The Ferghana Valley: A Ticking Bomb?
Conflict Potential and the Role of Youth in the Ferghana Valley

Simone de Bruijn, November 2011
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Conflict Potential and the Role of Youth in the Ferghana Valley

This master’s thesis is submitted for the completion of the Master Human Geography:

Conflicts, Territories and Identities

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Utrecht, November 2011

Cover photos (by Simone de Bruijn)
Upper photo: overview of Osh from the Suleyman mountain
Lower photo left: Destroyed building in Osh
Lower photo right: Children in destroyed Uzbek neighbourhood in Osh
Preface

At the moment I read about the Ferghana Valley for the first time, I was so attracted to it that I had to do something with it. How to realize? Making it the subject of my master’s thesis.

Now, more than one year later, I am very happy that I realized my research. Looking at the process that I went through I can say that I incredibly raised my knowledge about the valley. One year ago I could only dream about the region, now I know the valley because I have been there and I talked to many people living in the region.

The process of writing a master’s thesis and doing research was very instructive: brainstorming and defining the topic, organizing an internship at the OSCE Academy, realizing my trip to Kyrgyzstan, setting up contacts, conducting research and in the end finalizing my thesis.

Especially the research in Kyrgyzstan was very useful and interesting. Just by being there I already gained a lot more insight than I could have ever done in the Netherlands. By walking through conflict affected areas I could have a good feeling of the impact of the conflict, which is still hard to imagine for an outsider.

My research would not have been the same if I did not have met the next organizations and persons in Kyrgyzstan – which I sometimes just bumped into accidentally. For my stay in Bishkek, first of all I want to thank the OSCE Academy, by providing me a computer at their office. Besides, the fact that I did research at the OSCE Academy opened many doors for me. Furthermore, my research in Bishkek would have never been the same if I had not met Payam Foroughi, a colleague at the OSCE Academy. From the first time I met him, he invited me to his interviews where I could ask my questions. Even when I was not there, he asked my questions for me. Also I want to thank his assistant Aizada, who put so much effort in realizing interviews with important persons, and was very successful in getting a foot in the door. I already miss our traditional Chalap drinking moments after each interview.

For my time in Osh I want to thank Freek, Dorothé, Mira and Aron, for giving me a Dutch home in which I was totally free to do what I wanted to do. I really enjoyed having conversations about my research and international development in general, and I admire what you are doing. I enjoyed the warmth in your family and the regular eating and drinking moments on the tushuks in the garden.

Thanks for your hospitality and for being so understanding if I was not home for a few days in a row because of the many interviews I had.

In the Netherlands, I want to thank my supervisor Bert Bomert, for his useful comments. Also many thanks to my parents, who were sometimes maybe a bit worried and who made my trip to Kyrgyzstan – and my whole study - financially possible.

Simone de Bruijn
November, 2011
Summary

This study analyses the conflict potential and the role of youth in the Ferghana Valley at the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A specific approach is taken on Kyrgyzstan and the case-study of Osh, where a conflict broke out in June 2010 in which the majority of the perpetrators were young people. The Ferghana Valley and Osh specifically are analysed in this research through ethnic, socio-economic and political theoretical lenses.

The Ferghana Valley is an interesting region because of its many ingredients which can lead to conflict. First of all, because the valley is situated in a border region, there are cross-border issues which increase the risk on conflict. This can be traced back to the time of the Soviet Union, in which Stalin drew the lines of the Ferghana Valley as a “one-armed-alcoholic”: borders intertwined and convoluted crossing ethnicities, natural resources and water sources. These artificial borders belonged to the divide-and-rule policy: leaving ethnicities on the wrong side of the border would cause ethnic tensions so that the Soviet Union could easily control the region.

The borders became problematic with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tensions increased about access to undemarcated land and water resources, which often unfolded themselves along ethnic lines. Furthermore, the region as a whole went into decline. With the hardening of the borders, economic exchange became difficult and cross-border collective farms had to close down. Villages were split in half by a border fence, so that it was unable for people to visit their relatives on the other side of the border.

Other border issues which increases the instability in the region nowadays are drug trafficking and Islam extremism. Both have found their way to the region because of its peripheral location, low government control and bad socio-economic conditions. The valley is a safe haven for criminal groups and Islamic militant group to perform their duties. They also find support amongst the population: as the socio-economic conditions are bad people are searching for alternative ways to earn money, especially young people because they suffer the most from unemployment. Furthermore, as the people are dissatisfied with their government, it is also an alternative way to oppose the government and to find a secure safety net.

The three countries’ ethnic, socio-economic and political conditions are of big influence on conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. All countries have ethnic minorities, of which Kyrgyzstan has the most. The geographical distribution of these minority groups is such that the majority of them live in the Ferghana Valley, one of the most densely populated parts of Central Asia. Together with the fact that the valley is separated from the rest of the country by a huge range of mountains, the minority groups live in the periphery far away from the capitals. As the governments in Central Asia are characterized by nationalism, they do not pay particular interest to the Ferghana Valley. This causes a big regional division between the Ferghana Valley and the rest of the country in terms of socio-economic conditions, and as the Ferghana Valley is a densely populated area with different ethnic groups, this can lead to tensions and grievances between them.

Looking at the socio-economic conditions, they are worst in respectively Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Unemployment is high, especially amongst young people. The greed theory implies that when socio-economic conditions are bad, the chances on conflict occur. Therefore conflict would be most likely in Tajikistan. However, as Tajikistan has already seen a civil war the people there are so-called tired of conflict. In Kyrgyzstan a conflict in Osh in June 2010 broke out, while Uzbekistan has not seen a conflict yet. However, this should not only be ascribed to the socio-economic conditions, but also the political situation in each country.

Looking at the governments in the countries, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are at the moment characterized by authoritarian regimes while Kyrgyzstan has just seen a revolution and is now ruling under an interim-government. Kyrgyzstan is the most open and ‘democratic’ country: it is a country in between autocracy and democracy and it has a semi-repressive regime. These aspects make it happen that people are able to mobilize to protests, however, as effective routes for political participation are still blocked, this can result into violence. In contrast, in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan opposition is extremely suppressed. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan is a state in transition compared with
Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. After the deposing of president Bakiyev in April 2010, an interim government took over the power which was hastily formed and which could not control the country. It introduced a new constitution, in which the power of the president was constrained and a new semi-parliamentary system was introduced. In October 2010 parliamentary elections were held, which showed the enormous division in the country: five parties made it to parliament with none of them having the majority.

Because no new strong power took over the power in Kyrgyzstan after April 2010, a power vacuum was created. This led to the ethnic violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan in June 2010, which caused more than 400 deaths, about 2000 wounded and hundreds of thousands displaced. Although the violence unfolded itself along ethnic lines, it is not the case that the main reason for the conflict was ethnicity. Ethnicity did play a role, but on the other hand ethnicities lived in peace before for decades. Underlying causes had activated the feelings of ethnicity.

The bad socio-economic conditions in Osh were one of these causes. First of all, unemployment is high, especially amongst young people. As they have nothing to do and they do not have any prospect to look out to, it was easy to mobilize them to take part in the violence. Indeed, the majority of the participants in the violence were under thirty years old who live at the bottom of society. Furthermore, the bad socio-economic situation unfolded itself along ethnic lines. Uzbeks were running the good businesses in Osh, which caused envy amongst Kyrgyz, because an ethnic minority were having the good jobs in a Kyrgyz country. As a reaction Kyrgyz were starting to fill the tier above them; they dominated the jobs in the local government and the police. This caused again envy and feelings of social exclusion amongst Uzbeks. An ethnic division in the working class was thus created which caused feelings of inequality. These feelings were one of the reasons why the violence occurred along ethnic lines.

However, the convergence of feelings into violence can only occur in a certain political situation. With the overthrow of the nationalistic president Bakiyev, Uzbeks took their chance to express wishes for minority rights. The statements were interpreted by Kyrgyz as threats to their interest. They did not understand why the Uzbeks were requesting so much as they already had the wealthiest businesses in Osh. The tensions between the ethnicities increased and rumours about Uzbeks requesting autonomy made the Kyrgyz scared and angry.

Politicians were making use of this situation after the overthrow of Bakiyev. Political elites wanted to gain a large and strong support base and an easy to do this was to focus on feelings of nationalism and ethnicity. Especially young people are sensitive for this because they are like a sponge: they are easy to influence. The political struggle that was going on in the country quickly took an ethnic focus in which tensions increased. Together with the fact that the interim-government could not control the situation the conflict occurred. Other issues which contributed to the conflict in Osh were the drugs business, third forces, media and the police.

The conflict in Osh led to a situation nowadays which is characterized by a greater division within society, tensions and fear. Many perpetrators still walk around freely and the law enforcement bodies are characterized by discrimination. More Uzbeks than Kyrgyz have been punished, while at the same time the majority of the victims were Uzbeks. People are still waiting for justice.

A lot should be done in order to prevent a new conflict to break out. On the one hand the situation might belong to the transition phase a country goes through; on the other hand conflicts like what happened in Osh can be prevented to a great extent by focussing on youth, cross-community building and income generating activities.

This research has shown that conflicts should be analysed by combining different theoretical approaches. A conflict should be regarded as a process, which not only affects the society as a whole, but which is also rooted in society. Furthermore it is important to take into account the specific history and context of a region. In the Ferghana Valley these characteristics are for a great extent determined by the history of the Soviet Union. The role of youth with regard to conflicts should not be underestimated. As the Ferghana Valley is one of the most densely populated parts of the Ferghana Valley with a majority of people under the age of 30, young people are very important to
take into account. Especially because they are the ones who suffer the most from unemployment and they are the easiest to influence when it comes to ethnic feelings. Conflict potential increases because of this large group of young people. They want to have prospects for the future but they do not have anything to look out for.
Preface

Summary

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1. Introduction

During my internship at the Embassy of the Netherlands in Turkey in the Spring of 2010, I became interested in the so-called “Turkic world”, a region which stretches from western China all the way towards Turkey. The languages spoken in this region belong to the Turkic language family, just as some cultural traditions. When I read a book from Hugh Pope about the Turkic world, called the Sons of the Conquerors - The Rise of the Turkic World, I also read about the Ferghana Valley. I was attracted by this valley because of its many characteristics: different ethnicities, densely populated, complex borders, territorial disputes, natural resources, water disputes, Islamist extremism, fertile grounds, depressing socio-economic conditions, authoritarian leaders and weak regimes. When I was reading the book a revolution in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010 took place. This event was followed a few months later by an ethnic conflict in the valley to which I was so attracted: the Ferghana Valley.

In this chapter the basic facts of the research will be presented. The research goal and questions, societal and scientific relevance, methodology and structure will be explained.

1.1 Research goal and questions

The research focuses on the Ferghana Valley, which is as said before a complex region of which some characteristics can be seen in map 1.1.

Map 1.1: Land issues and population density in Ferghana Valley, Central Asia

![Map 1.1: Land issues and population density in Ferghana Valley, Central Asia](https://example.com/map1.1.png)

Reference: UNEP, 2010
Taking the characteristics into account, it seems that the Ferghana Valley has all the ingredients to lead to a large scale conflict comparable with the Balkans or the Caucasus (Deen & Bouyjou, 2006). Indeed, the region has seen many disturbances. To name just a few: the conflict between Uzbek and Kyrgyz in Uzgen (Kyrgyzstan) in 1990; the protests and killings in Andijan (Uzbekistan) in 2005; and the ethnic conflict between Uzbek and Kyrgyz people in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) in 2010. However, the region is still relatively stable, no large scale conflict has broken out (yet) (Deen & Bouyjou, 2006; Peimani, 2009). Still, it is important to keep an eye on this region. Very recently, the president of Kyrgyzstan, Roza Otunbayeva, declared that she is worried about the developments in the Ferghana Valley and that international attention is needed. This statement indicates fragility in and worries about the region (NRC Handelsblad, 2011).

These characteristics and the past unrests in the region make the Ferghana Valley an interesting research topic in the field of conflict studies. The research goal is to establish a valuable conflict potential map for the Ferghana Valley. In order to make the project practically feasible the research has been focused on the case-study of Osh in which a conflict took place in June 2010, as will be explained more in-depth later on. In order to make the project more useful for society, the role of young local people will be taken into account. Young people formed the majority of participators in the violence in Osh, which indicates that they are an important group when it comes to conflict. Analysing why they took part in the conflict gives insight in their problems, which can then be solved. The conflict potential map will provide insights in the key aspects and causes of the problems. Insights are necessary in order to address the main problems. On the basis of the main problems conflict prevention tools can be selected. For example, when ethnic diversity appears to be the main problem, cross-community projects could be used as a prevention tool.

The research goal leads to the following research question of the thesis:

“What is the conflict potential of the Ferghana Valley and what is the role of young local people on this?”

When analysing conflicts, it is always important to take the history and the context of a region into account. Because we are dealing with a region covering three countries, it is also important to pay attention to cross-border issues. Drugs traffickers, border disputes and radical groups determine everyday life in the border areas of the Ferghana Valley. Therefore the first two sub-questions are:

- Which cross-border issues are important for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
- To what extent are the history and context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan of importance for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?

As said before, the Ferghana Valley is a large region which spreads out over the territory of three different countries. Because of practical, financial and safety issues it has not been possible to conduct research in all three countries. Therefore the primary data have been collected in Kyrgyzstan, the most accessible, open and safest country in the region. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are more difficult to do research in, due to a repressive regimes and the more conservative religion. This is why the main research has been focused on Kyrgyzstan and specifically on Osh, the place where a conflict broke out in June 2010. Therefore Osh will be the case study of this research.

To determine the conflict potential, theories on ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances and the political situation as causes for conflict will be used. These will be explained more in depth in the next chapter. Related to these theories, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

- To what extent is ethnic diversity of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
To what extent are socio-economic conditions of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
To what extent is the political situation of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?

These sub questions will be answered by analysing the situations of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and by the specific case-study of Osh.

In order to answer the second part of the central question, the next sub-question has been formulated:

What was the role of young local people during the unrest in Osh in June 2010?

This question will be answered by first analysing theories on youth and conflict, after which the theories will be applied on the case study in Osh. Osh will be taken into account and not the Ferghana Valley as a whole because Osh has just experienced violence.

Answering these sub-questions will lead to the final answer to the central question. In the end the analysis and findings will result in conflict prevention focus areas. Recommendations for further research will arise from the research; for example on specific conflict prevention tools including young people in the Ferghana Valley.

1.2 Societal relevance

The direct societal problems which trigger this research project are the recent events in the Ferghana Valley and the neighbouring countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan): The 1990 conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Uzgen; the 1999 bombings in Tashkent; the incursion of IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) fighters in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000; the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005; the on-going protests against the Kyrgyz government in the years after the revolution; the Andijan incident in Uzbekistan in 2005; the skirmishes on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in May 2006; another overthrow of the government in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010; and the ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in June 2010. These are the most important of the many disturbances in the region. Besides, everyday life is characterized by tensions at the borders and by drugs traffickers (Peimani, 2009; Passon & Temirkulov, 2004, p. ii).

More generally speaking, some overall societal problems of the Ferghana Valley can be distinguished. These are the ethnic distribution of the Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks over the three countries; authoritarian and weak political states; and poor social and economic conditions which are specifically affecting young people.

The thesis can contribute to solving the societal problems by gaining insight into the current situation. Given the fact that the unrests in Osh in June 2010 are very recent, not much research on this topic has been done yet, especially on this specific case-study. The developments last Summer shed new light on the situation in the Ferghana Valley. Therefore, a better understanding of the situation can help in preventing future conflicts. Furthermore, by including the role of young people, more insight will be gained into an important group in society.

Eventually the people living in the Ferghana Valley will benefit the most from the results of this research. They are in need of a peaceful and stable situation. More specifically, this project can help NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other organizations in the region implementing projects and programs in the Ferghana Valley – and Osh more specifically – to bring peace and stability. Policy makers, the governments, international organizations and NGOs need analyses in order to make the
right choices in their policy and plans. This is only possible when it is known what the people and the region need.

1.3 Scientific relevance

With regard to the scientific relevance, this thesis aims at contributing to the common accumulation of knowledge in the field of causes of violence and conflict, conflict potential and conflict prevention.

Conflicts have been explained from different perspectives. Some of the most well-known theories are those which explain conflicts from either ethnic differences, socio-economic circumstances or the political situation. This thesis will combine these theories, because I believe a conflict cannot be explained by just one side of the coin. A conflict occurs because of many aspects which are interrelated.

In the Ferghana Valley, conflicts occurred between different ethnic groups, mainly between Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks. Therefore it is important to consider theories on ethnic conflict. These theories can be divided in two groups: the primordialists and the constructivists. The primordialists see ethnicity as a natural given, while constructivists see ethnicity as socially constructed. Because it is important to know why the violence has occurred and what the potential for ethnic violence is, we should know the underlying causes (Rubenstein & Crocker, 1994).

It is not likely that ethnic violence occurred just because of ethnic differences (which would be the primordialist point of view). Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks have been living for ages in peace in the Ferghana Valley; only since a few decades ethnic tensions have emerged. In other words, there should be underlying causes and other forces, which relates to the constructivists’ point of view. The constructivists say that ethnicity is important, but it should be activated in order to be a root for conflict (Eriksen, 1993).

