most funds on reconstruction of old housing in the mahallas. In regard to new apartment buildings in Belfast, as a means of creating new “non-sectarian” spaces, Gaffikin and Morrissey asks the following question: “*would the city trade off more social segregation for less sectarian segregation?*” (2011:226). In the case of southern Kyrgyzstan, the answer is positive. Moreover, “*social interaction across cultural diversity is not completely related to the spatial proximity of shared residence in a neighbourhood*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011:92) meaning that the restoration of the bazaar and other main arteries of trade might have a higher value in re-establishing social interaction without fear, regardless of changes made to residential areas. After the violence it has been noted that one of the few public spaces still equally shared by Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are mosques, where both ethnicities meet regularly (Yusupova and Ahmedjanov, 2011).

One may argue that the construction of multi-storey buildings in Osh and Jalalabad is an act made in order to strengthen and foster the legitimacy of the Kyrgyz culture and authority in southern Kyrgyzstan. It is an act of cultural hostility in the sense that preferences of one group is yet again overlooked, resulting in a form of “housing deprivation” as a factual result, but also as a perceived political deprivation, in the sense that Uzbeks are not integrated in the reconstruction phase to the extent that they can even partially steer the course of the SDRD. In addition, it is not only a political marker, but also a cultural one, since Kyrgyz have traditionally lived in multi-storey apartment buildings; it is a demonstration of which kind of city should be built and subsequently a symbol of who the city belongs to. As mentioned by Gaffikin and Morrissey, it becomes an attempt of making a tale of two cities become one (2011:93). Segregation isn’t necessarily the symptom of a socio-economic deprivation or conflict: “*Of course, some of these spatial detachments are more volitional and less socially disabling than others. In this respect, it is right to distinguish between imposed and intentional ethnic enclaves*” (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011:59). One may argue that the enclaves in the case of the Uzbeks is voluntary since the mahalla is their preferred housing. However, the ethnicity of this enclave might not be the absolute marker of this enclave,



Gaffikin and Morrissey refer to Hudson et al (2007) who argue that: *“government policy should seek to reframe the notion of cohesion, understanding that: there is an overemphasis on residential segregation to the exclusion of the complex dynamics of separation/interaction in highly diverse neighbourhoods; the primary focus on ethnicity as the most salient social division that results in hindrance to cohesion is itself problematic and needs to be rethought”* (2011:92). In the case of Uzbeks in Osh and Jalalabad, it appears to be clear that living in mahallas is an intentional enclave, which is not necessarily ethnical, and that the same living preferences can be noticed in Kyrgyz residential areas.

The SDRD argues that mono-ethnicity itself is a root cause of the conflict and the June violence. However, Gaffikin and Morrissey argue that segregation itself is not necessarily the cause of the conflict, but rather that extended segregation is symptomatic of conflict, or inter-ethnic tensions (2011:92). In addition, the international investigation did not consider mono-ethnic neighbourhoods as a root cause, but rather identified the similarities of the 2010 violence with the riots of 1990, and the fact that national political power play and turmoil forewent the riots both times.

Many throughout the NDI survey mentioned unemployment as a root cause to the June violence. Paradoxically, the construction of new apartment buildings contributed to lower the number of unemployed probably far more than only reconstruction of old housing would have. Subsequently, this would mean that the reconstruction plan addressed the actual root causes, as articulated by residents, and not just the symptomatic segregation.

Lastly, according to an investigation made by the Swedish Migration Board, the SDRD and the local government has now resigned in their attempt to forcibly move people from the Uzbek community into the multi-storey apartment buildings (Landinformationsenheten, 2011:23). This is an indicator of the failure of the reconstruction for victims, as well as a confirmation that it is probably Kyrgyz families who will fill the empty newly constructed apartments.

## **Conclusion**

Through the prism of the conceptual framework, Osh and Jalalabad cities may arguably be seen as cities divided due to pluralistic contests. Their conflict arises from relative deprivation which in turn fosters ethnic stereotypes. The reconstruction efforts are excessively focused on ethnicity as a social marker, something which is also reflected in the reconstruction plan. The excessive focus on ethnicity, and omitting of participatory planning has resulted in an

unsuccessful attempt to create “multi-ethnic” neighbourhoods. In accordance with the conceptual framework of Gaffikin and Morrissey, these buildings may in themselves enable a new social structure of the cities. By proceeding in constructing the apartment buildings, the Kyrgyz authorities are manifesting territoriality through cultural markers, such as preferred housing.

In the post-conflict context, none of the established causes are taken into account by the SDRD. The agency addressed the root-causes from its own notion of the implications of homogenous ethnic neighbourhoods, in despite of the claims made by NGOs at an early stage of reconstruction, and later by the international independent investigation. Indirectly, the SDRD addressed the unemployment, which was listed as a perceived cause in the survey made by the National Democratic Institute, but not articulated by the SDRD.

Finally, it is difficult to incorporate the addressing of root-causes into post-conflict reconstruction policy, as time is a stressful variable, and causes of conflict vary dependent on which theoretical filter one chooses. Nevertheless, attempting to address inequalities through reconstruction planning policy might be more fruitful if participatory planning would be included. In the end it almost appears as if the multi-storey apartment buildings were built as a part of the 1978 master plan, however, veiled and with compromises, which in turn resulted in a change in the cityscape rather than merging the threads of the social fabric in the cities.

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