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## **Memories of the Riots in Chimkent (Kazakh SSR) and Frunze (Kirghiz SSR) in 1967**

On May 17<sup>th</sup> 1967 hundreds of people rioted in the center of Frunze, the capital of Kirghiz SSR, during which they destroyed and put on fire militia and district departments, militia transport and assaulted militia workers. Just as in many other parts of the Soviet Union, the KGB reported that the riots were triggered by »hooligans«<sup>1</sup>. Barely a month later a much larger mass riot took place in neighboring Kazakh SSR in the city of Chimkent.<sup>2</sup> Again »hooligans« destroyed city militia departments and cars, just as the regional office of the Ministry for the Defense of Public Order, but also attempted to release prisoners from the symbolic investigative isolation cell in the center of the city.<sup>3</sup> Just as in other cities of the USSR, rioters in Frunze and Chimkent attacked exclusively militia workers and road police. To calm down the situation the Soviet administrators had to employ military troops of neighboring republics. Strict secrecy and silence followed the two uprisings. Vladimir Kozlov in his recent historical investigation of mass uprisings in the post-Stalin USSR has estimated the riots in Frunze and Chimkent to have been the largest mass uprisings of the entire Brezhnev Era.<sup>4</sup>

The riots followed a typical scenario of many riots in other Soviet cities not least in that that they arose around important symbolic dates. 1967 was the year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October revolution. In Frunze, barely a week after the celebration of the World War II victory, two militiamen beat a soldier in public on a bus stop near a central market. The crowd at the bazaar, especially women, started shouting at the militiamen criticizing them for attacking the »defenders of the motherland«. Bazaar traders, some customers and passersby attacked these and other militiamen. Later that day a group of men attacked militia

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<sup>1</sup> Obvinitelnoe Zakluchenie [Charge], in: Archives of the National Security Service (SNB) of the Kyrgyz Republic, Archives of Criminal Processes, August 8<sup>th</sup> 1967, no 1714, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Post-Soviet names of the two town are Shymkent, Kazakhstan and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of the event was submitted to the Minister of Social Order of USSR Nikolai A. Shelokhov, signed by the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Kazakh SSR Shirakbek Kabylbaev. Cited in Khalmenov, Kulahmet: Vospominaniya Generala Milicii [Memories of a Militia General], Almaty 2001, p. 191–193.

<sup>4</sup> Kozlov, Vladimir: Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the post-Stalin Years. Armonk, NY/London 2002.

buildings and transport; burned furniture with documents in militia departments and, as an ex-KGB worker recalls, attempted to liberate prisoners from a jail.<sup>5</sup>

The procurator's office concluded that hooliganism and distrust in militia's actions were the main reasons of the »mass disorders«: »hooligans«, many of which were reported to be drunk, »destroyed in a barbarian way belongings, working documents and passports at the militia department, tore portraits from walls, broke desks, chairs, doors, telephone and radio equipment«<sup>6</sup>. An ex-KGB worker who was actively involved in investigating the riots remembered: »Well, after that [»mass disorders«] a process was started against youth. But who was the aim? We did not know. We took pictures of people. Then we figured out who was who. There was no planning (*sgovor*) of the riots, no leaders: someone had a brother in jail and wanted to free him, someone was sitting there before.«<sup>7</sup> Among the »evening« rioters were a carpenter, an unemployed wall painter, two unemployed military personnel and an ex-military man currently a musician,<sup>8</sup> they were Russians and Kyrgyz. Unlike rioters of other uprisings described by Kozlov, none had been previously serving a sentence in prison.