Some of these other forces can be socio-economic circumstances. The Ferghana Valley is characterized by bad socio-economic conditions and a high unemployment rate. People could therefore choose for violence because there are no alternatives. To rebel and to loot would be an attractive outcome. People would do well out of war. Also the violence in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 was characterized by looting. Markets and shops were plundered, and the violence stopped when there was nothing to loot anymore (Schwirtz, 2010; Sanghera, 2010; interview 1). However, although these socio-economic circumstances might have played an important role, there is also a link to ethnicity.

A link between ethnicity and socio-economic conditions can be found in the concept of horizontal equality. This link can be found in grievances and the relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970). Theories based on grievance argue that inequality is the basis of rebellion and that if socio-economic inequality is high, then violent conflict will occur. Economic inequality produces discontent among groups in a society and is largely regarded as a cause for rebellion and violence (Gurr, 1970; Schock, 1996, p. 99). More specifically, ethnic divisions can also be used for a division in the working class. An example of this is where jobs with higher statuses tend to be reserved for members of the dominant culture, whereas members of minority cultures tend to occupy lower positions (Schock, 1996, p. 103).

In the Ferghana Valley this situation can also be distinguished. Since the independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, many Kyrgyz people moved to Osh, a city with traditionally many Uzbek citizens. With the immigration of more Kyrgyz into Osh, the competition for jobs and land became fiercer. Uzbeks mainly filled the middle niche jobs, like shop-keepers, craftsmen and businessmen. The Kyrgyz mainly filled the tier above – in government positions – and under them (Megoran, 2010; Sanghera, 2010).
As can be seen, also the political situation is important here: the government decided that the Kyrgyz should fill the jobs in national banks, state enterprises and local governments. With the government being corrupt and partial, the feelings of inequality and dissatisfaction increased. But the political situation is also important in another way: people should find opportunities to rebel, and this depends on the political situation of a country. The political situation can be described by the level of repressiveness and the level of democracy of a country. Semi-democracies are unstable, because they are partly open yet somewhat repressive: a combination that invites protests, rebellion and other forms of civil violence. This has a close relation with Schock’s (1996) analysis of semi-repressive regimes. In semi-repressive regimes there are opportunities to organize and mobilize the opposition, but political participation is blocked. The only effective choice then left is violence.

This thesis will contribute to the existing scientific knowledge by combining these three aspects and by applying these to the Ferghana Valley. As seen above, the different aspects primarily exist in different theories; however, I think they cannot be separated from each other. Instead, all these aspects are highly interrelated. By combining these theories, more insight in conflict potential can be reached. To what extent the aspects are of influence in the Ferghana Valley and Osh will determine the conflict potential.

By taking into account the role of young local people, a specific approach is taken to include an important group of the total population. Furthermore it should be analysed why so many young people played a crucial role in the violence in Osh. Young people can be regarded as the future of a country and therefore an analysis which takes the role of young people into account can yield interesting outcomes. The role of young people is often influenced by their circumstances: do they have access to education? Are there enough job opportunities? Are there facilities like leisure centres? By looking at the role of this group, a more accurate conflict potential map can be made (Najibullah, 2003).

Furthermore, the Ferghana Valley is a relatively new region in the field of conflict studies. As each conflict is context dependent, the research will contribute to the small (but increasing) amount of literature on the Ferghana Valley which is available at the moment.

1.4 Methodology and structure

The project made use of several research techniques with the aim to provide an inclusive overview of the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley and specifically Osh, the role of young local people and possible conflict prevention tools. The methodology used is qualitative based on literature, primary data (participant observation and in-depth interviews) and secondary data (documents from NGOs and international organizations). This part will explain the choices made for the methodology and structure.

Sources
The sources used are literature, primary data (interviews and participant observation) and secondary data (documents).

The theoretical framework is mainly based on literature retrieved from different libraries (Radboud University Nijmegen; Utrecht University; OSCE Academy). Furthermore, secondary data is used in the theoretical framework; these are mainly documents from NGOs or international organizations which use theoretical definitions in their documents.

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1 The term political situation is chosen instead of political context, in order to avoid confusion with the part about history and context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan
In order to map the conflict potential of the Ferghana Valley, different sources were used. Firstly, secondary data were used. NGOs and international organizations have done various research and projects in the Ferghana Valley and they have documented these. These documents are useful to see what has already been done in the Ferghana Valley. These documents were gathered from official websites of organizations and by contacting different organizations. These data have been used because when doing research it is always useful not only to have a look at other research conducted before, but also to use it by comparing it with and support your own results.

Second, two kinds of primary data were used to do research on the case study, of which the first one was participant observation. A part of the research consisted of an internship at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. Therefore I lived in Kyrgyzstan for ten weeks. I established many contacts with people in Kyrgyzstan who were willing to involve me in there social lives. By living in Bishkek and Osh and by careful participant observation I gained more insight in my research topic. Although participant observation was more an additional part in the research, it was very useful. It would not have been possible writing this master’s thesis without having been there. While being somewhere you can use all your senses in order to get a feeling of a situation. In this way I could experience myself how public life was in Osh by making use of the bazaar, public transport, parks and other leisure facilities.

On the other hand, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted. I have chosen for this method because of several reasons, of which the first reason is personal. For my bachelor thesis I did quantitative research, which I enjoyed because of the concrete results. However, I missed an in-depth analysis in this and the ‘stories behind’. During an internship at the embassy of the Netherlands in Turkey I conducted research to Turkish presence in Africa, for which I did qualitative research by interviewing African diplomats. I enjoyed this more than quantitative research because of the interesting talks and anecdotes while I could still find overlapping stories and results. There I found out that qualitative research suits me better because of the personal approach.

Another reason for this method is that it fits best to the research. As the main goal of the research is to map the conflict potential and the role of youth in the Ferghana Valley, experts can provide the most comprehensive information in order to get a complete view. This complete view is necessary because of the many aspects this thesis includes (ethnicity, socio-economic, political, history, context, cross-border issues, young people). A good understanding of the region is thus only possible with a deep analysis. So interviews with experts and other knowledgeable persons would be more useful than for example a survey amongst ordinary people, which are in general less educated and less knowledgeable, especially in Osh.

The last reason for this method is that it was more (financially and timely) feasible than quantitative research. In order to do quantitative research I would have had to make the surveys in Russian, Kyrgyz and Uzbek (languages I do not speak). Furthermore in order to conduct the surveys I would have needed many research assistants, which was financially impossible. Furthermore, the tensions amongst some parts of the populations are very high and they do not like foreigners being involved in their conflict. As a foreign researcher you can also be regarded as partial and as one of those foreigners being involved in the conflict. You should first build trust in order to conduct the surveys, which takes a lot of time. As I was on my own in Kyrgyzstan for ‘just’ ten weeks, it was better achievable to do qualitative research by interviewing experts who were willing to talk and which you did not have to convince first.

The respondents in this qualitative research were persons from NGOs and international organizations, politicians, students, journalists and other persons with a relation to the topic. The interviews conducted were analysed with the program MaxQDA. This is a qualitative data analysis computer program for researchers working with non-numerical and unstructured data (i.e. interviews). The program allows researchers to classify, sort and arrange information and examine relationships. The program was used in order to quickly find and sort specific themes in the 43 interviews conducted. The themes were related to the theoretical framework and the research:
conflict potential and prevention, cross-border issues, ethnicity, socio-economic conditions, the political situation and youth. It was thus mainly a tool in order to search through and select in the 43 interviews.

Contacts were established mainly through a snowball method. I established contacts and conducted interviews with the following organizations, both in Bishkek and Osh:


As can be noticed from the names in the list, some organizations have a specific approach towards youth. Also organizations with a wider orientation often had specific programmes targeting youth. In this way I was able to get information about the role of youth in the conflict. In addition to organizations, I also had formal interviews and informal conversations with students, other young people, members of parliament, the police, friends and colleagues. I made social contacts with young people in Kyrgyzstan via social media and universities. With the use of Facebook I was able to join groups like “Students in Kyrgyzstan” and “Aiesec”. I attended some of their meetings through which friendships were built. I also went to some universities and approached some students there to have a talk. In total I conducted forty official interviews, I attended three official roundtables and I had many informal talks on the topic. A list of the attended roundtables and conducted interviews together with the detailed texts can be found in the separate Appendix, “Attended roundtables & conducted interviews”.

As said before, I only conducted research in Kyrgyzstan, which led to the case-study about Osh. The information gathered about Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is only based on secondary data.

Due to this choice the research is biased towards Kyrgyzstan and the view of the respondents who live in Kyrgyzstan. However, Kyrgyzstan’s population is a mix of ethnicities. The largest ethnic group are the Kyrgyz (69%) and the second largest group are the Uzbeks who are mainly living in the South (14,5%). Other ethnic groups are Russians (9,0%) and small minorities including Tajiks (1,1%). So it is important to notice that there is a difference when talking about ‘people in Kyrgyzstan’ and ‘Kyrgyz’. People in Kyrgyzstan also include Uzbeks, Russians and other minorities. Beforehand I tried to get a good representation of the population. However, when I was in Kyrgyzstan I noticed that the points of view from the organizations were relatively neutral. This can definitely be said for the international organizations, which all strive for neutrality. But also with the local organizations I noticed neutrality. This can be ascribed to the fact that these organizations are all working on peace and human rights. They want stability regardless of the ethnicity of one person. They are not busy with blaming one or another, but focus on making the society stable again. Therefore I did not focus that much on interviewing as many Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, although I interviewed organizations both with Kyrgyz and Uzbek backgrounds. Only in a few cases the respondents were very biased. Ironically those were the persons who viewed themselves as being neutral, but always ended up blaming only one party in the conflict. Most of the time interviewees did not even want to talk about who started the conflict. On the one hand this indicates that the respondents wanted to be neutral, but it also points to the fact that the topic is still sensitive. The people whom I talked to did not want to generalize or to distinguish between groups, instead, they wanted to focus on other core problems which created the conflict.
In case I would have chosen to do quantitative research amongst the local population, the ethnic representation would have been very important. This is because the local population is in general much more partial, because they just came out of the conflict and they still suffer from feelings of hatred and tensions. However, by focussing on experts this was less relevant.

Still, although not regarded as a huge problem, the biased point of view will be considered by being careful when drawing conclusions. It can be said beforehand that further research should be conducted including the Uzbek and Tajik points of view in order to create more generalized and objective conclusions. However, the more than forty interviews conducted in Kyrgyzstan provide inside information about the Ferghana Valley and give – together with the theories and secondary data - a good overview of the situation there.

Interviews

The interviews were in-depth but semi-structured; this means that I tried to get as much detailed information as possible, but I also tried to make the interviews semi-structured by preparing specific questions. The questions which were asked were determined from the theoretical framework and secondary data. Specific questions were necessary in order to answer the sub-questions.

The analysis was done on the basis of the answers given. From the interviews it became clear which aspects are the most important for unrest in the Ferghana Valley and Osh and which aspects are the most important for a possible conflict.

The interview questions (see Appendix 1) were beforehand set up in a specific way. Although each group of questions may seem the same, they were set up in such a way and order that every first question is the most open and objective one. It depended on the answer the respondent gave if it was necessary to ask the next question, et cetera. This was done in order to prevent pushing the respondent in a certain (subjective) direction. For example: I presume that there are problems in the Ferghana Valley, but maybe the respondent would not even regard it as problems. Therefore I firstly asked about the situation before talking about problems.

Although I prepared the questions in advance, in practice in many cases it turned out into a different interview. I experienced this as positive and more in-depth, because in the cases that I conducted the interviews as prepared, the answers received were short and superficial. In the cases where I was not able to ask all my questions, answers were very profound and interesting, which were much more valuable than possible answers on my prepared questions. Often I came up with different relevant questions while the interview was on-going.

Half of the interviews I conducted in English and the other half of the interviews I used a translator who could translate from Russian, Kyrgyz or Uzbek to English. To some extent I experienced this as less efficient, as more time was lost to translation. On the other hand during the interview I had time to read through my questions again and think more in-depth about which question to ask next.

Structure

The thesis starts with the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. This chapter discusses the theories on conflict analysis. These theories are theories on ethnicity and conflict, greed, grievances and the political situation. Furthermore, theories about the role of young people in conflict will be discussed. Chapter 3 focuses on the region of the Ferghana Valley. In this chapter the relevant history and context of the region will be explained, including the surrounding countries of the Ferghana Valley (i.e. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan).

Chapter 4 will look in depth at the conflict causes and the role of young people during the June 2010 events in Osh. Chapter 5 will discuss the conflict potential and prevention focus areas.

In the end a conclusion will be drawn.
2. Theoretical framework: Conflicts, causes and the role of young people

This chapter discusses theories of conflict causes by ethnic differences, socio-economic conditions and the political situation. On the basis of these combined theories it is possible to analyse the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley and Osh, which will be dealt with in the following chapters. In the last part of this chapter theories on the role of youth in conflict will be discussed.

2.1 General terms: (violent) intra- and inter-state conflicts

Before starting to write about the causes of conflicts, it is first and foremost important to get a clear idea what is meant with conflict.

2.1.1 Definitions of conflict

There are different definitions of conflict. According to Miall et al (1999, p. 20) a conflict is “the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups”. Mitchell (1981, p. 17) goes a step further by giving the following definition: “Any situation in which two or more entities or ‘parties’ (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals”. Mitchell’s definition covers more, by saying that parties perceive that they have incompatible goals. So in order for a conflict to occur, there do not per se need to be incompatible goals, but parties need to perceive it.

Also in Osh people perceive that they have incompatible goals. Uzbeks want more minority rights, while Kyrgyz want their nationality and economic situation to be protected, without threats from Uzbeks. In their eyes these are incompatible goals, while in fact the goals are not necessarily incompatible. There are different economic and political options to fulfil both goals; however, people should be open for dialogue and concessions.

Dialogue and concessions brings us to the next point: a missing dimension in the definition is that it is unknown whether the parties can solve their problems without violence. Therefore it is good to look at Goodhand & Hulme (1999, p. 14), who give the following definition of a conflict: “Conflict is a struggle between individuals or collectivities, over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to assert their values or claims over those others”. However, they state that this definition is simplistic and holds a negative connotation including physical violence. Conflict can also be regarded as a positive happening, as “normal norms of social interaction which may contribute to maintenance, development, change and overall stability of entities” (Goodhand & Hulme, 1999, p. 14). A conflict can become violent when “society cannot represent, manage or resolve its different interests in a productive manner, thus initiating a degenerative or destructive cycle of physical violence” (Goodhand & Hulme, 1999, p. 14). So not only (perceived) incompatible goals are a precondition, also the role of society is determinative for violent conflict and its potential.

This was also the case in Osh, in which the government could not manage and resolve the different perceived incompatible goals. So the society, to a great extent determined by the political situation, was unable to prevent the conflict.

2.1.2 Intra-state and interstate conflicts

The nature of conflicts has changed over the years. For a long time war was mainly regarded as a confrontation between states. War was a continuation of international politics by other means; it belonged to the field of international relations (Cramer, 2002, p. 53). Wars took place between
nation-states and there were clear-cut national armies. Often a war had a precise beginning (e.g. by a declaration of a state) and a formal ending (Gold, 2010).

However, during the last century, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the world has seen a growth of *intra*state conflicts instead of *inter*state conflicts. Intrastate wars are often more complex and protracted because they do not have a clear distinction between war and peace. In other words, there is no precise beginning or formal ending. Furthermore, the parties are not always visible; intrastate wars are characterized by child soldiers, rebel armies, guerrilla groups and global terrorist networks. Compared to interstate wars, they are not funded by the state, but sustained by outside assistance (diaspora groups, criminal mafia) and the parallel economy (drug trafficking, diamonds trade). Furthermore, the conflicts are characterized by more suffering and casualties under civilians, which could also be a consequence of new technologies (Gold, 2010; Goodhand & Hulme, 1999, p. 13-14; Cramer, 2006, p. 77).

So the most important difference is that an intrastate conflict is not between states, but between groups or parties within a state. Nowadays identity groups are at the core of contemporary conflicts. This is often a consequence of failed or weak states, in which the state is unable to control its territory; other parties then take over the power, which was also the case in Osh (Cramer, 2006, p. 53; Gold, 2010).

It is important to make this distinction because both types of conflict are possible in the Ferghana Valley. The most common are the conflicts between groups within a state. The conflict in Osh can also be categorized as an intrastate conflict. Ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks groups, not the state, were fighting against each other within Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore there were rumours that other third parties like militant groups were involved. Most certainly they were funded by the criminal mafia which is involved in drug trafficking, a huge economy in Osh. On the other hand an interstate conflict is also possible because there are still disputes about undemarcated borders between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

2.1.3 When can violent incidents be regarded as a conflict?

But when is a violent event or incident an official conflict in the international and academic debate? And were the events in Osh ‘just’ riots or was it a conflict? And has the Ferghana Valley already seen conflicts?

Different criteria are used in different international databases of conflicts. Often numerical criteria are used like the number of battle-related deaths. According to the Correlates of War project (COW) an event is a conflict when there are more than 1,000 deaths related to the conflict in one year. However, the University of Uppsala uses at least 25 battle deaths in one year. So there are different criteria possible. Another point to add is that it is also important to look at the total population, so it is possible to say something about the percentage of the population which is involved in the conflict (Cramer, 2006, p. 59/60).