In Chimkent, however, it was the death of a bus driver that triggered mass uprisings. On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1967, at about 1 a. m. Vasili Ostroukhov, a 29 year old employee of the regional autobus park, as officials reported back then, was taken off the city streets by a group of militiamen in drunken condition and brought to a sobering-up station. In the morning, around 6 a. m., during the next round check by the police, he was found dead on the same street. The medical doctor who conducted the post-mortem examination came to the preliminary conclusion that his death was caused by blood clots in his brain following excessive alcohol intake in combination with hypertonic illness. The director of the auto park and his drivers suspected that their colleague had died because of beatings in the center. After this version had reached employees of the automobile park, relatives and colleagues of Ostroukhov demanded another medical investigation with the participation of a specialist. At the same time, at 12 a. m., another group of drivers refused to start their work. Bus and taxi drivers blocked the traffic on the streets. In total 117 cars crowded together. Between 2 and 3 p. m. about 800 people approached the city's militia department. On their way, a big group of people from the bazaars joined them. The movement swelled to 3 500 people, who burned the building of the city's militia department, and who then went on to demolish the jail. They burned some parts of it, but the prisoners remained inside.<sup>9</sup> An ex-militiaman

<sup>5</sup> Interview taken in Bishkek, September 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Obvinitelnoe Zakluchenie (footnote 1), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Interview taken in Bishkek, September 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Obvinitelnoe Zakluchenie (footnote 1), pp. 18–22.

<sup>9</sup> A summary of the event submitted to the Minister of Social Order of USSR Shelokhov (footnote 3), p. 191–193.

who experienced the events recalled: »The deputy head gave me some keys and ordered me to gather all the guns and to lock them away, so that protesters would not be able to get them. I noticed that, suddenly, he was not in the room anymore. In the meantime, the noise of a crowd could be heard and one could presume that the beating of militiamen had already started. The siege was in full blow. At this point, of course, we would have needed to take guns and defend ourselves. But following the order, we had given up the guns. Perhaps it helped. But some guns still fell into the hands of the people [...]. Many militiamen tried to save themselves by jumping from the second floor. But they were caught, taken to the front of the buildings and just trampled over. I was able to run into the internal yard and found the clothes of a worker on a motorcycle. I changed clothes and survived. At this moment, the crowd rushed into the yard, but they beat up only those who were in uniform. However, they did not find any guns.«<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, one wishes greater details of and reasons for these riots. Important archival material about the events, however, is still classified and historians are left to wait to learn more about them, especially the numbers of deaths they caused. Vladimir Kozlov has argued that the post-Stalin period uprisings in the USSR shared similar patterns and »were, no matter how paradoxical it sounds, evidence of the continued ideological stability of the [Communist] regime and of the still vibrant belief in »real communism.« The persons who participated in uprisings, he explains, had personal reasons for revenge since many were ex-convicts (often innocent) and had experienced the government's brutality at first hand. Others were simply unemployed or poorly paid workers who had nothing to lose after their open protest against their living conditions and miserable lives. The author concludes that as a result of the wave of uprisings throughout the USSR, the state was frightened and became more flexible and attempted to satisfy the basic social groups economically.<sup>11</sup> In my case, due to refusal of KGB agencies (Committee for National Security, previously KGB) to disclose archival material both in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, this work is only partially based on written documents. The limitation, however, opens other, no less important opportunities to the study of these uprisings: the living memories, interpretations and meanings of those in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Shemratov, Danil: *Jarkoe Leto 1967* [The Hot Summer of 1967], in: *Karavan*, no 7 (665), February 14<sup>th</sup> 2003, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Kozlov: *Mass Uprisings* (footnote 4), p. 314.

### Mass media reports

The events of 1967 were not mentioned in the newspapers back in 1967<sup>12</sup>, no history textbook included information about them. And as Erlan Satyrbekov, a journalist of an independent Kyrgyzstani newspaper, wrote, »the government cleaned up everything the next day in order to erase the horrible event from people's memories«. Journalists in Shymkent and Bishkek<sup>13</sup> report that »1 150 military personnel were sent to restore order in Chimkent«<sup>14</sup> and »some 6 000 personnel to restore order in Frunze.«<sup>15</sup> The government back then decided not to make these events public, so that they were officially »forgotten«. However, some journalists, both in Shymkent and Bishkek, started discussing the events after the collapse of the Soviet Union, usually blaming militiamen and the ex-Soviet system for the brutal riots that took place some four decades ago.

In Bishkek, Alexander Tuzov writes in *Vechernii Bishkek*, a major daily newspaper in Kyrgyzstan, that in spring 1967 »the Soviet rule was abandoned, but the rioters did not put in place any other power and in few days the anarchy was stopped.«<sup>16</sup> He portrays the event as pointless and brutal revolutionary uprising against the Soviet rule.<sup>17</sup> However, the author notes, the citizens of Frunze, as usual, were mostly inactive and silent, so that the riot was suppressed the same day. He also draws attention to the fact that the Soviet government started holding military parades from November 7<sup>th</sup> 1967 on to demonstrate its power. Previously it had held only parades of workers. The noise of tanks and the brightness of rockets must have underlined the power of the rule of the Bolsheviks, who were celebrating in 1967 the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the socialist Great October Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Erlan Satyrbekov in his article in the newspaper *Delo #* does not go so far as to proclaim the riot a revolutionary uprising, but instead links them to other events of 1967 that took place in the Soviet Union, among which were inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus, student uprisings in Belarus SSR, workers' boycott against growing prices, and so on.<sup>19</sup> For him, the many violently silenced riots were the

<sup>12</sup> I have checked newspapers from 1967 in the archives of the Lenin Library in Bishkek. Journalist Erlan Satyrbekov, who investigated the events, also states that none of the newspapers mentioned the riots. Satyrbekov, Erlan: Bazarnyi Bunt: belie piatna nashei istorii (Market riot: white gaps in our history), in: *Delo #* May 28, 1997, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> I am using these names to mark the period after collapse of the Soviet Union (see footnote 2).

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Khalmenov: Vospominaniya (footnote 3), p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> Satyrbekov: Bazarnyi Bunt (footnote 12).

<sup>16</sup> Tuzov, Alexander: Kyrgyzstan: XX vek ... 1967 ... 1968, in: *Vechernii Bishkek*, December 15<sup>th</sup> 2000, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Satyrbekov: Bazarnyi Bunt (footnote 12).

results of rising repressiveness of the Soviet politics of the 1960s when »human suffering was not considered«. He notes that the reports characterize the »hooligans« as »alcoholics, drug addicts or those who did not participate in the social life of a community«. But those were only the leaders and starters, who were followed by people mainly with positive characteristics. Here, Satybekov suggests, is »where the trouble starts«<sup>20</sup>. He questions the fact »that the government did not find any »politics« in these events, mere hooliganism in the framework of »mass disorders«. He also states that »these two days are included in teaching materials of the MVD and KGB of the USSR as the most typical examples of »mass disorders« that take place according to a classical scheme«<sup>21</sup>. In another newspaper, the same author mentioning the same riots argues that the present government has not changed the core of the [Soviet] politics, but only the ideological direction.<sup>22</sup> A clear link between the past and the present is constantly articulated: authoritarian government, lack of freedom of speech, passive population. A change occurs only with March 2005 Kyrgyzstani »Tulip revolution« with an article describing Felix Kulov<sup>23</sup> – the prime minister who was liberated from prison during the events 2005 and was the »spiritual father« of the »revolution« – as a revolutionary hero who already in 1967 participated in uprisings in Frunze. Ironically, back then Kulov was a militiaman and was on the other side of the uprisings, his lasting heroism was dubiously explained by the journalist: Kulov warned about post-Soviet uprisings<sup>24</sup> as an experienced person but the government did not listen to him.<sup>25</sup> In the article, then, the mass riots are seen both positively and negatively. On the one hand, innocent persons were suppressed, on the other hand riots are destructive and the government should prevent them. This dubiousness probably reflected the uncertain attitude towards the »Tulip revolution« of 2005 a year later, where many still could not decide whether it was destructive or constructive, right or wrong.