According to international jurisprudence (ICTY, 1995; ICC; underlining added): “An armed conflict will exist whenever there is resort to armed force between states or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state. Internal disturbances and tensions such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence [...] are generally excluded from the notion of armed conflict. In order to distinguish internal conflict from mere internal unrest, tensions or banditry, international humanitarian law imposes measures of duration, potency and design. The armed conflict must be prolonged and assume at least a minimum level of both intensity and organization. Further [...] the armed group must exercise control over part of the territory”.
Applying these numbers and definitions to what happened in Osh in June 2010, it can be said that the incidents cannot be regarded as an armed conflict. Officially ‘only’ 470 people were killed\(^2\) in a period of five to six days (KIC, 2011). Furthermore, although the conflict was intense and highly violent, the duration of the conflict cannot be regarded as prolonged (KIC, 2011, p. 48). The unrest in June 2010 can better be regarded as internal disturbances and tensions. These included acts of serious violence and riots (KIC, 2011, p. 48). Also the Ferghana Valley as a whole has not experienced an official conflict, neither intrastate conflict nor interstate conflict between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and/or Tajikistan. Although no official conflict, in this thesis I will refer to the Osh events also as conflict because of linguistic reasons. Also people in Kyrgyzstan themselves talk about the happenings in Osh as a conflict or even as war.

So it can be said that no official conflict has broken out yet, but it cannot be denied that the region has seen serious violations, riots and other acts of violence often between ethnic groups. Therefore I will now take a look at theories about conflict causes and ethnicity, socio-economic conditions and the political situation.

2.2 Ethnic conflict

To explain conflict by ethnic differences is a popular topic in the war causation theories nowadays (Gilley, 2004). This is no surprise, since after the end of the Cold War the world has seen many ‘ethnic’ conflicts. To name just a few: Tutsi’s and Hutus in Rwanda; Abkhazians and South-Ossetians in Georgia; Turks and Kurds in Turkey. And not to forget the case-study of this thesis: Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. But what is ethnicity? According to Gilley (2004, p. 1158):

“[...] that part of a person’s identity which is drawn from one or more ‘markers’ like race, religion, shared history, region, social symbols or language. It is distinct from that part of a person’s identity that comes from, say, personal moral doctrine, economic status, civic affiliations or personal history”.

Most of the academics state that an ethnic group is a community or communal group. Ethnic groups are larger than social formations such as family and clans or face-to-face groups such as neighbourhoods. Also, a family or neighbourhood can exist out of different ethnic groups. However, there is discussion about the question whether this communal bond is given by nature or whether it is imagined, created through social action. This is the difference between the primordialist and constructivist point of view and it is decisive when analysing conflicts.

2.2.1 Primordialist view

The primordialists see ethnicity as a ‘given’: people are born with it and so you cannot choose it. Cultural features are a cultural given and a natural affinity. Ethnic groups are fixed; they are based on irrational bonds based on kinship, blood, race, language, religion, social practices and culture. It is a personal property acquired by birth.

Because ethnic groups are fixed, different ethnicities can be seen everywhere in the world: the world exists of different traditions, cultures, religions, norms and values (Baumann, 1999, p. 59; Fox, 2005, p. 449; Oberschall, 2000, p. 982). Furthermore, the world exists of inequalities. Mostly these inequalities run parallel with different ethnicities mentioned before. In other words, inequalities are caused by different ethnicities, because different ethnicities exist just because they are there. These inequalities cause conflicts between different ethnicities. Clashes and conflicts between ethnicities and cultures are thus

\(^2\) Although many people told me more than 1,000 people were killed; however there is no evidence for this.
unavoidable (Baumann, 1999, p. 61-62). The primordialists thus see ethnic differences as the main driving forces for conflicts, which are very hard – or even impossible – to overcome.

2.2.2 Constructivist view

However, the primordialist view received much critique from the constructivists. They argue that differences in ethnicity do not necessarily lead to clashes. As seen in the past, different ethnicities lived peacefully together in empires and countries without conflicts between them. Before the war in Yugoslavia broke out, Bosnians, Serbs and Croats lived peacefully together and there were even intermarriages. This was – and still is – also the case in the Ferghana Valley. According to the constructivists, cultural features are not like kinship sentiments, but they are socially constructed and it is thus possible to change them (Rubenstein & Crocker, 1994, p. 118; Oberschall, 2000, p. 982/983).

Constructivists argue that ethnicity is being viewed as a ‘cogent existential reality’, which is a process of reification. Reification takes place when an abstract belief or idea is taken for granted as being real. Something which in fact is not real, is being treated and viewed as real, like ethnicity. According to the constructivists ethnicity is made by mankind and it is socially constructed (Baumann, 1999, p. 61-63).

Baumann (1999, p. 64) gives a clear example of how ethnicity should be regarded: it can be compared with wine, which is made of natural ingredients. But these natural ingredients do not make wine themselves. The ingredients need to be added to each other and they need to ripen. In the end, a wine will have different flavours depending on a certain context. Also ethnicity exists of different natural bonds which in themselves do not create ethnicity. It needs economic and political interests in order to work in everyday life. In addition, it needs social conditions, because the ethnicity needs to make sense for the people. Furthermore, ethnicity has also different meanings related to various social settings.

So in other words, ethnicity is a people’s creation based on natural products and not a natural product of its own (Eriksen, 1993, p. 16; Barth, 1998, p. 15).

So although ethnicity is being viewed by many academics as something absolute and a natural given, in fact it is not because it is socially constructed (Eriksen, 1993). For the explanation of war this has consequences, because if ethnicities are constructed, clashes between ethnicities can be avoided. This is not to say that conflicts between ethnicities will not occur. Culture is a basic need for people, but it must be ‘activated’ in order to be a root for conflict. This is why ethnicities can live in peace together as well as fight against each other. This was also the case in Osh where it was first peaceful and at a sudden moment ethnicities were fighting each other. There should be underlying forces and reasons which cause increasing tensions and eventually so-called ethnic conflict.

Furthermore, certain aspects must be present in order for an ethnic conflict to occur. One of these aspects is a core-periphery differential that is characterized by regional differences and growing nationalism among ethnic groups. Another setting in which ethnic conflict often occurs is in regions with high industrial development but where political leadership and control over resources are lacking. Furthermore, it is said that development of uneven national consciousness and cleavages due to class differences can contribute to the potential of ethnic conflict (Carment, 1994, p. 557). These aspects can also be found in Osh: the place is situated in the periphery of Kyrgyzstan, which is characterized by its North-South division. The South is less developed than the North. Because in the South as a result of worse socio-economic conditions there are class differences between ethnicities. This leads to increased feelings of nationalism, especially amongst the Kyrgyz living in the South who think that the Uzbeks are taking the good jobs. The tensions increased during the time of the Soviet Union which was characterized by high industrial development in which Kyrgyz were forced to move
to the urban centres. At certain periods of time when there was a weak political leadership, the tensions broke out into violence. In Osh this was the case in 1991 and in 2010. In 1991 the Soviet Union weakened, in 2010 the Bakiyev regime in Kyrgyzstan was overthrown. Also the Ferghana Valley as a whole is characterized by a core-periphery. Not only in Kyrgyzstan, but also in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the Ferghana Valley is an isolated part of the country with differences in economic conditions compared to the rest of the country. Because of its isolation, the government is often unable to control the situation in the periphery sufficiently.

So ethnic ‘markers’ alone in a conflict do not have to be the basis of calling something an ‘ethnic conflict’. A clear example is given by Gilley (2004, p. 1158): “When the six countries that share the Mekong River fight over its use, this is not ‘ethnic conflict’ merely because all sides are ethnically distinct”. Therefore, critics of the theories of ethnic conflict argue that ethnic conflict is a superficial description. In order to make the concept of ethnic conflict useful, it should include a causal explanation, not merely a description of who is fighting whom, like Kyrgyz fighting Uzbeks (Gilley, 2004, p. 1158). There should be underlying structural issues which cause structural deprivation, such as economic or political issues. Conflicts are large events which consist of heterogeneous components and causes extended in space and time (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998, p. 446). They consist of a number of different types of actions, processes, occurrences and events. In this ethnicity can provide a sense of solidarity which can mobilize people. It is even said that political and economic interests of states or other actors can furnish the “underlying causes and ongoing issues for most serious conflicts” (Carment, 1994, p. 552). This can be seen in Kyrgyzstan as well, in which nationalistic politicians try to gain power by playing the ethnic card – by focussing on the fears of the ‘other’ - to win votes. Ethnic groups are then put against each other which can lead to increasing tensions and violence, which therefore did not even exist. One can then question if an ethnic war even exists at all. Maybe it is only a descriptive label for a collection of different issues and phenomena (Gilley, 2004, p. 1159-1161). Multiple theoretical lenses are necessary in order to analyse the so-called “ethnic violence” (Gilley, 2004, p. 1159-1161; Brubaker & Laitin, 1998, p. 446). The next paragraphs deal with those underlying causes by looking through other theoretical lenses.

2.3 Greed or grievance? Socio-economic conditions and inequality

Some academics argue that socio-economic conditions are the main drivers of conflict. The most well-known theories focusing on these factors are the greed thesis and the grievance thesis.

2.3.1 Greed: socio-economic conditions

In the greed thesis, greed is seen as the most important cause for war and a conflict always has an economic dimension (Collier, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Ginty, 2004, p. 858). Economic incentives make rebellion and looting possible and there are groups with economic power that tend to gain from the continuation of the conflict. This theory is rooted in the rational choice paradigm, as rebels make an individual cost and benefit analysis whether to loot and to take arms (Bulte, 2009, p. 2). Parameters like financial opportunities and social and geographical constraints, but also the financial capability of the government to provide defence determine the analysis (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 35).

Indeed, when looking at the on-going conflicts in the world nowadays, it becomes clear that in many cases economic aspects and looting play an important role: Colombia, Mexico, Congo, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, et cetera. These are all countries with little financial and job opportunities, which is also the case for Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, these are all cases in which drugs, oil or natural resources are (leading) factors in the conflict. Also in Osh it was said that the conflict was financed with drugs money from mafia groups. And drug trafficking in general plays an important role in the Ferghana Valley.
Whether or not people start to loot and fight also depends on the context they are living in. Important aspects are the political situation and the presence of armed groups. If the situation in a country is characterized by, for example, protests and marches, it will be easier for individuals to mobilize and to decide whether or not to loot. This is also the case in Kyrgyzstan, a country characterized by many protests and two revolutions. Also the scale is important; if unemployment in a region is very high, there will be more young men with bad socio-economic conditions who are sensitive to be persuaded to take part in violence, which is also the case in the South of Kyrgyzstan. In other words, looting and participating in violence highly depends on the economic and political situation in a region (Ginty, 2004, p. 862).

However, discussing the greed thesis leaves out the ethnic aspect, while we are searching for underlying root causes which can activate feelings of ethnicity. A link between economic conditions and ethnicity can be found in horizontal inequality and relative deprivation, in other words the grievance theory.

2.3.2 Grievances: inequality

Grievance is – in contrast to greed – rooted in a behavioural paradigm and emphasized by relative deprivation, inequality and social exclusion (Bulte, 2009, p. 2). Theories based on grievance argue that inequality is the basis of rebellion and that if economic inequality is high, then violent conflict will occur. Economic inequality produces discontent among groups in a society and is largely regarded as a cause for rebellion. The frustration about inequality leads to aggression and turns into violence (Gurr, 1970; Schock, 1996, p. 99). This is what also happened in Osh, where Uzbeks had good jobs and where Kyrgyz started to fill the tier above and under them.

One of the most well-known theories about grievance is the relative deprivation theory of Gurr (1970). The definition of relative deprivation is the “perceived gap between people’s value expectations and their value capabilities – that is, the discrepancy between what people think they ought to get from society and what they believe they will actually obtain” (Schock, 1996, p. 101; Gurr, 1970).

When people feel they cannot obtain what they want, they feel they suffer from inequality. In other words, the unrealized expectations result in feelings of deprivation (Gurr, 1970, p. 39). These feelings lead to frustration which may lead again to aggression and violence. This happens mainly with people who suffer from social exclusion. Also repression of elementary wishes can cause violence. Feelings of repression develop when “people come to feel that their legitimate aspirations and ideas are being repressed or perverted” (Gurr, 1970, p. 38).

People who suffer from social exclusion and feelings of deprivation are often ethnic minority groups. They can be excluded from society. Ethnic divisions can be used for divisions in the working class. An example of this is where jobs with higher statuses tend to be reserved for members of the dominant culture, whereas members of minority cultures tend to occupy lower positions (Schock, 1996, p. 103). This is also the case in Osh where Kyrgyz are occupying positions in the government and the police, while the Uzbeks are running the businesses. At the same time, many Kyrgyz are also filling the tier under the Uzbeks. So there is envy on both sides: Uzbeks are envy because of the Kyrgyz having the important positions, and Kyrgyz are envy because of the Uzbeks having wealthy businesses.

This situation is often influenced by the political situation of a country; an open inclusive democratic state in which minority rights are protected would be aware of one dominant group occupying the higher jobs and even stimulate more integration. Therefore the next paragraph will look at theories on politics and conflict.
2.4 The political situation

As mentioned before, the political situation of a country can be decisive whether a conflict breaks out or not. This has to do with state transition, democratization processes, degree of democracy and repressiveness and state strength.

2.4.1 State transition and democratization

Mansfield & Snyder (1995) argue that there is more chance on violence during a period of democratization than in a full authoritarian or a full democratic regime. This means that when a state is changing from an autocracy to a democracy, the state is in transition and this increases the chance on conflict and war. In a transition period a situation of social change, institutional weakness and threatened interests arises. In other words: the state is weak. This can produce a political impasse for getting to democracy: it becomes difficult to form stable political coalitions and to gain sufficient support for power. Sometimes a power vacuum exists, in which a rebel group can take over the power (Mansfield & Snyder, 1995, p. 26). This was also the case in Kyrgyzstan, which is in general regarded as the most democratic country in Central Asia, but which is far from being a real democracy. The conflict broke out in the period just after the revolution, which indicates that after the overthrow of Bakiyev Kyrgyzstan was in transition. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are both characterized by a more autocratic regime.

Mansfield & Snyder further argue that during a period of democratization, elites will try to mobilize allies among the mass of people. Therefore they often use ideology in order to create mass support, which is often nationalism. Nationalism has the advantage of creating a community of interests that unites elites and masses, and so gaining a strong support base (Mansfield & Snyder, 1995, p. 28/29). In a country with ethnic differences this might happen along the lines of ethnic groups. Nationalism among ethnic groups is growing, which might lead to increasing awareness of one’s identity and ethnicity. Conflict can then also take place along the lines of ethnic groups (Carment, 1994, p. 557). This is what happened in Osh. Because there was space for new political coalitions, new politicians wanted to gain a strong support base and this was easily done by focusing either on the Uzbeks or on the Kyrgyz. People are sensitive for one's nationality or ethnicity, and therefore they are also sensitive for political elites who are focusing on this: the ethnic card was played in politics.

2.4.2 Degree of democracy and repressiveness

Other academics add to this that not only transition and democratization can explain civil war, but also the degree of democracy (Hegre et al, 2001, p. 42/43). They state that semi-democracies are unstable, because they are partly open yet somewhat repressive: a combination that invites protest, rebellion and other forms of civil violence (Hegre et al, 2001, p. 33). This is close to Schock’s theory about a semi-repressive political context. This context is conducive to the translation of discontent into violence, because there are opportunities to organize and mobilize, but effective forms of routine political participation are blocked. Potentially effective violent protest is thus selected to oppose the government (Schock, 1996, p. 124/125). This contrasts to fully autocratic or fully democratic countries. Autocratic regimes will suppress dissidence and protests very effectively, and developed democracies have the political and institutional facilities for groups to express grievances and feelings of inequality in a non-violent manner. Stability in a country is necessary for prevention of violent conflict and maintenance of peace (World Youth Report, 2003, p. 377). This theory might explain why violence occurred in Kyrgyzstan and not in other Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has seen a tradition in violent protest to oppose the governments under Akayev and Bakiyev. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan there is also opposition, but they are being extremely suppressed by the autocratic regimes under respectively Karimov and Rahmon, which is why these countries are more ‘stable’.
Figure 2.1 illustrates how the degree of democracy in a country relates to the chances of extreme political violence in that country. The vertical scale indicates the probability of extreme political violence in percentages; the horizontal scale indicates the level of democracy between -10 and +10. As the curve shows, the chance on political violence increases when the level of democracy comes around zero. More general spoken, extreme political violence is most likely to occur (20-25%) when the level of democracy is between minus five and plus five. Furthermore the curve shows that this is more likely in ethnically heterogeneous nations than in homogeneous nations. This is because in heterogeneous nations there are more different interests, which often unfold themselves along ethnic lines. Besides, in these countries the level of political inclusiveness is often low. This is often characterized by one ethnic group being dominant in the government. This leads to discontent among other ethnic groups which increases the chance of violence along ethnic lines.

In the next chapter the levels of democracy of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will be analysed.