In Kazakhstan the riots were looked at in a similar way. The journalists tell the readers stories of militia's corruption and decadence and harshly criticize the past regime but also the present one. A journalist of *Karavan*, one of the most popular newspapers, wrote: »The exact number of people who were accused and executed was never officially proclaimed. And memory of these events was »prohibited«. However, in archives of Southern Kazakhstan we can notice a high rise of cases on articles such as »evil hooliganism« and »resistance to rules«. As a matter of

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Satybekov, Erlan in: Slovo Kyrgyzstana, no 27 (266), May 17<sup>th</sup> 1995, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Felix Kulov held various government positions both in Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>24</sup> Here the author refers to various riots in post-Soviet Kyrgystan.

<sup>25</sup> Tuzov, Alexander: Massovy bunt, bessmyslenny i besposhadnyi [The senseless and ruthless mass uprising], in: Vechernii Bishkek, no 65 (8739), April 8<sup>th</sup> 2005.

fact, all this »hooliganism« is under a »secret«-stamp. The only thing that was possible to discover is that there are thousands of cases like these in courts for the period from September to December of 1967.<sup>26</sup> The author draws attention to the fact that none of the participants of the riots were rehabilitated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, since all of them were accused of having conducted criminal acts and were executed by the court. The editor of this newspaper states that »at least back in Soviet years there was order«. He remarks that this popular argument does not take into account the fact that this »social order« killed people.<sup>27</sup> However, he continues his contradictory argument, although official explanations for disorders were »hooliganism« and »Western espionage«, on a non-official level militiamen were also punished since those were the main reason that led to such riots, whereas *now* in Kazakhstan brutality of militiamen goes mostly unpunished.<sup>28</sup> Journalists of the local Kazakh-language Shymkent newspaper *Yakiha* call people to remember past heroes, the ones who fought against militiamen and the system in 1967, since those understood back then that »the past [Soviet] politics was unable to offer opportunities for future development of the country«<sup>29</sup>. They regret, though, that local administration and militia workers did not help them with archival information, but instead asked to forget the riots since »those are in the past and do not need to be remembered«<sup>30</sup>.

### Divided memories: along the ethnic lines

Memories of past events never live in a vacuum and are not unchangeable. Individual worries, interests, desires and fears are expressed through storytelling and remembering. »Incorrect« memories of past events are valuable in that they can help us explain the *meanings* of those events for the individuals and groups today.<sup>31</sup> What do riots mean for these people today, how do they understand the protests? Memories are always individual and peculiar to each person, but there are trends among individuals in how they remember certain events and thus build a certain identity around them. In recalling the 1967 uprisings in Frunze and Chimkent, the memories of the events were bright and diverse. There was a pe-

<sup>26</sup> Shemratov: Jarkoe Leto 1967 (footnote 10).

<sup>27</sup> Shuhov, Alexander (editor-in-chief): At least in Soviet years there was order!, in: Karavan, no 7 (665), February 14<sup>th</sup> 2003, <<http://www.caravan.kz/content.asp?pid=157&tid=4&aid=5810>>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Abdikemuly, Mombek/Jomart, Atymtai: 1967 jylhy Shymkenttegi shoppyrlar koterelisi [Shymkent drivers' uprising in 1967], in: Yakiha, no 2 (2001), p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, Paul. The Voice of the Past: Oral history. Oxford 2000.

cular trend in narratives: those of »Slavic« background remembered the events differently from Kazaks and Kyrgyz. Both groups, however, linked the uprisings to other events and thus had their fears and aspirations about the great political and social transformations expressed in their memories.