Figure 2.1: Impact of levels of democracy on the probability of extreme political violence

![Graph showing the relationship between democracy and extreme political violence](image)

Reference: Coming Anarchy, 2006

2.4.3 State strength

Similarly state strength is important when looking at translation of discontent into violence. In state strength the level of inclusiveness of the political system is important. A high political inclusiveness can reduce the likelihood of civil war. Inclusiveness can be achieved by applying more consensual democracies rather than majority systems. Especially in heterogeneous societies with ethnic differentiation, it is important to achieve high political inclusiveness, so that each ethnic group is represented (Reynal-Querol, 2004, p. 459-462). If this is not the case, ethnic groups might feel deprived, especially when the whole governmental system (and maybe even the police and security system) is dominated by one ethnic group, as was the case in Kyrgyzstan where everything was dominated by Kyrgyz. Ethnic groups - in the case-study Uzbeks - might feel a sense of exclusion and failure in the social and political arena, and their aspirations are being denied. Furthermore, a preference of one ethnic group and other non-democratic operations by the government can lead to an inequitable distribution of resources and the marginalization of certain groups. All this can cause ethnic conflict. However, to what extent an ethnic conflict will occur also depends on the structure, strategy and characteristics of the ethnic groups. But in general it can be said that “most states experiencing protracted conflict pursue redistributive policies that favour one ethnic group over another” (Carment, 1994, p. 574) (Carment, 1994, p. 565-6; WYR, 2003, p. 377).
Furthermore, it depends on to what extent ethnic groups are geographically separated from each other. In countries in which ethnicities live intermingled it will be more difficult to separate them from each other, and therefore it can be more difficult to manage the conflict in the long run (Carment, 1994, p. 574). This is also the case in the Ferghana Valley where different ethnicities live intermixed with each other; although on a micro scale there are separate mono-ethnic neighbourhoods and villages. Besides, ethnic conflict is more common when the state strength comes into danger. This can happen when a country is characterized by internal pressures, such as a coup d'état, a new regime or another kind of power transition (Carment, 1994, p. 573). This was also the case in Kyrgyzstan, where the conflict broke out a few months after the overthrow of Bakiyev. In the case the state becomes too weak and one can speak about state failure, the chance of conflict increases as well. The government is characterized by abuses, extortion and corruption. When the government feels no responsibility for its citizens, people will have to search for security and social safety nets themselves. In this case people are often more willing to risk their lives and use violence, or they join other groups in order to get security (WYR, 2003, p. 377).

In this first part of the theoretical framework the three theoretical lenses of ethnicity, socio-economic conditions and the political situation were discussed. As already seen in this chapter, these theories seem highly applicable to the Ferghana Valley and the case-study of Osh. However, a deeper analytical research is necessary to see if these theories can really be applied. This will be done in the next chapters about the Ferghana Valley (Chapter 3) and the case-study of Osh (Chapter 4), upon which the theoretical framework will be reflected. First, the next part of the theoretical framework will have a closer look at the role of young people in conflict.

2.5 The role of young people in conflict

In conflict prevention addressing the root causes of conflict is very important. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the population. An important aspect of the local population is the group of young people, because they are the future of each society. They will be the new leaders in a few decades. Young people and youth are defined as all people with an age of 30 and below (WYR, 2003, p. 381; Oxus International / IOM, 2011).

Young people in general face many obstacles in the world nowadays. In many regions there are insufficient opportunities for young people to find a job and earn a living. According to the World Youth Report (2003, p. 376) of the three billion people earning less than two dollars a day, half of them live in developing countries and half of them are younger than 24. Furthermore, unemployment amongst young people is very high. Many finish their education, but cannot find a job after graduating.

Using young people as a target group is becoming more popular in conflict studies nowadays. More research is being done regarding youth and conflict (UNDP, 2006). Also the international community is paying more attention to youth; organizations like UNICEF and UNHCR are setting up projects for conflict prevention and recovery efforts especially focusing on youth or young adults in the West-Africa region (UNDP, 2006). Also in Osh I spoke with many organizations which are focussing on youth by providing them with peace building trainings and setting up youth centres.

Interesting of the topic is that the target group can be regarded in two ways, because the group is very mouldable. On the one hand youth can be viewed as a threat to peace: they can easily be mobilized and are sensitive to take part in armed hostilities. On the other hand they can be viewed as a force to peace: they are a good starting point when using community building as a conflict resolution tool, because they are easy to mobilize and sensitive for positive changes (UNDP, 2006; UNDP, 2007; WYR, 2003, p. 371).
2.5.1 Negative role of youth in conflict

When talking about youth and their negative role in conflict, identity seems to be an important aspect. Often young people are motivated to participate in a conflict because of identical reasons. At young ages people are overloaded (especially in conflict sensitive areas) with stereotypes of the ‘other’. Young people easily internalize concepts of the other laden with negative stereotyping and negative inter-group attitudes. This process maintains the status quo of the conflict because it reproduces the material and psychological conditions of the conflict (Hammack, 2010, p. 184).

In a study conducted in 2008 in former Yugoslavia it seemed that youth had more negative attitudes towards the ‘other’ than their parents. This might be explained by the fact that the parents grew up in a less divided society. Before the conflict started there were even intermarriages between different ethnic groups. In addition, young people have less life experience and might be more rebellious (Hammack, 2010, p. 184).

So the identification process plays an important role in the maintenance of the conflict because of its reproductive function. People find a legitimate reason in identity to use violence. Violence against the out-group becomes necessary and justified in order protect the own group, for which young people feel responsible (Hammack, 2010, p. 185; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2007).

Other issues which make youth a problematic group in conflicts is that conflict areas are often characterized by bad economic conditions: poverty, disease and violence. Once a conflict breaks out, the situation does not get any better. Conflicts influence social welfare, economic development and education in a negative way. Unemployment is high and there are not enough opportunities available for development. Especially youth are affected by this situation; because once they finish school they cannot find a job. The situation can lead to growing tensions in society which can increase the risk of violent conflict. It is easier for young people to participate in violence, because often they do not have other possibilities. In addition young people can also quite easily be mobilized; as seen above they can be recruited by identity and ideologies to take part in a conflict (WYR, p. 373/376; UNDP, 2007, p. 1).

This is what also happened in Osh. Unemployment is high and hate speech about the ‘other’ (either the Kyrgyz or the Uzbek) can be heard everywhere. The situation is very nationalistic nowadays. Young people are more sensitive for this than elderly, because the last ones grew up in the Soviet Union. This was a less divided society, both in ethnicity as well as in economic status. It was thus not difficult to mobilize young people to participate in the violence. Indeed, when looking at the Osh events the majority of the perpetrators were young people (interview 27).

2.5.2 Positive role of youth in conflict

As said before, youth can have a versatile role in conflict because they can also be regarded as a solution in a conflict. For conflict prevention to be successful it is often crucial to focus on youth. Focusing on young people may result in long-term benefits. They should be more included in the policy-making procedures. At the moment they remain highly invisible in public forums to solve and prevent conflict, while their participation could greatly reduce the likelihood of conflict (WYR, 2003, p. 379/388).

Young people are necessary to include in order to take future generations and the society as a whole into account. Especially because youth often take part in the violence, youth communication forums can be useful in order for them to have a chance to voice their frustrations and to address their main concerns (WYR, 2003, p. 388).

There are already examples of young people taking initiative and setting up youth networks in order to prevent conflict and to build peace. Programs of NGOs are set up by youth and they often play an active role in their communities (WYR, 2003, p. 371/384). A good example of this is the organization
“Youth of Osh”, an organization set up by youth for youth and who are stimulating youth to set up its own projects.

Another aspect which is crucial in a society suffering from conflict is education. Education is important in changing the mind-set of young people, and in that way also changing the mind-set of the society as a whole. Through training, workshops, forums and peace-building mediations young people will learn how to engage in a constructive dialogue, which is necessary for solving a conflict. By education they can learn how to use other methods for solving a conflict instead of using violence (WYR, 2003, p. 389).

To end this part on youth in conflict, it is important to note that as in many cases, not only the society is divided but also parts of the societies are divided. Also amongst young people there are ones which participate in violence and ones which participate in building peace. Often it is seen in practice that both youth as a problem and youth as a solution go hand in hand.

In the case-study of Osh in Chapter 4 the role of youth with regards to the conflict will be analysed based on this theory.
3. The Ferghana Valley: history, context and cross-border issues

In order to apply the theories discussed in Chapter 2 to the Ferghana Valley, it is important to have a good analysis about the context of the Ferghana Valley. This chapter gives an overview of the Ferghana Valley and its cross-border issues and the surrounding countries of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In this chapter the next sub-questions will be answered:

- Which cross-border issues are important for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
- To what extent are the history and context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan of importance for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?

Also preliminary answers will be given to the three sub-questions with regards to ethnic diversity, socio-economic conditions and the political situation and its influence on conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. These sub-questions will also be answered in the next Chapter about the case-study of Osh.

3.1 History: the decisive divide-and-rule policy

The Ferghana Valley is situated at the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The region knows some complex borders and many enclaves. Uzbekistan has 60% of the valley's territory, Tajikistan 25% and Kyrgyzstan the remaining 15%. The valley is enclosed by the Kuramin, Chatkal, Ferghana, Alai and Turkestan mountains. The official administrative provinces in the valley are Andijan, Ferghana and Namangan in Uzbekistan; Batken, Osh and Jalalabad in Kyrgyzstan; and Sogd in Tajikistan (Slim, 2002). Map 3.1 gives an illustration of this.

Map 3.1: Topography and hydrography of the Ferghana Valley

Reference: Philippe Rekacewicz, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, 2005
The borders around the Ferghana Valley date back to the time of Stalin in the 1920s. He set the borders on the basis of his divide-and-rule strategy. Stalin drew lines like a “one armed alcoholic”: the borders intertwined and convoluted. For example, there are several Uzbek enclaves entirely cut off by Kyrgyzstan (Stephens, 2010; Murray, 2010).

This divide-and-rule strategy was not without reason; the borders were specifically designed so as not to create prosperous economic, political, cultural and ethnic coherence, especially not in the Ferghana Valley. The valley was well-known because of its fertile ground and economic prosperity potential. It could be one of the world’s most productive agricultural regions, because in the Summer it is fed by the glaciers and mountains surrounding the valley. By drawing lines crossing ethnicities and natural economic units, distrust and hostility amongst ethnic groups would increase so that there would be no chance for consolidation of nationalist movements in the economically high potential valley (Star, 2011). So though it might seem that the three countries are respectively ethnic homes for Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks, the truth is entirely different. An example of an ethnic mixed place is Osh, a city which was originally mainly inhabited by Uzbeks, but has been ‘placed’ on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is a tense situation between the ethnic groups about access to land, water and jobs (Gleason et al, 2007, p. 7; Stephens, 2010; Murray, 2010; Megoran, 2004, p. 733).

Some analysts even go a step further by saying that the divide-and-rule policy was not only to prevent an economic prosperous region, but that its main goal was ethnic engineering. The goal of this would be to foster ethnic inter- and intrastate conflicts. The Soviet policy was to intentionally create mono-ethnic regions which left large communities of ethnic minorities in each Central Asian state, leading to ethnic tensions. Ethnic discrimination and territorial claims became part of everyday life, planting the seeds for conflicts (Peimani, 2009, p. 145).

Whether or not on purpose, ethnic conflicts did take place in the period around the collapse of the Soviet Union. Towards the end of the 1980s conflicts amongst different ethnic groups emerged in the Ferghana Valley. The central power of Moscow weakened and Gorbachev introduced his first reforms. The Soviet Union was weakened and not able to control its own territory anymore. In Uzbekistan in 1989 fighting erupted between Turkmen and Uzbeks and in Kyrgyzstan between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks and between Kyrgyz and Tajiks (KIC, 2011, p. 9). Theories about the political situation can be applied to this. As can be seen, conflicts broke out in a time when there was state transition in the up run towards the collapse of the Soviet Union. The control weakened which is why it was possible for people to violate. The fact that the conflicts broke out in this period also gives support to the constructivist’s view about ethnicities that there should be underlying forces which activate ethnic conflict. These underlying forces would be tensions about access to land, water and jobs. These tensions can be translated into violence if the political situation allows it to happen.

The borders became more problematic with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian states. The borders drawn by Stalin, which at the time of the Soviet Union did not have much meaning as with only administrative purposes, suddenly became the international borders of the new Central Asian countries. Crossing the border all of a sudden became difficult. Especially Uzbekistan adopted strict border policies. The consequence was that there were many minority ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Uzbeks living in Osh, suddenly became an ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan without a possibility to visit their relatives across the border. Furthermore, with the independence of the Central Asian states, feelings of nationalism grew which did not improve the relation with ethnic minorities. This can also be traced back to the theory about the political situation. In a period of transition and democratization elites will try to mobilize ordinary people with feelings of nationalism. Nationalism provides the opportunity to unite elites and masses and to get a strong support base, as was the case when the Central Asian states became independent (Stephens, 2010; Murray, 2010; Deen & Bouyjou, 2006, p. 1; Megoran, 2004, p. 736).
The hardening of the borders had economic consequences for the valley. Suddenly, economic exchange became difficult or not possible anymore and cross-border collective farms had to close down. The ordinary flow across the border of people, goods and services disrupted. Unemployment increased, partly because of the crack down of the network of suppliers and distributors and markets that used to be spread throughout the Soviet Union. The region fell into an increasing dependency on subsistence farming, labour migration and drug trafficking. This situation led to a steep decline in people’s living standards. What once was an economic potential valley now became a valley with bad economic conditions (Slim, 2002; ICG, 2010, p. 1). As seen in the previous chapter, bad economic conditions and unemployment increases the chance of tensions and conflict.

The hardening of the borders also caused many problems in the villages in the border regions. Some villages were split in half by a border fence, sometimes in the middle of a street. In some villages the border is still disputed and therefore still not demarcated. It does not need much explanation that villages suffered – and still suffer – from these developments. The communities depended on each other for decades with regard to trade and public facilities. It has become difficult to visit schools, mosques and hospitals on the other side of the border. Also resources like water had always been shared between communities and suddenly belonged to a sovereign foreign state. But also family relations existed out of people from different villages and communities; suddenly it became difficult or even impossible to visit them. This situation also led to increasing tensions between ethnic groups (Deen & Bouyjou, 2006, p. 2; Megoran, 2006, p. 631/636).

Concluding, it can be said that the history of the Ferghana Valley has been very decisive for conflict potential in the region. The artificial designed borders led to ethnic tensions. Together with economic decline and the political transformations this led to increased conflict potential.

3.2 Cross-border issues in the Ferghana Valley

As the Ferghana Valley is a border region, there are cross-border issues as in all border regions in the world. The issues discussed here are border disputes, Islamic extremism and drug trafficking. It will be analysed to what extent these border issues increase the risk on conflict.

3.2.1 Border disputes

Nowadays there are still territorial and border disputes between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan about the Ferghana Valley. There are disagreements about each country’s share of the valley and there are parts which are still undemarcated. Also separatist movements are present in the valley, caused by the many ethnic minorities. In Khojand, a city in Tajikistan with an Uzbek majority, the Uzbeks threaten to secede from Tajikistan in order to join Uzbekistan. The other way round, Tajikistan inactively claims the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan (Peimani, 2009, p. 16/96).

This situation increases the risk on interstate conflict in the valley. Most probably the countries will try and solve the undemarcated border zones through multilateral or bilateral dialogue and concessions. However, when this is not possible an interstate conflict can occur (Slim, 2002).

Because of the disputes about the borders at the national level, people at the local level have disputes about accessible land. Because land is scarce and many spots are undemarcated, everyone tries to access this land. Arable land is needed for farming, especially in the Ferghana Valley which is one of the most densely populated parts of Central Asia. Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks are competing for the land in different parts of the Ferghana Valley, especially in the region of Batken in Kyrgyzstan (Passon & Temirkulov, 2004, p. iii). This is a good example of an ‘ethnic conflict’ while the cause of
the conflict is not because the groups are ethnically distinct. The groups are fighting for access to land, not because of differences in ethnicity. This relates again to the constructivist’s point of view that there should be underlying forces to stimulate ethnic conflict.

In addition to land disputes, the disputed borders also cause problems with regards to water. As indicated with red stars in map 3.2, many water disputes are situated at the borders of the Ferghana Valley. Many small-scale conflicts occur between neighbours and villages. However, the water issues also have further growing consequences for the economic situation. The three countries in the Ferghana Valley are interdependent on each other for their water sources. In addition to this the water is also used for contrary purposes: where Kyrgyzstan needs water for energy production, Uzbekistan needs the same water for the irrigation of their cotton. As a consequence of this, the agricultural production in Uzbekistan fell by 30% in 2000 (Slim, 2002). Water issues thus not only contribute to intra-state conflict potential, but also to inter-state conflict potential.

Map 3.2: Water issues in the Ferghana Valley

Reference: Philippe Rekacewicz, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, 2005,
So it can be said that border disputes between the three countries of the Ferghana Valley increases the conflict potential in the region, both intra-state and inter-state conflicts are possible.

3.2.2 Islamic extremism

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Islamic extremism also found its way to the border area of the Ferghana Valley. Some experts say that radical groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir find more and more support in the countries surrounding the Ferghana Valley. Both are pan-Islamic groups which want to create an Islamic state in the historical region of Turkestan under the rule of the sharia (Slim, 2002).

The increasing popularity can be ascribed to the fact that there is dissatisfaction amongst the population with their government. As said before, since the collapse of the Soviet Union people increasingly live in poor conditions and their governments do not offer improvements. As seen in Chapter 2, when the government feels no responsibility for its citizens, people will have to search for security and social safety nets themselves. Therefore they seek their salvation in religion and Islamic groups. It is said that in Osh this is also the case nowadays. After the violence many Uzbeks joined Islamic groups because they do not have faith in the government of Kyrgyzstan anymore. In order to guarantee their own security, they will have to search for alternatives which are often Islamic groups. However, rumours about growing Islamic fundamentalism in the Ferghana Valley remain mainly guessing and speculations. This is partly because the groups act mainly in underground networks. Besides, many case studies on Islamic fundamentalism in the valley do not find any proof. People do have their Islamic values and traditions, but not in such a way that it is worrisome (Passon & Temirkulov, 2004, p. 10).

For the time being Islamic extremism as such does not lead to conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. This is because Islamic extremism should be more regarded as opposition towards the governments. In a case like IMU who is striving for the overthrow of Karimov it can lead to instability. The increasing popularity finds its roots in disappointment with the government, not in the convincing ideas of the religion as such. According to the ICG (2001, p. 11): “the [Islamic] insurgency is a reflection of the economic hardships and discontent affecting a part of the population”. People want change, and therefore they search for other ways to achieve this change. So again, the bad economic and political situation in the countries lead to conflict potential, and Islamic groups are taking advantage of this.

3.2.3 Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking belongs to the daily business in parts of the Ferghana Valley nowadays. Because it is an illegal business, it is difficult to find out to what extent this has an impact on the situation in the Ferghana Valley, especially since official data are not available and hard to collect.

Especially the Southern part of the Ferghana Valley plays a role in drug trafficking. Drugs are transported from Afghanistan to Tajikistan, from which it is brought to Kyrgyzstan via the many Uzbek enclaves and undemarcated zones. From this part of the valley, the drugs are smuggled to Uzbekistan, either directly or via Osh (Passon & Temirkulov, 2004, p. 11).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic decline in the Ferghana Valley, the drug business has increased. The informal economy is a good alternative for people who cannot find a job (Slim, 2002). This relates to the greed theory; people make a cost and benefit analysis in order to join this criminal business. As people do not have many things to lose, it is often an easy decision for them to participate in drug trafficking.

The criminal business is well visible in the street view nowadays. The money being earned with drugs leads to a culture of consumption in the valley. Young men in Osh are wearing luxury clothes and are driving expensive cars. This also leads to increased feelings of inequality amongst the population. Especially when the business is dominated by a certain ethnic group, the inequalities lead to tensions between ethnicities. This relates to the grievance theory (Slim, 2002).
The drug trafficking also leads in another way to instability. Intense competition is going on between criminal groups about the ownership of the most important drugs routes (Slim, 2002).

So drug trafficking leads to increased conflict potential in the region. However, again this is also mainly rooted in the fact that economic conditions are bad. People search for ways to earn money. If employment was high and the region would experience economic prosperity, it is likely that less people will be involved in drug trafficking. The trafficking is also rooted in the political situation; the governments are unwilling or unable to control the situation. A complex network of drug traffickers, criminal groups, corrupt border guards and political elites has been developed in which people in the drugs business are free to move.

So border disputes, Islamic extremism and drug trafficking all lead to increased conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. However, all the issues are rooted in the bad economic conditions and the weak or authoritarian political situations in the countries. In the next part the context of the three separate countries of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will be compared and discussed.

3.3 History and context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

This part will discuss the history and context of the three countries which share the Ferghana Valley. There will be specific attention for ethnic, socio-economic and political aspects. Table 3.1 gives an overview of relevant ethnic, socio-economic and political information about Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The information has been put in one table in order to make quick comparisons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Information Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Population &amp; Ethnicities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
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<tr>
<td>% living in Ferghana Valley</td>
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<td>% Ferghana Valley total state territory</td>
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<td>Ethnic majority</td>
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<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
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<td><strong>Socio-economic conditions</strong></td>
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<td>HDI</td>
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<td>Multidimensional poverty index</td>
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<td><strong>Political situation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Level of democracy (-10-+10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil liberties index (1-7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References: UNDP, 2010; Stat Uzbekistan, 2011; Stat Kyrgyzstan, 2011; Stat Tajikistan, 2008; CIA The World Factbook, 2011; World Resource Institute, 2008; Slim, 2002; The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2010

The percentages and total numbers speak for themselves and will be analysed later on. The Human Development Index (HDI) gives an indication based on four indicators: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling, and gross national income per capita. A HDI of 1 would indicate very high human development and a HDI of 0 a very low human development. The figures in brackets show the country’s rank in the world. In comparison, Norway has the highest HDI in the world of 0,938 and Zimbabwe the lowest with 0,140 (UNDP, 2010; UNDP, 2011a).
The multidimensional poverty index indicates to what extent people live in poverty in a country. It is based on ten indicators: nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, children enrolled, cooking fuel, toilet, water, electricity, floors, and assets. The lower the figure, the lower the poverty (UNDP, 2011b).

The level of democracy indicates to what extent a country is an autocratic state (-10) or a democratic state (+10). The civil liberties index indicates to what extent the population in a country is free in which 1 is most free and 7 is least free.

The next figures show the population pyramids of respectively Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These figures give an indication about the percentage of young people living in these countries. As there is not much official data available, these figures are estimations by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2010. Finding reliable information is difficult, for example, since independence Uzbekistan has not conducted a census.

Figure 3.1: Population pyramid Kyrgyzstan 2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Reference: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011

Figure 3.2: Population pyramid Uzbekistan 2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.
Reference: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011
Taking a look at the population pyramids it is striking that all countries have a large young population. People under the age of thirty form the majority in each country. Tajikistan has the largest percentage young people under 30. It can be said that young people are an important and large group in society.

Population & Ethnicity
To start with the population and ethnicity, as can be derived from table 3.1, large parts of the population of each country live in the Ferghana Valley. This is especially the case for Kyrgyzstan, of which 42.2% of the total population lives in the Ferghana Valley. But also in the other countries large amounts of the population live in the valley. This is especially striking for Uzbekistan, as the valley covers only 4.3% of the total state’s territory. When looking at the population density of Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley is indeed one of the most densely populated parts. This is illustrated in map 3.3.

Map 3.3: Population density in Central Asia

All three countries are ethnic heterogeneous countries. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the majority is about the same percentage. However, Tajikistan has a large Uzbek minority (15,3%) while Uzbekistan has more smaller minorities (of which the biggest is 5,5%). Kyrgyzstan’s majority is smaller, around 70%, but the country also has a big minority (Uzbeks 14,3%). The Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz minorities living in these countries all live in the border area of the Ferghana Valley. Although some also live somewhere else, for example in the capitals, this is such a small percentage that it is not relevant to take into account. In Kyrgyzstan only 30,000 of the 768,000 Uzbeks do not live in the South. In some cities in the South, they even form the majority (Deen, 2010, p. 642; ICG, 2010, p. 1).

The fact that large amounts of the population live in the valley makes it a region which cannot be denied. But at the same time the region is not situated in the cores of the several countries. Instead, the valley is – in each country – separated from the capital and the core businesses by a huge range of mountains. In Kyrgyzstan this became clearly evident by the many times people told me about the ‘North-South’ division that exists in Kyrgyzstan (interview 4; 22; 26; 32; 36).

This situation, which can be found in all countries, makes it happen that there are regional differences between the Ferghana Valley and the rest of the country. Although the large amounts of people living in the Ferghana Valley, the governments do not see this region as a core region which they should invest in. A reason for this is the increasing nationalistic feelings that are present in the countries. The nationalistic governments do not want to invest in a region which has a large ethnic minority. A consequence of this is that the socio-economic conditions in these regions remain bad and unemployment remains high. The minorities feel they are excluded from what is decided in the capital. This can lead to feelings of grievances among ethnic lines.

In general it can be said that the clustering of ethnic minorities in the Ferghana Valley – in which they often form an almost majority – together with the geographical enclosure of the valley with the rest of the nationalistic sensitive country can lead to increased conflict potential.

Socio-economic conditions

Looking at the socio-economic conditions of the three countries, it must be said that the unemployment rate is estimated. The official statistics from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan indicate that there unemployment is respectively 0,3% and 2%. They are representing rosy images of their economic conditions. This is not possible as the unemployment rate is very high in the region, with Tajikistan in the lead followed by Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (CIA The World Factbook, 2011a/b; U.S. Department of State, 2011).

According to Kramer (2008) from the Harvard University, unemployment in Tajikistan has reached 60% in some regions. Especially youth unemployment is high, which can reach as high as 80%. Surveys conducted in Tajikistan have shown that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunities: “young people are especially inclined to believe that they will never be able to get a job they really want” (Kramer, 2008). Furthermore underemployment should be taken into account. Underemployment is possibly as high as 40% in Tajikistan.

Uzbekistan has a lower unemployment rate than Tajikistan, although much higher than the 0,3% the official country statistics suggest. The official unemployment rate is estimated around 8% and underemployment around 25%. Unemployment amongst youth in Uzbekistan would be around 15-20% (Kramer, 2008; US Department of State, 2011).

Furthermore the migration of many people to Russia has not been taken into account, this count for all three countries but is the biggest in Tajikistan (interview 12).

Looking at the Human Development Index (2010) and Multidimensional Poverty Index (2010) it can be noticed that Tajikistan is the poorest country while Uzbekistan is the wealthiest country of the
three. In all countries the Ferghana Valley belongs to the poorest part of the country. The valley is at the bottom of most socio-economic indicators (ICG, 2010, p. 1).

Taking into account the greed theory discussed in Chapter 2, the countries have the socio-economic conditions which are necessary for violent conflict to occur. If unemployment is high, people will search for other opportunities. If taking part in violence and looting is an option, people will make a cost and benefit analysis in order to decide whether to take part in these activities. Looking at table 3.1, it would be most likely that violence would occur in Tajikistan because poverty is the highest. However, Tajikistan as a country has already suffered from a civil war and is still restoring from it. People are so-called ‘tired’ of conflict (interview 12).

So ethnic conflict is likely to occur because the economic situation is worse in the Ferghana Valley, in which ethnic groups live intermingled. If inequalities exist between ethnicities, not only greed but also grievance can play a role. Conflict will then probably express itself along ethnic lines. In general it can be argued that in all three countries disappointment with the socio-economic conditions and chances on grievances along ethnic lines can lead to increased conflict potential.

Political situation
Looking at the information about the political situation in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan it is noticeable – as already partly discussed in Chapter 2 – that Kyrgyzstan is the most democratic and open country. It has the highest level of democracy and the highest level of civil liberties compared to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan is the most autocratic and closed country of the three in which civilians do not have freedom. Looking at the theories discussed in Chapter 2, this suggests that violence is most likely in Kyrgyzstan, after which respectively Tajikistan and Uzbekistan follow. The level of democracy in Kyrgyzstan is around -1, a level with a 20% probability on political violence when taking into account figure 2.1 in Chapter 2. In contrast, the level of democracy in Uzbekistan is around -7, where the probability of violence is around 10%. Tajikistan has a level of around -5, which means a probability of violence around 15%. This could be another explanation why violence in Kyrgyzstan did occur and not in other Central Asian countries (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2010).

Because the political situation is very decisive for a conflict to occur, the separate political situations of each country will be discussed now. Especially Kyrgyzstan will be analysed in depth, because there a conflict broke out.

3.3.1 Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is seen as the most democratic country in Central Asia. It is often called the ‘island of democracy’ in Central Asia. Many people see this as a result from their nomadic traditions: people are used to be free and therefore they protest when their freedom is being limited; more protesting takes place compared to other Central Asian countries. Kyrgyzstan has not had such a strong leader as in other Central Asian countries. However, the absence of one single authority cannot be regarded as democracy. There are many centres of power, but they are not democratically in themselves yet (interview 8).

Since its independence, Kyrgyzstan was ruled by the autocratic leader Akayev until 2005. However, towards the end of his presidency protests increased. On February 27, 2005, parliamentary elections were held and according to the opposition groups and the international observers these were far from fair. As often seen in autocratic countries, only 6 out of the 75 seats were won by the opposition. Protest and demonstration followed which the government could not stop. The demonstration spread to the capital and on March 24 demonstrators captured the Kyrgyz presidential palace: the day of the so-called Tulip Revolution. Akayev fled and Bakiyev (the
opposition leader) took over the power. He declared that from that moment on the ‘people’ were in charge of the government (Peimani, 2009, p. 86; Deen, 2010, p. 641).

However, although it is called the Tulip Revolution, a real radical change did not take place. In fact, the changes were limited to a replacing of the ruling persons. When looking back, one could argue that the revolution – and especially the capture of the presidential palace – was too easy and without reverses. Rumours spread that security forces cooperated with the opposition (including Bakiyev), mainly consisting of former officials of the Akayev administration. So except from a new president, there was not a radical change in the political system. The government and the ruling elite were still characterized by corruption and cronyism, while the rest of the country was characterized by poverty, economic problems, inequality and human rights abuses (Peimani, 2009, p. 86; Deen, 2010, p. 641).

This is also an explanation why a conflict did not occur in 2005: there was no real transition. Looking at the theories discussed in Chapter 2 one might think that conflict should have occurred in 2005, because of the revolution and the transition the state went through. However, as described above this was not really the case. The state was not in transition and so a power vacuum did not exist. Instead, the first revolution of 2005 was just the start of the slow transition the country is going through now: from autocracy to democracy.

That a radical change did not happen but that the start to transition was given, can be illustrated by the on-going protests the years following the revolution. Mass street protests occurred from time to time. These protests show the popular dissatisfaction with the unfulfilled promises of the government, combined with the bad socio-economic conditions. It is clear that the Kyrgyz government system suffered from the lack of sustainable popular support and legitimacy. However, most demonstrations were suppressed or were made impossible, so that there were no real consequences for the acting government. In other words, protests became more and more possible, but the autocratic government still had almost everything under control, although losing strength (Peimani, 2009, p. 86/149).

In April 2010, there were again massive demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan, following the arrests of opposition leaders and attempts by the government to limit the freedom of expression and media. Furthermore, food and energy prices were increasing, which had an effect on the society as a whole and therefore it was easier for the opposition to mobilize the people. On April 15, president Bakiyev fled the country to Kazakhstan and a new interim-regime led by opposition leader Otunbayeva took over. However, the interim-regime was hastily formed by a shaky coalition of opposition groups. The regime faced difficulties with keeping the authority and control over its territory; two months later ethnic violence broke out in the South of Kyrgyzstan (Deen, 2010, p. 641; interview 43).

That violence broke out can be explained that this time the country was in a transition from an autocracy to a democracy, more than in 2005. The revolution was not organized as in 2005, but was started by the people themselves. This is evidenced by the interim president Roza Otunbayeva, who formed an interim government. In line with her own democratic values Otunbayeva was not candidate for the presidential elections in October 2011. Furthermore, the interim government introduced a new constitution, in which the power of the president was constrained and a new semi-parliamentary system was introduced. Besides it was documented that no single party could have more than 65 seats in the 120-seats counting parliament. These are all changes which clearly point to a transition from an autocracy to a democracy. However, the changes and the lack of one strong leader also led to a situation of institutional weakness and contradicting interests: the state became weak. That there was no sufficient control led to the fact that other groups could take over the power in the South of Kyrgyzstan, by which the conflict in Osh could occur, which will be more discussed in Chapter 4 (Deen, 2010, p. 642).
In October 2010 parliamentary elections were held which were relatively quiet and orderly, despite the fears for unrest. The international community (i.e. the OSCE) even called the elections the most free and fair elections ever held in one of the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia. A threshold was maintained that each party needed at least 0.5% of the votes of the number of registered voters in each of the seven provinces and two big cities. This was done in order to exclude parties with a solely ethnic or regional base. This is why there is for example no Uzbek party in Kyrgyzstan (Deen, 2010, p. 643).

The results of the elections were very striking. The party Ata-Zhurt won the elections with 8.47% of the votes. Ata-Zhurt is the main opponent of the interim-government, and is well-known because of its nationalistic approach and its link with former president Bakiyev. The party is mainly popular amongst nationalistic Kyrgyz in the South. The socio-democratic party SPDK (Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan) became second with 7.83% of the votes. This is the party of which Roza Otunbayeva was member before she became president. The parties Ar-Namys and Respublika got respectively 7.57% and 6.93% of the votes. Both are parties which take a position in the middle: they are not necessarily pro-interim-government neither against. The fifth party which passed the threshold was another pro-interim-government party: Ata-Meken with 5.49% of the votes (Deen, 2010, p. 642/643).

Most striking was that Ata-Zhurt won the elections, because the elections took place as a result of the overthrow of Bakiyev. Looking at the voter turnouts, the turnout was especially high in Osh, the region in which Ata-Zhurt was very popular amongst the nationalistic Kyrgyz who first supported Bakiyev. The party used nationalism in order to gain a large support base, in which it was easily successful in the time after the ethnic violence.