Marina Grigorievna<sup>32</sup>, a fifty-four years old woman, citizen of Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Russian, who was eighteen years old when the riot took place recalled: »I was going to work this day, you know, I was working since I was 18 years old [...]. Our trolleybus went down Sovetskaia street and was going through the green market. But this day it stopped just before the bazaar. We did not know what was going on and we had to go out. I did not get to work, I think we even did not work for two days because of this mess. When we came out I saw all these fruits lying on the floor: nuts, *kuraga* (dried apricots), raisins, all in the dirt, on the ground! It was so shocking. I remember Kyrgyz and Uzbeks fighting with each other. I remember all those *tyubeteikas* (traditional hats), a lot of noise. I saw a body near me and all that food lying around. This was the first time I saw a corpse. All this was dirty. I do not know what else they needed, but we [Russians] stayed out of the conflict. You know they [Kyrgyz and Uzbek] always had problems between each other. As during those Osh events<sup>33</sup> [...]. It was so scary. What do they want, why do they fight? I do not understand. You know people just came down from the mountains and do not know what to do. People divide something and argue with each other. But we sit silently, because no one needs us.«<sup>34</sup>

In the last sentence by »us« Marina Grigorievna meant »Russians«. What is striking about her narrative is that for her the riot was not an uprising against militiamen but a fight between Kyrgyz and Uzbek. Her event clustered around ethnicity and food. For her there was a clear link to the Osh events. Marina and her family were forced to migrate to Central Asia with the official mission to »civilize« the people of the region in 1940s, where she succeeded by becoming the head of a technical unit at a factory and could secure a stable and good living for her family. She worried about another »nationalist« uprising taking place in Kyrgyzstan that could force her to flee to Russia.<sup>35</sup>

»Back then we had no nationality problems whatsoever, not like today!«<sup>36</sup> repeated Lyubov, a woman of Ukrainian origin, dozens of times. Always an activist worker, she was a Komsomol chair, then a district head (also in 1967) which she remained until today. But instead of recalling the 1967 riots she re-called her experience of the Osh events: »We, Russian old women [*starushki*], were riding on a

<sup>32</sup> All names are changed.

<sup>33</sup> The »Osh event« was an ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek in southern Kyrgyzstan that occurred shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>34</sup> Interview in Bishkek, November 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Marina left for Russia before the Kyrgyzstani »Tulip revolution«.

<sup>36</sup> Interview in Bishkek, March 2003.

bus when one young Kyrgyz man stopped the bus and asked us to get out. We were outside of the city. The driver, a good man, told him that he should show consideration since only old women were in the bus. Thus, he let us through. [...] It was so awful, I was afraid that we [Russians] would have to leave [Kyrgyzstan].» Vasili, a Russian ex-militiaman, remembered the uprisings of Osh similarly and concluded that »the crowd is dangerous precisely because it does not have demands, as president Akaev<sup>37</sup> says [...] it brings only violence.« Thus, as Marina, Vasili and Lyubov would go on talking about nationality problems, they would declare that they respect [former] president Askar Akaev, and add that only because of him Russians can live in Kyrgyzstan and therefore they want him to stay for longer. Their memories of the past, their fear of change of the contemporary situation and their personal experiences with nationalism in Bishkek influenced their voting behaviour in the constitutional referendum in 2003.<sup>38</sup>

Sapar, a Kyrgyz history professor in Bishkek, on the other hand, who was a married student in 1967, related the riots in Frunze to a different occurrence that took place in 1968, also in Frunze. He said that the riot of 1967 was, as any other riot, a struggle for scarce resources:

»In 1968, if one did not work in a factory, for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or the KGB it was impossible to get land or an apartment. A lot of people as me were from rural areas and did not work in such places. I was a doctoral candidate. There was one unoccupied place in the town that is now near the Cancer Center; there we started building houses for ourselves. We knew no one would give us land. We were young Kyrgyz intelligentsia; we did not see any other prospects [...]. When all the houses were finished militiamen came with tractors and started pulling them down. The houses were so beautiful, white. But militiamen did not care. There were 385 houses. We put our old grandmother in front of the house and they did not dare to drive over her. Thus, she saved some houses [laughing]. But somebody else put a pregnant woman in front of the house and militiamen did not care, they forced her into the car, but still destroyed their house.«<sup>39</sup>

He talked about his experience with militia, not in the context of 1967, but against a different background. When I met Sapar the next time, his story changed radically:

»Back then there were many »mass disorders«. We took them as hooliganism. But during this event [riots of 1967], we began to realize what life meant without

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<sup>37</sup> President of Kyrgyzstan 1991–2005.