Furthermore, the fact that five parties made it to the parliament shows the enormous diversity, division and contradicting interests that exist in the country after the revolution and the conflict. This does not only leave space for nationalistic groups to take their chance, but also for violence to occur. If a nationalistic party comes into power, there is a probability that there will be a low level of political inclusiveness. This will leave out ethnic minorities in the government which increases again feelings of exclusion and grievances which can lead to conflict. Also it can lead to a relapse in the democratisation process of Kyrgyzstan and a government who is unable to control the different interests in the country, in other words a weak state.

3.3.2 Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is often seen as the most stable Central Asian country. The relative stability can be ascribed to the authoritarian regime and the repressive police state. Since its independence, president Karimov is ruling the country with tight grip and it seems that he will do this till his death. The government strictly curtails freedom of expression and religion, in which the security services play an important role. The government is afraid that Islam will take over, and therefore it controls it strictly. Furthermore human right defenders are constantly threatened and attacked and there is little to no improvement in this area (Peimani, 2009, p. 6; Pannier, 2010, p. 570; HRW, 2004, p. 5; interview 16).

Like Kyrgyzstan and other clan-based countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan is also characterized by nepotism. A good example of this is that the youngest daughter of Karimov is Uzbekistan’s ambassador to UNESCO, while his oldest daughter is Uzbekistan’s representative to the UN in Geneva (Pannier, 2010, p. 581).
Elections have been held in Uzbekistan, but they have always been undemocratic according to international organizations. According to the OSCE about the presidential elections in December 2007: “[...the elections] failed to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections [...] While there were four candidates [...] the voters were nonetheless left without a real choice as all contestants publicly endorsed the policies of the incumbent president, Mr. Islam Karimov. Legal and administrative obstacles prevented political movements representing alternative views from registering as political parties or initiative groups, thereby precluding them from fielding presidential candidates” (OSCE, 2008, p. 1). This shows that the country is real autocracy.

However, despite the tight grip, Uzbekistan also suffers from disturbances and irregularities caused by political opposition. Political opposition in Uzbekistan is mainly present in the Ferghana Valley, the most geographically separated part of the country. The most well-known anti-government group is the IMU, as already mentioned earlier in this chapter (Peimani, 2009, p. 6/15; Amnesty International, 2011).

The gravest incident led by the opposition in Uzbekistan took place in the Ferghana Valley. The city of Andijan experienced a big incident on May 13, 2005. On this day there were popular protests and violent anti-government activities. The government building and the prison were attacked and occupied, government security personnel were killed and prisoners were released. There is dispute about who organized the incident. The Uzbek authorities called the incident a well-calculated terrorist operation (led by the IMU) during which Uzbek security forces and people were attacked. On the other hand opposition and human rights groups state that the security forces used violence in order to stop the unarmed protestors which were demonstrating against the government. However, these last groups acknowledge that there were also armed opposition groups involved in the violence, although the majority were peaceful protesters (Peimani, 2009, p. 87/201; Pannier, 2010, p. 570).

After the incident, the Uzbek authorities immediately restored order in Andijan. Tensions and anti-government groups are still there, but Uzbekistan is keeping a tight grip in which there is almost no possibility for people to protest. The IMU still plays a big role in the Ferghana Valley, and it is said that the movement is gaining more support because of the dissatisfaction amongst the population in the region. As analysed before, also the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley is caused by poverty and unemployment (Peimani, 2009, p. 88).

In addition to the unrest in the Ferghana Valley, also elsewhere in the country violent anti-government activities by the IMU have taken place now and then. In 1999, Tashkent (the capital) was surprised by a series of bombings (Peimani, 2009, p. 6/200). Also in 2009 there were again attacks in Tashkent and in the Ferghana Valley (Amnesty International, 2011). These attacks show the vulnerability of the Uzbek state, because if people are not allowed to protest, extremist groups will show their dissatisfaction by attacks.

However, overall Uzbekistan is stable, ‘thanks to’ Karimov. Therefore the stability in the country depends on him. He is the one who binds Uzbekistan together. No one can foresee what will happen if he falls away, although experts talk about serious instability that could spread over whole Central Asia. But so far as he is alive Uzbekistan remains a strong autocratic state in which there is almost no chance for protests and violence (Pannier, 2010, p. 572; interview 8).

3.3.3 Tajikistan

Tajikistan is often seen as the most worrisome country in Central Asia. Since its independence from the Soviet Union it immediately rolled into a civil war which ended in 1997. Since then the country is characterized as a poor state with a strong leadership under president Rakhmon. Its proximity to
Afghanistan makes it a country in which international organizations are mainly focussed on the border with Afghanistan instead of on the country itself. Some see Tajikistan as the “Yemen” of Central Asia (interview 12; 16).

The poverty can be mainly ascribed to the civil war. This had a huge impact on society, in a way that the population can be described as passive. Civil society is not very developed, nor active as compared to for example Kyrgyzstan. This is partly because of the poor education system. The human rights notions are poorly understood by the ordinary people, because they simply do not know what it means. This also counts for the development of political opposition. Furthermore people are afraid, they had war for a long time and now they want to keep the peace. Therefore they prefer not to be active in human rights or oppose the government (interview 12; 19).

Another reason for the passiveness of the population is because a large number of the population is working abroad, mainly in Russia. This is also the case for other Central Asian countries, but not to such a great extent as in Tajikistan. Also this can be ascribed to the poverty mainly caused by the civil war. Almost all men between 18 and 35 are working in Russia and sending their money back to their families in Tajikistan. This also does not contribute to the activeness of the population (interview 42).

Officially Tajikistan holds elections for the presidency and parliament. However, in practice it turns out that everything is ruled by one dominant party. The People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) of President Rakhmon has a vast majority in the parliament and president Rakhmon has been ruling the country already for more than two decades. In the last parliamentary elections of 28 February, 2010, the PDPT won more than 70% of the votes. The OSCE said that the elections “failed to meet many key OSCE commitments” (The Economist, 2010; BBC, 2010). Just like Uzbekistan, also in this country there are clear indicators of strong autocracy in which violence is almost impossible.

Furthermore, the leadership under Rakhmon and his government is characterized by corruption and strong control. In October 2010 the government was criticized by the OSCE for censorship and repression of the media (Kozhevnikov, 2010; Karimov, 2010). Furthermore, setting up small businesses is almost impossible. Entrepreneurship is made impossible because corrupt government officials will come and take the money. This is visible when you compare the street view of the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek with the Tajik capital Dushanbe. Where in Bishkek one can find drink stands with Kfas and Tan (local drinks) on almost every corner of the street (photo 3.1), in Dushanbe this is impossible. In Dushanbe there are only a few stands in total and people even have to share the same cup (interview 42).

Photo 3.1: Women selling drinks in Bishkek

Reference: Fellowsblog, 2010
Because of the strong leadership in combination with the fact that people are tired of conflict, there is not much opposition in Tajikistan. The biggest opposition is formed – just as in Uzbekistan – by Islamic radical militant groups. Now and then Tajikistan is surprised by a series of attacks, of which the latest big attacks were in September 2010. It is said that the Islamic militant groups are responsible for these attacks (Peimani, 2009; West, 2010). But in general it can be said that the political situation in Tajikistan makes violent protests and conflicts impossible. People are not happy with their situation, but they are too tired and unable to change this.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter can be concluded with saying that the history, cross-border issues and the context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are of influence for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. The history has been very decisive for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. With the artificial drawing of the borders the stage was set for tensions and conflicts.

First of all, the history caused cross-border issues which brought instability to the region. The undemarcated border increases the risk on both inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Drug trafficking and Islamic groups also increase the risk on conflict, but these issues are rooted in the bad socio-economic conditions and the political situation. These aspects led to the emergence of drug trafficking and Islamic groups, because people have to find alternatives to earn money or to oppose the government. So drug trafficking and Islamic extremism can be seen as consequences of the bad economic conditions and the political situation.

The history also set the stage for the context of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The ethnic composition and geographical separation of the Ferghana Valley are similar in the three countries, which increases the conflict potential because of regional differences compared to the capitals. The governments focussed more on promoting nationalistic values instead of paying attention to minority rights, which resulted in a poorly developed Ferghana Valley.

Also the economic conditions are relatively equal in the three countries with high unemployment rates. The inequality and feelings of grievances which exist can lead to conflict between ethnic groups. As poverty is the highest in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, it would be most likely that conflict break out there. However, a side note should be kept in mind that Tajikistan is still recovering from a civil war. Indeed, a conflict broke out in Kyrgyzstan. However, as seen in this chapter, this should also be ascribed to the political situation.

So the ethnic composition and the geographical distribution are pre-conditions for the conflict, not causes as such. Tensions are activated by bad socio-economic conditions and inequalities, but will only break out in a certain political situation. Having said this it is explainable why conflict broke out in Kyrgyzstan, and not (yet) in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan there might be ethnic tensions, but the government strictly controls outbreaks of possible violence. Conflict potential exists, but is most likely to break out if the state also goes through a transition phase.

So it can be said that the history, cross-border issues and the context of the three individual countries contribute to conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. These aspects resulted and are rooted in ethnic, socio-economic and political aspects, which themselves also increase the conflict potential. Mainly intra-state conflicts are possible, but as discussed also inter-state conflicts are a potential.

As Kyrgyzstan experienced a conflict in June 2010, the next chapter will analyse the case-study of Osh to which ethnic, socio-economic and political theoretical lenses will be applied.
4. Case-study: conflict causes and the role of youth in Osh

In June 2010, Kyrgyzstan experienced violence in its part of the Ferghana Valley, mainly in the city of Osh. In order to say something about the conflict potential, it is important to know what happened there exactly. This chapter will first start with a short overview of the happenings in 1990 and 2010, because also in the 1990s Osh experienced ethnic violence. After this the theories as discussed in Chapter 2 will be applied to Osh. We will look if the events can be explained by ethnic, socio-economic or political reasons, or a combination of them. By doing this, the next sub questions will be answered, which were also already discussed in Chapter 3:

- To what extent is ethnic diversity of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
- To what extent are socio-economic conditions of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?
- To what extent is the political situation of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?

This chapter will furthermore take a specific look at the role of youth during the unrest in June 2010 by answering the following sub question:

- What was the role of young local people during the unrest in Osh in June 2010?

During the field research it also became clear, however, that there were other influences on the events. These will be discussed under “other issues”.

4.1 The June 1990 and June 2010 events

In order to analyse the situation in Osh, it is necessary to give a short overview of what led to the violence in Osh in 1990 and 2010.

1990
The 1990 Osh events took place in the period just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the government in Moscow was already weakened. In 1989, the Supreme Court decided to make Kyrgyz the official language of the Kyrgyz SSR instead of Russian. This was not accepted by the Uzbeks living in the Kyrgyz SSR (mainly in Osh) and they set up the organization Adolat. Its main goal was to establish an autonomous Osh Province in which the Uzbek rights were to be protected. Some activists were more radical by striving for a total separation from Kyrgyzstan and integration into Uzbekistan. Furthermore, they wanted more representation in the government of Kyrgyzstan and integration into Uzbekistan. Furthermore, they wanted more representation in the government of Kyrgyzstan (HRW, 2011, p. 14; KIC, 2011, p. 10).

In May 1990, a Kyrgyz counterpart organization was formed which focused on land scarcity and economic inequality facing ethnic Kyrgyz. The organization asked for more land for housing for Kyrgyz, and the Kyrgyz-dominated local government of Osh was more than willing to fulfil these demands. However, the local government allocated Uzbek-owned land for Kyrgyz housing projects (HRW, 2011, p. 15).

The land disputes in and around Osh increased, and on June 4 the police needed to restore order between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks who were ready to attack each other. The violence quickly spread around the region, and was the worst in the city of Uzgen (near Osh). The fighting ended after an intervention of Soviet troops a few days later (HRW, 2011, p. 15).

During these 1990 events, “more than 300 people were killed, more than 1,000 wounded and over 500 arrested” (HRW, 2011, p. 15). Furthermore, houses and bazaars were burned down and looted. Unrest continued until August and a state of emergency was declared that lasted till November 1990 (HRW, 2011, p. 15).
After the events little to no attention was paid to what had happened. The government did not analyse the reasons for the conflict and the issue of ethnicity as a potential problem was denied. In June 2010 ‘history repeated itself again’ (interview 22).

2010
First of all, the June 2010 events cannot be analysed without taking the April 2010 revolution into account in which Bakiyev was overthrown. Bakiyev was originally from Jalalabad, his hometown in the South of Kyrgyzstan where he had a large support base (KIC, 2011, x).

After the revolution and up to the June events, there was already unrest in the South of Kyrgyzstan. Because of anger amongst the Bakiyev supporters because of the overthrown of Bakiyev, on May 13 they seized interim-government buildings in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken. The next day, the supporters of the interim-government from Otunbayeva recaptured some buildings. Furthermore, a crowd of both Kyrgyz and Uzbek marched to Bakiyev’s home town where they set fire to Bakiyev’s houses. Although it was an ethnically mixed crowd, the supporters of Bakiyev saw it as violence from Uzbeks against Kyrgyz (KIC, 2011, x).

Tensions and small riots further increased during the month with the police unable to address or prevent them sufficiently. On the June 10 clashes near the casino sparked further riots near the dormitory of the Osh University. A rumour emerged that the women dormitory was attacked and that Kyrgyz students were raped. This rumour, for which no evidence was found, was spread at an “extraordinary speed” in the Kyrgyz villages in the rural areas. Kyrgyz were mobilized really fast and they gathered together to go to Osh (KIC, 2011, x).

The official conflict started on June 11 and lasted till June 14. The majority of the houses burnt down belonged to Uzbeks, as were the majority of the people who were killed. In total over 400 people were killed, more than 1000 were wounded and hundreds of thousands persons were displaced, either within Kyrgyzstan or to Uzbekistan (KIC, 2011, p. ii).

It can be said that both conflicts – in 1990 and 2010 – broke out at a time when there was a weak government because of a transition phase and a regime change. In 1990 as well as in 2010 the government was in transition and did not have control over its territory. In the 1990s this was the government of the Soviet Union, in 2010 it was after the collapse of the regime of Bakiyev. A power vacuum existed in which other groups could take over the power and organize the violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan. As already seen in the previous Chapter, the theory on the political situation thus seems to give a useful explanation. However, first we will analyse the 2010 conflict with theories of ethnicity and socio-economic conditions.

4.2 Ethnic conflict?

In this part the sub-question “To what extent is ethnic diversity of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?” will be answered.

Immediately after the 2010 events the conflict was portrayed in the media as an ethnic conflict. This makes sense somehow, as the conflict was mainly between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Also when walking around Osh, it seems like an ethnic conflict. The destroyed neighbourhoods are all Uzbek. Streets continue with destroyed and burned houses from Uzbek people. The mixed neighbourhoods are also remarkable. Two types of houses can be distinguished here: the ones that are destroyed and the ones that still stand which often show a painted sign which says “Kyrgyz”. Walking around here makes you believe in the concept of ethnic conflict, because it is so extremely visible.
Ethnicity does play a role in Osh, the question is to what extent and to what extent it should be called an ethnic conflict, which implies ethnicity as the cause. The society in Osh has already for a long time been characterized by a division between ethnicities. This can be seen in the divided neighbourhoods, for example the Uzbek *mahallas*, although there are also some mixed neighbourhoods (KIC, 2011, p. 20). The division in neighbourhoods also results in mono-ethnic schools (interview 38). From childhood onwards, people experience little integration with the other ethnicity. In Kyrgyzstan this can be regarded as a problem, as also there is little attention for minority rights. A consequence of this is that in Uzbek schools they are using teaching material from Uzbekistan. A story which was told by several interviewees several times: “One girl from this Uzbek village thinks that our president is the president from Uzbekistan. Because she uses the books of Uzbek history!” (interview 17). The different languages also cause that people cannot talk to each other. The Uzbeks want their language to be recognized as an official language, while the Kyrgyz think that the Uzbeks should learn Kyrgyz because they are living in Kyrgyzstan. Especially young people suffer from this problem, as the elderly all learned Russian during the Soviet Union and they can thus communicate with each other (interview 16; 41).

The ethnicities mainly differ in their income generating activities. Kyrgyz always have been traditional nomads while Uzbeks have always been businessmen. This leads to a different attitude to economic benefits. An interesting story which was told in an interview: “I was asking what would you do with 100 soms [Kyrgyz currency]? I was asking this question at Kyrgyz and Uzbek schools. Uzbek schools would say I would buy a hen from this money, and I would get more of them and I could do business. Because I could sell eggs. Kyrgyz schools were saying we go to a café or to a shop and buy jeans. These people were from 13 to 18” (interview 15). As this difference in culture clearly has economic aspects, this difference and its consequences will be discussed more in-depth in the next paragraph about socio-economic conditions.

However, although there are clear ethnic factors present, it does not mean that ethnicity was the main cause of the conflict. As discussed in Chapter 2, just describing whom is fighting who does not include a causal explanation.

Regarding ethnicity as the main explanation for the violence in Osh raises many questions. How come that the different ethnicities lived in peace before and that violence erupted ‘just’ twice since the last decade? Despite the ethnic differences, some villages in the South of Kyrgyzstan were characterized by inter-ethnic marriages (interview 38). Furthermore, many stories were told that during the violence in 2010 Kyrgyz people helped Uzbeks and vice versa (interview 36; 13). They were giving each other protection (interview 36). If the cause was really ethnicity, this would not have been very likely.
From the research conducted in Osh, soon it became clear that other factors were more important; however, they almost always have a link to ethnicity. So ethnic diversity is of influence for conflict potential in Osh, but this cannot be only ascribed to ethnicity as such. Furthermore it must be said that the conflicts and tensions led to even further increased feelings of ethnicity and nationalism among Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Ethnic diversity as a factor for conflict potential thus becomes more important each time something happens. Feelings of hatred increase, because many people have lost relatives and they blame the ‘other’ for this. This can also be seen nowadays in Osh. The tensions and lack of trust between the ethnicities even became worse after the conflict, and so the gap between the ethnicities increased. This relates strongly to the constructivists point of view as discussed in Chapter 2: there should be other causes which activate feelings of ethnicity which can lead to conflict. Therefore the socio-economic conditions will be discussed now.

4.3 Socio-economic conditions

As seen in Chapter 2, there are theories which see socio-economic factors as the main drivers behind conflict. In this part the sub-question “To what extent are socio-economic conditions of influence for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?” will be answered.

As discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, when people live in bad economic conditions, they are more willing to participate in violence because they have nothing to lose. The socio-economic conditions in Kyrgyzstan, and especially in the villages in the South of Kyrgyzstan, are bad. Unemployment rates are high, especially amongst young men (interview 36; 13).

That the economic factor was important in the June events can be derived from the fact that the first thing that happened on June 11 was the looting of the main bazaar by particularly young men. If people are poor and when they do not have opportunities, they have nothing to lose and in order to survive they can benefit from a conflict by looting bazaars (KIC, 2011, p. 26). This was the case in Osh (Schwirtz, 2010):

“In just two days starting on Saturday, looters made off with most of the market’s goods, burning the rest in a free-for-all that left both Uzbek and Kyrgyz businesses destroyed, witnesses said. Even kiosks spray-painted with the word “Kyrgyz”, which throughout the city has offered protection to homes and businesses from Kyrgyz gangs, were not spared. Greed, not ethnic hatred or political machinations, appeared to be the driving force behind destruction”.

These looting activities can be explained by the greed theory. People – especially young men – were looting because of their own cost-benefit analysis, regardless of someone’s ethnicity. An officer from the OSCE Field office in Osh told me: “when people have money in their pockets they won’t be aggressive, the major problem is not ethnicity but economic” (interview 27). The young men were easy to mobilize because of unemployment, increased feelings of nationalism and – although no evidence is available for this – links to the mafia and criminal groups. Mafia is highly developed in Osh because of the drugs trade. It offers an alternative for legal jobs and therefore people can be easily mobilized for illegal activities.

However, it is not the economic situation as such that created the violence. The bad economic conditions in combination with a perceived inequality between the ethnicities explain why it unfolded along ethnic lines. During the years, a so-called ethnic division was created within the working class, which can be explained with the grievance theory explained in Chapter 2. In order to understand this, it is important to have a short look at the history.
Traditionally Uzbeks lived in the valleys in the villages while Kyrgyz were nomads living in the mountains. Uzbeks were businessmen while Kyrgyz were the nomads living on a day-to-day basis. They were moving from their winter camps to Summer pastures each year. This was fine till the forced collectivization of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, after which many Kyrgyz moved from the mountains and settled in the villages in the valleys, for example in Osh. Osh belonged to Kyrgyzstan but originally it had many Uzbek citizens. With the immigration of more and more Kyrgyz into Osh, the competition for land and water began. Disputes about resources already unfolded along ethnic lines, even more so when the population in the cities increased (HRW, 2011, p. 14; Megoran, 2010; KIC, 2011, p. 20; interview 13; 20).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the economy declined and the need for jobs increased. Uzbeks as businessmen mainly filled the middle niche jobs, like shop-keepers and craftsmen. As the Kyrgyz did not have the qualities to fulfil such jobs, they started to fill the tier above and under them. On the one hand there was the poor Kyrgyz underclass of unskilled workers who came to Osh from the rural areas. They even had to work for Uzbek people in for example cafes. On the other hand there were the rich Kyrgyz elite which filled the top positions in national banks, state enterprises and local government (Megoran, 2010; Sanghera, 2010; interview 13).

As a consequence of this situation, the Uzbeks felt excluded from the opportunities in the top positions which became increasingly mono-ethnic. This contributed to a sense of insecurity. The Kyrgyz, on the other side, felt that the Uzbek were taking all the good jobs and that they had the wealthiest businesses. The Kyrgyz felt as second class citizens in their own state (Megoran, 2010; Sanghera, 2010; interview 7). According to a famous human rights activist: “This caused a lot of frustration because Kyrgyz are the ethnic majority and they had to work for the ethnic minority” (interview 13). Therefore they also felt it was justified that only Kyrgyz people were occupying the jobs in the government, not least because they are also living in the Kyrgyz state, not an Uzbek state. The KIC report notes: “Kyrgyz politicians, even those who were well-disposed towards addressing minority problems, were not prepared to embrace the Uzbeks as genuinely equal citizens. It is hard for Kyrgyz to imagine that an Uzbek could be a prime minister or a minister of defence” (KIC, 2011, p. 24).

This analysis shows that the cultural and historical aspects led to a socio-economic situation of inequality between different ethnic groups. Ethnic divisions can be seen back in the divisions in the working class. Both groups suffer from feelings of inequality and therefore feelings of deprivation. So it can be stated that the socio-economic conditions led to grievances which were – and still are – of huge influence on conflict potential in Osh. However, the conversion of these feelings into violence is to a large extent determined by the political situation in a country.

4.4 The political situation

The political context is important because it contributes to the understanding if and how discontent turns into violence. In this part the sub-question “To what extent is the political situation of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?” will be answered.

There would be few people who would say that the conflict in Osh was totally disjunctive from the political situation in Kyrgyzstan. The fact that the conflict happened two months after the April Revolution, make almost all people convinced that it was not an ethnic conflict, but a political conflict (interview 6; 10; 11; 16; 17; 18; 19; 22; 27; 37). Therefore we will now look at the political situation from the April Revolution onwards how this contributed to the conflict in Osh.

When Bakiyev came to power in 2005, he immediately started his pro-Kyrgyzification campaign. As a Kyrgyz from Jalalabad, he had especially a large support base amongst strong nationalistic Kyrgyz in the South of Kyrgyzstan. Bakiyev quickly put an end to the advantages gained by Uzbeks in the South.
There was little to no attention for minority rights. The level of political inclusiveness in Kyrgyzstan was low during the Bakiyev years; the Uzbeks were underrepresented. As said before, Uzbeks felt deprived because the government system was dominated by Kyrgyz. They suffered from exclusion. There was simply no attention for ethnic issues (interview 7; 16; 19; 22).

With the overthrow of Bakiyev in April 2010, Kyrgyzstan went through a phase of transition in which a power vacuum was created with contradicting interests in the society. Everyone wanted to take advantage of the revolution and several groups were struggling for power, because there was a break-down of the rule of law (interview 10; 11). Three groups could be distinguished in the South: the interim-government of president Otunbayeva, the nationalistic Kyrgyz supporters of former president Bakiyev and the representatives of the Uzbek community. The interim-government took an approach with more attention for ethnic minorities, and therefore it sought support by the Uzbek community. The Uzbek community was stimulated by the government to express its wishes (interview 18; 22; KIC, 2011, p. 13-14).

Representatives of the Uzbek community took their chances and made statements about the need for Uzbek participation in politics, because during Bakiyev’s rule they were underrepresented. Uzbeks were asking for issues like “renaming of the state to the “Republic of Kyrgyzstan”, recognition of Uzbek as a regional language in the areas of compact Uzbek settlement, an increase in representation in power and law-enforcement bodies [...] and the removal of limits on use of the Uzbek language” (KIC, 2011, p. 22). Although never called for by the Uzbeks representatives, rumours were spread that Uzbeks were also requesting autonomy: “[...] if 10 Uzbeks said they wanted autonomy, the Kyrgyz interpreted it as all Uzbeks want to have autonomy” (interview 19; 37).

Nationalistic Kyrgyz saw the statements of the Uzbek representatives as a threat to their interests, especially because their president was overthrown. They did not understand why the Uzbeks were requesting so much, as the Uzbeks already had the wealthy businesses in the South. The situation contributed to the tensions between the ethnicities in the run-up to the June events, especially the rumours about autonomy made the Kyrgyz scared and angry (KIC, 2011, p. 13-14, 16; interview 18).

The situation contributed to the fusion of politics and ethnicity in the South of Kyrgyzstan. Playing on people’s feeling of ethnicity is an easy way to gain a strong support base within a short period of time, especially in the South of Kyrgyzstan in which tensions between ethnicities existed (interview 5). According to an interviewee of the Youth Human Rights Group (interview 14): “[...] non-competent politicians were making ethnical statements [...]” in order to gain support. The ‘other’ was seen as a threat, and therefore it was easy for political leaders to promise to protect their own ethnicity (interview 18). “It was a political struggle [...] that quickly led to ethnic aspects” (interview 16). This also explains why Ata-Zhurt won the parliamentary elections in October 2010, as seen in the previous chapter.

Besides the specific period of time after the April revolution, in general the degree of democracy in Kyrgyzstan also made the conflict possible. As seen in Chapter 3, Kyrgyzstan scores the level –1 on a scale of –10 (autocracy) to +10 (democracy), which indicates a semi-democracy (Hegre et al, 2001). Kyrgyzstan is often seen as an “island of democracy” in Central Asia. People can say what they want without being suppressed by the government. People have the freedom to organize and mobilize. At the same time, it is difficult for people to really participate in politics. Politics in Kyrgyzstan are characterized by corruption and nepotism. People with money and the right connections call the shots. So Kyrgyzstan is not an autocratic state which suppresses dissidence and protests, and it also not a democracy with facilities for Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the South to express their grievances. This situation resulted in violence.
So the political situation was decisive for the violence in Osh. All the political ingredients were present in Kyrgyzstan: a state in transition from autocracy to democracy, a power vacuum after the revolution, politics along ethnic lines, a semi-repressive government in which mobilization is possible but political participation is blocked, an inbetween level of democracy and a low level of political inclusiveness. The interim-regime after the April Revolution was weak and unable to control its own territory. So it can be stated that the political situation is of very high importance for conflict potential.

As analysed so far it can be concluded that socio-economic conditions and the political situation together led to the conflict in Osh, which quickly unfolded itself along ethnic lines.

4.5 Other issues (drugs, third forces, media & rumors, police)

Besides the issues mentioned before and in the theory, other issues were also of high influence that led to the conflict in Osh. Some of these issues involve cross-border issues which have been already discussed in Chapter 3, including drugs and third forces like criminal groups. Other issues which have not been discussed yet are media & rumours and the police.

4.5.1 Drugs

Because of its proximity to Afghanistan, the Ferghana Valley serves as a route for drugs from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe. The UN has even identified Osh as Central Asia’s most important drug trafficking center (KIC, 2011, p. 23).

It is difficult to find out to what extent the drugs business influenced the June events. A representative of the Head of State Service on Drug Control recently called the drug trafficking an "alarming situation", because of its increase after the April and June events: “its financing of destabilizing forces and corruption have only worsened since the events of June 2010” (KIC, 2011, p. 23).

Certainly drug trafficking has a big influence on society and it is related to the mafia, government and businesses. It is not without reason that Bakiyev closed the only organization dealing with the drug trafficking problem. After the closure, the trafficking flourished even further and mafia groups were strengthened. Besides adding to more instability around Osh, it is also most certain that some events related to the conflict has been realized with drugs money, for example the distribution of weapons (KIC, 2011, p. 23; Deen, 2010, p. 642).

After the April revolution, the power in the South of Kyrgyzstan was in the hands of criminals. The government bodies were so weak that they could not control the actions of the mafia and criminal groups. They could carry out their activities without being obstructed by the government. As the criminal groups mostly consist out of nationalistic Kyrgyz, including former state officials and supporters of Bakiyev, they mainly targeted Uzbek businesses. In this way they wanted to scare the Uzbeks and to retain power. This made the situation between the ethnicities also more tense (interview 10; 11).

4.5.2 Third forces

During many interviews, people noticed that the conflict was not spontaneous, but that it was partly organized. So-called third forces would have provoked the conflict, which made use of the deep feelings of both ethnicities (interview 18; 21; 26; 27; 36).

According to a member of parliament, she cannot believe that people – even if they hated each other very much – would “kill each other with such cruelty”. No one wanted the conflict to happen. There was knowledge how to “cut heads and bodies” in a professional way. The professionalism and
organization with which there was looted, burned and killed point to some kind of coordination and provocation of a third force (interview 21).

Again it is difficult to determine to what extent the conflict was spontaneous and to what extent it was organized. But there are incidences that contribute to the reliability that third forces were involved. In May, when the situation in the South of Kyrgyzstan was already destabilizing, there was a telephone conversation between the brother and son of former president Bakiyev. The security services intercepted this conversation and publicly released it on May 19. In this phone call the two men were talking about hiring 500 criminals to create unrest (KIC, 2011, p. 21; interview 21).

According to a member of parliament, when referring to this phone call: “And cynical he [the son of Bakiyev] said that the police would run from one place to another to try and resolve the problems, but they wouldn’t be able to. And of course he was promising a lot of money, and he was asking his uncle to find these type of criminal people and people who could coordinate it […] And third forces are also those who didn’t want to change the political system. They didn’t want us to change Kyrgyzstan at all, they prefer to have relations with one dictator [Bakiyev] and it’s more comfortable for them, they can get anything they want” (interview 21).

Many people speculate that the third forces were the mafia and criminal groups mentioned before. Since they wanted to keep Bakiyev in power, they would benefit from more tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. More tensions would lead to increased feelings of nationalism amongst Kyrgyz in the South, which would mean more supporters for Bakiyev-minded nationalistic people. More supporters would mean more votes in the next elections. Indeed, during the parliamentary elections in October 2010 the biggest party was Ata-Zhurt, as discussed before. This makes many people think that the violence was organized for political reasons.

4.5.3 Media & rumours

Many people in Kyrgyzstan say that the information spread by media and rumours were very important in the run-up to the June events (interview 2). Many rumours were spread by media and word of mouth which were never verified, but they were taken for granted.

The ‘problem’ with media in Kyrgyzstan is that there is no censorship. Media can write what they want, even reports which are not true. A lot of hate speech is spread by media. This kind of information provokes people (interview 18; 43).

An example of this was a national Kyrgyz TV channel which aired a report about the burnt houses of former president Bakiyev in Jalalabad. The Kyrgyz journalist told that the other proponents were burning down the houses. On the basis of this information more tension was created in society (interview 18).

Examples of rumours were rumours about Kyrgyz students who were raped by Uzbek men and rumours about people being closed-up in a mosque which was set on fire. These rumours were never verified. However, they were legitimate reasons for people to take up arms and to defend their own ethnicity (interview 18).

Another rumour was about a controversial book which was going to be set on fire together with large protests. The rumour was spread, but no one has seen this event happening and there are not even videos about it on Youtube. Apparently the protest did not take place, but the rumour was already spread and caused hatred (interview 7).

Also rumours about Uzbeks taking over power were making Kyrgyz angry. There were even talks that the Uzbeks already appointed a president and several ministers. This made especially the marginalized nationalistic people in mono-ethnic villages angry (interview 22; 37).
So many rumours were spread which were not based on anything and which led to the escalation of the situation. Everyday new rumours were spread and this increased the tensions. Also nowadays tensions are still high and society is still characterized by rumours. In November 2010, there was an explosion in the bazaar, soon the rumour was spread that the conflict had started again (interview 7; 19; 28).

4.5.4 Police

The police also contributed to the tensions in the South of Kyrgyzstan. The police has become more and more separated from the government. In Kyrgyzstan there are huge problems with the police, because they are immensely characterized by corruption. Almost all policemen make extra money of their job. An often said saying in Kyrgyzstan: “The police is your biggest enemy”. Policemen make money with bribes and they falsify facts in order to get money (interview 20).

In addition, the police is very discriminative. Almost all police men are Kyrgyz, and in the up-run to the June events the discrimination against Uzbeks was getting worse. Policemen were only stopping Uzbek people and taking bribes of them. When the conflict broke out, this got worse and the police was violating the law. Instead of providing security to people, they pushed the conflict forward. That is why people also felt the need themselves to take up arms, in order to provide for their own security which they did not receive from the police (interview 2; 8; 20).

4.6 The role of youth

After having discussed which factors are of influence on the conflict potential in Osh, it is now time to look at the role of youth in the conflict. The next sub-question will be answered in this paragraph: “What was the role of young local people during the unrest in Osh in June 2010?”

About 90% of the participators in the violence in Osh were under the age of 35. There is no need for further explanation that young people then can be regarded as a problematic group with regard to violence and conflict potential. However, at the same time they can be regarded as a huge potential and the future of the country (interview 17; 23; 27; 28).

How come the youth participated this much in the violence? Traditionally the role of elders in society is very important in Central Asia, leaving young people aside. Young people are not involved in decision making processes. As they feel they do not have a say in these processes, the only option left is to participate in violence. Furthermore, unemployment is very high in Osh, which is mostly affecting young adults, as already discussed in Chapter 3. It is estimated that only around 35% of young people in the Ferghana Valley have reliable income-generating activities or stable jobs (Mercy Corps, 2003).