<sup>38</sup> The Constitutional referendum of 2003 was coupled with the »vote for the president«. Amidst instable political situation in Kyrgyzstan with various parties demonstrating against the president, the president Akaev announced that those who will vote for the constitution will also vote symbolically for the president and entrust him to lead the country. This referendum was seen by some people as a rehearsal before the real presidential elections in 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Interview held in Bishkek, March 2003.

militiamen. For about two days there was no militia on the streets. People, dangerous for society, felt like kings – *tuniyadtsy* [lazy people who live on the cost of society], *bezdelniki* [people who do nothing] – were hanging around the streets. They were lucky, they stole beer, and they felt good. It became dangerous [without militiamen]. *Tuniyadtsy* were those who did not get a job anywhere in the Union. Kyrgyzstan was one of the centers of all-Union construction works [*vesoyuznaya stroyka*], thus we had *tuniyadtsy* from all places. Also, young people who did not enter colleges were becoming alcoholics. There was a peak of Issyk Kul opium culture. Opium was exported from the Republic in tons. Many people wanted to make money on that. Thus, if the events of 1967 were not the first democratic movement, then they were a criminal act. From May to September people produced opium in Issyk Kul. Those years a lot of people from Caucasus came [...]. Thus it was an opium period. People gathered a certain amount of opium needed to get it out of the country unnoticed. Since there were many alcoholics, it was not difficult. They provoked the riot and when everyone was in shock they left the country with opium quite easy. What do you think? The Batken [event]<sup>40</sup> is also a matter of narcotics. Every time there is a narco season, there are battles. Riots are often just a manoeuvre for taking away one's [militia's] attention.«<sup>41</sup>

In his first interpretation Sapar tries to place himself as a Kyrgyz citizen in Kyrgyzstani history playing a role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the later interpretation, he is trying to link the events of 1967 to the Batken events and develops conspiracy theories. In his first narratives he shows himself as a citizen who came from a rural area to Frunze and contributed to the democratic development of Kyrgyzstan; in the second interpretation, he is explaining the riots as »dirty business« which he condemns and of which he was not a part.

A similar account gives Murat, a Kazakh male citizen of Shymkent who also came from a village to become a journalist. He tried to explain the events of 1967 through the corrupted politics of the past and present administration, but also linked them to another nationalist rebellion in 1986 that took place in the capital of Kazakhstan:

»These drivers did not rise in vain. Back then the director of the bus-station had to pay 10 000 rubles for his seat. It is like today; everyone has to pay for his or her position. The Party – as now does the clan – decided who would get what position. The director of the station could not gather 10 000 rubles any more, there was not enough money. And he planned the uprising. The only thing is that

<sup>40</sup> The Batken events were generally portrayed as defence war of the Kyrgyz border against Islamic extremists (usually native Uzbeks) coming from Afghanistan into Uzbekistan through Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>41</sup> Interview held in Bishkek, March 2003.

he planned to have it later. But here, by chance, a driver was killed and the drivers started it themselves [...]. A Soviet man of the 1960s was a mature person: he knew all that structure of politics and did not need the Soviet Union anymore. Do not believe that the riots were simple ›mass disorders‹. You cannot have in one day, in one minute so many people protesting [...].

It was also a national question. Back then the head of the regional Committee was Vladimir Nemencov, but if he were a Kazakh, then he would have been jailed. Nemencov was sent to Aktyubinsk, and here [in Chimkent] a Kazakh secretary was put in place. See, for Moscow the rioters were Kazakhs. The national question was not raised back then, but if the secretary were a Kazakh they would ask him ›Why do your people rebel?‹. It was just like in 1986, in Almaty. But there I was one of the organizers of the uprising. There we could not stand that our state secretary would be a Russian.<sup>42</sup>

Murat saw clear links between nationalism, the party network and the events. The clan network – is what makes him feel dismal today. But he also links his story to 1986, the ethnic conflict in Almaty between the Kazakhs and the Russians, and his struggle with the past. However, what is similar in Murat's and Sappar's narratives is that they both try to set themselves as contributors to the Kyrgyz or Kazakh nation, but also criticize corruption as obstacles.

An ex-worker of the bus-station where the uprising started, Timur, ethnic Kazakh, remembers the events the following way:

»No one taught us how to demonstrate – look, in the European Union they do it peacefully, in some frameworks. In 1967 everyone rioted not knowing what to do, they did it in despair. We jumped from feudalism to socialism and broke our leg, just like on the staircase. Here [in Chimkent 1967], the cup was too full and people went against militiamen. It was against their corruption. There was one auto-inspector, traffic regulator, uncle Styopa – Uzbek – no one touched him, because he did not take bribes, even if those were offered. Well he took bribes, but just a little bit, not like others [...]. Drivers wanted to complain, but it did not work out. People thought that war had started. Military divisions were sent here. People died. KGB agents took pictures of those who participated and then put them in jails [...]. Nevertheless, militiamen became more honest after all, *we* have achieved *something* [...].

But the riots were only against militiamen, because those were taking bribes. People did not attack other officials. [...] Militiamen were mainly Kazakhs from villages. They were uneducated, poor – second class citizens. Most Kazakhs were hired only for construction works: black people – black work. Russians had elite jobs; they could afford to be more honest. Today, for example, a smart Kazakh in power does not take as vice-chairs Kazakhs, but only Russians. This way one can

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<sup>42</sup> Interview held in Shymkent, November 2002.

get rid of the clan. A Kazakh vice-chair would hire everyone from his clan. Russians do not do it on clan structure [...].»<sup>43</sup>

Timur's narrative is similar to Murat's and Sapar's in that it condemns clan structures and corruption of the past and of today. He sees himself as one of those who fought such a system before and how those in power can fight it today. In their narratives, Timur, Murat, and Sapar derive their sense of citizenship from their memories of certain events: for Sapar it is taking lands and for Murat it is riots in Chimkent and Almaty. On the other hand, they express their disappointment about the criminal element such as corruption, or a clan structure, destroying something that they were fighting for. Thus, Sapar and Murat are interested not so much in nationality problems (although they do complain about past problems), as are Lyubov, Marina and Vasili, but in the lack of government's transparency and the overall political structures.

To conclude, memories of events can give us alternative information that has not been reported by officials in a way that would demonize the protesters. However, memories do not simply give us »alternative« information about riots. Memories can help us understand people's political imagination (how the state should function) and construction of national identities: how they put themselves as a Russian, a Kyrgyz or a Kazakh citizen in the course of a nation's history. Their desires and fears can suggest their political behaviour: with the example of Marina, Vasili and Lyubov it becomes possible to explain the voting behaviour of the »Slavic« population, the second largest ethnic group, of Bishkek in the 2003 referendum. However, Kyrgyz and Kazakh voices also suggest that there are not simply »losers« or »winners« of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz just as Russians live through difficult times of uncertainty: many are disappointed about corruption and authoritarianism of past and present governments.<sup>44</sup> But, as journalists were quick to point out, it is crucial to remember and discuss past protests and political problems. They are politically sensitive and bring up issues not only of the past, but also of the present and thus a dialogue with ourselves.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview held in Shymkent, February 2003.

<sup>44</sup> The interviews were held in 2002 und 2003, with the »Tulip revolution« the attitude seems to change.