In general it can be said that young people are excluded from part of society in Osh and that they do not have many things to do in their everyday life, especially when they are unemployed. This is expressed by frequent fights and disputes between young people from neighbouring – often mono-ethnic – villages in the South of Kyrgyzstan (Saferworld, 2011).

As discussed in Chapter 2, youth can be easily influenced, in either direction: “youth is like a sponge, you give something, they will just absorb it” (interview 26). They can be very easily influenced by rumours, even the ones that followed higher education. They could hate someone without even knowing the other. Especially nowadays in a divided society like Osh where children go mainly to mono-ethnic schools, they do not have the chance to come into contact with the other. Elderly people are often more conciliatory and polite towards the other, because of life experience and because they know the other better. They are from the time of the Soviet Union, in which everyone spoke Russian and everyone went to the same schools (interview 31; 33; 36; 38; 43; Mercy Corps, 2003).
After the June events most all international and local organizations started to focus on youth, because it was recognized that they were the main problem of the society (interview 34). Besides, as said before, they can be influenced in either direction. Organizations believe that youth can also be influenced by positive thoughts, so that they can also bring positive change. As can be seen in Osh, there is a large group of young people active who are willing to build mutual respect. Many projects targeting youth and several youth centres were set up by Unicef, Youth of Osh, UNDP, IRET and other organizations.

Many youth centres were set up in mono-ethnic villages around Osh, because that is where many young people were mobilized to participate in the conflict. In the rural areas people are poor, unemployment is high and the people do not know the ‘other’. In the youth centres young people can come to talk about their problems, to discuss and debate but also to learn computer skills and to learn English or Russian. Furthermore, the aim of the youth centres is peace building. This is done by providing trainings in conflict prevention and administration development (interview 26).

However, organizations recognize that the chance is big that youth centres mainly attract youth who are going to school and are more developed. It is important that also the young people who are living in the streets and took part in the violence are attracted. Those people are the most worrisome group, especially since they are characterized by alcoholism and involved in criminality. These are the ones who joined the June events (interview 26).

Young people had a decisive role in the June events. They were the ones who participated mostly in the violence as they are easy to influence and they do not have many opportunities. The fact that youth had a big role can be seen in the many projects set up after the conflict targeting youth. Youth should be regarded as the future of the country, therefore it is important to pay attention to youth, because they should be the potential in a positive way (interview 17; 23; 31).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter analysed how the conflict in Osh in June 2010 could happen by looking through ethnic, socio-economic and political theoretical lenses. Also other issues were taken into account and the role of youth during the violence has been analysed. Analysing why a conflict has occurred gives insight in the conflict potential of a region, by looking at which issues are important.

Although an ethnic conflict, the main reason for the conflict in Osh was not ethnicity. Instead, different factors which are all interlinked led to the conflict. Socio-economic conditions led to inequalities and grievances between ethnic groups, and also the political situation in the country after the revolution in April 2010 quickly took an ethnic approach. Hate speech in media increased and falsified rumours were spread. It is likely that some people could benefit from this situation for illegal and political reasons, which is why many people think the violence was provoked.

Furthermore, the political situation influenced the bad socio-economic situation and vice versa. If there would have been a higher ethnic political inclusiveness, local governments and the police would have been less discriminative towards Uzbeks which would reduce the tensions. The other way around, in a time of economic decline with Uzbeks having the best business, feelings of nationalism amongst Kyrgyz increased which led to a low political inclusiveness with Kyrgyz being dominant in government structures.

In this analysis young people are very important, because they were the main perpetrators in the conflict. Unemployment is highest among this group, leaving them in a position to search for illegal alternatives to survive. They do not have prospects to look out to. Furthermore, they are most sensitive for feelings of nationalism and ethnicity as they are easy to influence.

So in conclusion it can be said that mainly the socio-economic conditions and the political situation are of influence for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley, which both take ethnic features. The
role of young people was very important for the unrest in Osh, as they are the so-called victims of society and therefore they were easy to mobilize to take part in the violence.
5. Conflict potential and prevention

In the previous chapter the causes which led to the violence in June 2010 were discussed and this also indicated to what extent these causes are of influence to conflict potential. Conflict potential is basically making predictions about the future, which is very difficult. Nevertheless, the situation nowadays can indicate to what extent there is conflict potential in Osh and in the Ferghana Valley as a whole. This chapter will give a first answer to the central question: “What is the conflict potential of the Ferghana Valley and what is the role of young local people on this?”. In the last paragraph conflict prevention focus areas will be discussed.

5.1 Conflict potential

There are some people who say that the situation in Osh is stable nowadays. People are tired and exhausted of conflict and they want to go back to normal life. Also when walking around in the city centre, it is hard to imagine that one year ago Osh was the scene of violence. The bazar is running, people are walking in the streets, shops and cafes start to (re)open, people make use of public transport and this is all done ethnically mixed. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are selling food to each other in the bazaar: Kyrgyz buy bread from Uzbeks because they simply make the best bread (interview 2; 4; 16; 24; 26; 36).

However, under the surface there are many tensions, and this is what most people say. Just by walking around in the city centre of Osh as an outsider this is not noticeable. Although I always wondered when a little fight broke out in the street if it was just two ordinary people or maybe a Kyrgyz and an Uzbek.

Nowadays life is more separated than before the conflict. Inter-ethnic contact is less than before. People stay more in their own communities and neighbourhoods. They feel safe in their own houses. And although people are using public transport again, little fights break out because an Uzbek women hits a Kyrgyz women per accident or vice versa (interview 16; 17; 28; 37).

The situation today is characterized by fear. People are insecure and they do not know what the future will bring. This is fuelled by the lack of trust between the ethnic groups and the lack of feelings of security in the South. Kyrgyz people are afraid of Uzbeks and vice versa. There is little dialogue and they blame each other for starting the conflict. Especially the feelings among the youth are very nationalistic. The tense situation is not getting better due to nationalistic politicians, hate speeches in the media and discrimination and corruption by policemen (interview 15; 19; 30).

Another factor which leads to the unstable situation nowadays are the law enforcement bodies. They are characterized by discrimination and corruption. Besides, many perpetrators still walk around freely. The majority of the people imprisoned are Uzbeks, while at the same time the majority of the victims are Uzbeks. Uzbeks feel that they are treated unfair, especially because many Kyrgyz perpetrators still walk around freely. They feel discriminated and torture has become everyday practice in the prisons (HRW, 2011; interview 15;19).

Because of the conflict, many people – especially young men – migrated to Russia to find a better life there, also because unemployment is still high and there are no economic improvements. A consequence of this is that the marginalized people are left behind. People in Osh are now even more desperate and poor, because the ‘talented’ people of their society went abroad. As long as the economic situation does not get better, conflict potential will exist (interview 16).

Furthermore, the international presence has contributed to the tense situation and increased the conflict potential. As the majority of the people in need were Uzbeks, the humanitarian aid went for
a large extent to Uzbeks. They got food and materials and they were helped in reconstructing their houses. International organizations say that they are impartial, because they help the ones who need it most. However, in the eyes of the Kyrgyz the international organizations are partial, because they only help Uzbeks (interview 13; 15; 27). The international presence is extremely visible in Osh. White jeeps are driving around and in constructing – mainly Uzbek – areas you can see “UNHCR” stickers everywhere. According to UNHCR this is part of the visibility (interview 29; 36), however some experts wonder why this visibility is needed because it “only pisses off the Kyrgyz, which make the situation worse” (interview 33).

Overall it can be argued that there is still conflict potential at the moment in the South of Kyrgyzstan. The situation still needs to stabilize and this takes time. However, this also depends highly on the improvements of the socio-economic situation and the political situation. Young people will not be able to find a job if the socio-economic situation remains bad, and this is especially worrisome because the majority of the population is under the age of 30. This means that many people are unemployed, increasing the instability.

5.2 Conflict prevention

As seen in the previous paragraph, the conflict potential in Osh and the Ferghana Valley exists. It is difficult to predict if a conflict will break out again and if this could be prevented. As often the case with conflict prevention, the results are difficult to measure. This was also often said by NGOs already active in Osh before the conflict in June. If they would not have been there, maybe the conflict in June would have been even bigger and protracted. Interviewees told me what should be done in order to increase stability. The next aspects are the most told conflict prevention areas by the interviewees.

Education
As the majority of the participants in the violence were young people, it is important to improve education. As the schools in the South of Kyrgyzstan are mainly mono-ethnic, young people do not have a good image of the ‘other’. According to many interviewees I have interviewed, the quality of education should improve and classes on ethnic-tolerance should be given (interview 17; 20; 34; 36; 37).

In order to provide better education, it is also important that learning materials will be available. If Kyrgyzstan provide materials for all schools, it would not happen anymore that an Uzbek girl living in Kyrgyzstan thinks that her president is Karimov (interview 17; 19).

Language
Another important issue for which a solution should be found is language. The problem in Kyrgyzstan is that there are two official languages: Kyrgyz and Russian. As Russians are an even smaller minority than the Uzbeks, the Uzbeks also want their language to be an official language. They feel subordinated compared to the Russians (interview 18; 19). This problem is specifically present amongst young people, because they experience mostly that they cannot communicate with the other ethnic group. Elderly people do speak Russian because they grew up in the Soviet Union.

Reforms must be implemented in order to find a solution for this and to integrate minority rights. The government could have a look at other countries in which there are similar problems. Examples are Switzerland with German, France and Italian but also the Netherlands with Dutch and Frisian.

Media
In order to give right information to people the media should be improved so that hate speeches are reduced and rumours would not have a chance to spread soon. Media should not be used for
nationalistic propaganda anymore, for which young people are very sensitive. There need to be a complete, true and impartial coverage of news in the South (interview 2; 17; 21; 34).

This is a difficult situation, because on the one hand it is good that there are no restrictions on media; there is no censorship imposed by the government and there is freedom of media. However, when this exist in a country where feelings of nationalism and ethnicity increase, the media can be used to spread hate speech. This is an example of that aspects of democracy do not develop at the same speed. Freedom of media has been developed, but government institutions and political inclusiveness still needs democratic improvements.

Concrete prevention tools could include trainings for young journalists. This is already done by Kloop Media Foundation, which covers independent news and blogs on the situation in Kyrgyzstan in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek languages. Furthermore they started the Kloop Online Journalism School for young people in Kyrgyzstan to become a qualified journalist or blogger. Such initiatives are good to stimulate independent media (Kloop, 2011; Hivos, 2011).

**Government**
The government is of very huge importance for the overall situation in Kyrgyzstan. Reforms are needed in all fields and corruption and nepotism should be cleared out. However, this is not a process which will occur over night, in order to change the government system – but also the mindset of the political elite – time is needed. An honest attitude is needed towards all ethnicities. An equal society should be build and there should be opportunities for people to develop (interview 2; 5; 17; 21).

**Police**
As the police is now characterized by corruption and bribes, there should be a police reform as well. In this reform a multi-ethnic approach is needed. The relationship between the police force and the Uzbek communities should be improved, in order to reduce tensions and discrimination (interview 15; 19; 32; 33). The OSCE already carries out a Police Reform Programme in Kyrgyzstan.

**Improve economic conditions**
The main problems in the South of Kyrgyzstan are the bad economic conditions and unemployment. Therefore it is important to stimulate income generating activities and to create jobs. This creates stability because people have to go to work again. Employment creates stability (interview 4; 21; 29). In this specific attention should go out to young people, as unemployment is highest amongst them. Vocational trainings could be given in which young marginalized and uneducated people learn practical jobs. Also trainings in entrepreneurship can stimulate people to start their own business which can stimulate economic development.

**Trust-building**
The conflict in Osh increased the tensions between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Horrible things have been done, people have been killed and many lost their family. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks both blame the ‘other’ for what has been done. The gap that exists now between the ethnicities should be minimized and they should trust each other again. The gap is specifically present between young people, as they are less loyal to other ethnicities because they grew up in a more divided society than their parents did (interview 29).

Trust-building could be done by different type of events. Concerts, sports and other events can bring ethnicities and young people closer together. People should learn about each other ethnicities by integrating different cultures (interview 2; 4; 13; 21).

**Change focus**
At the moment the whole society is being viewed through a lens of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. People should change this focus and look at the society to have and have-nots. By keeping on focussing on ethnicities, people will keep on looking at the society through an ethnic lens. People do not look at
each other like persons at the moment, but they look at each other like ‘you’re an Uzbek, you’re a
Kyrgyz’. This should be changed (interview 28; 33).

Provide justice
People are still waiting for justice in Osh. Perpetrators should be punished, both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Without justice people can still walk around freely. This can also negatively influence people the next time a conflict evolves. People will not care about violating because they know they would not be punished anyway. The law enforcement bodies should put forward the right message by letting know that the ones who violate the law will be punished, regardless of someone’s ethnicity. At the moment the court cannot be trusted either (interview 2; 5; 15; 16).

It is not possible to realize all aspects over night. All aspects are idealistic and belong to the democratisation process Kyrgyzstan is going through right now. Democracies are not build in a snap and it will probably take decades. However, it is possible for local and international NGOs to focus on these areas by organizing projects focussing on these topics.
6. Conclusion

The research conducted in this master’s thesis analysed the conflict potential and the role of youth in the Ferghana Valley by looking through ethnic, socio-economic and political theoretical lenses and by taking into account the specific history, context and cross-border issues in the region. It took a specific approach towards Kyrgyzstan and the case-study of Osh, a place in which an ethnic conflict broke out in June 2010.

6.1 Answering of the central question

In this conclusion the central question formulated in Chapter 1 will be answered:

“What is the conflict potential of the Ferghana Valley and what is the role of young local people on this?”

First of all, the conflict potential has been determined by taking into account ethnic, socio-economic and political aspects.

Starting with ethnicity, ethnicity is important because often conflicts unfold themselves along ethnic lines, as was the case in Osh. Therefore the aspect of ethnicity cannot be denied when looking at the conflict potential. The research has shown that ethnicities are constructed and that feelings of ethnicities can be activated in certain circumstances. Ethnic diversity as such does not – in first instance – contribute to conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. Instead, the geographical distribution, compositions and proportions of ethnicities first of all lay the foundations for conflict potential. If these circumstances are good, then feelings of ethnicity can be activated by grievances and for political purposes, as this research has shown. The longer there is focussed upon the concept of ethnicity, the more the concept becomes something real. Indeed, nowadays people in Osh view their city more in terms of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, while before this did not play a significant role. Especially young people are sensitive for this because they are easy to influence because of little life experience. In the Ferghana Valley, they grew up in a more divided society than their parents did which grew up in the Soviet Union in which everyone went to the same school and everyone knew Russian.

Socio-economic conditions do influence conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. The region is characterized by bad socio-economic conditions and unemployment is high, especially amongst young people. This has two implications: greed and grievances.

First of all people start looking for alternatives to survive, which is rooted in greed. As drug trafficking is a highly development business and a good alternative, young people often get involved in criminal groups. The expansion of these groups leads to instability in the region and thus to increasing conflict potential.

Greed also contributes to conflict potential in another way. When people do not have money, they become easy to mobilize. As conflicts are characterized by big unrest, marginalized people will take their chance to loot bazaars, shops and houses. In this way they can at least make profit from participating in the conflict, fuelling the conflict even further. As unemployment is especially high amongst young people, they formed the majority of the looters and violators in Osh. Also looking at conflict potential in general it is likely that if a conflict occurs, young people will form the majority in it.

Grievances increase ethnic conflict potential more directly. Bad socio-economic conditions in the Ferghana Valley are characterized by economic inequalities between ethnic groups. These inequalities lead to feelings of frustration and deprivation which lead again to ethnic tensions. This causes a greater division in society along ethnic lines, planting the seeds for ethnic conflict. Once the
situation is ripe, these are the root causes which can activate the so-called underlying root causes from the constructivists’ point of view.

If the situation is ripe depends on the political situation in a country, which is highly decisive for a conflict to break out and which is country dependent. At the moment the political situation in Kyrgyzstan increases the risk on conflict in the Ferghana Valley, in contrast to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan where a conflict is less likely. This can be explained by the fact that Kyrgyzstan is a country in transition characterized by a status in between an autocracy and democracy. In contrast, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are countries with a strong autocratic regime, Uzbekistan even more than Tajikistan. In these settings conflicts are difficult to occur because unrest is being suppressed by the government which strictly controls the country. So it can be concluded that the political situation in Kyrgyzstan increases the conflict potential, while in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan it is less likely that a conflict will occur. However, as is the case with politics, this can change as soon as the dictator falls away. In the long-term conflict potential is also high in these two countries. So the political situation highly influences the chance on conflict.

Another way in which the political situation increases the chance on – more specifically ethnic – conflict deals with political inclusiveness and nationalism. When ethnic minority groups are excluded from decision making processes, they feel excluded from society as a whole. This also leads to an increasing division within society along ethnic lines. Again, once the situation is ripe, conflict can occur along side ethnic lines. This is the case in the Ferghana Valley, in which the former Soviet Union countries clearly followed a nationalistic line since their independence, as they had to form a new country in which was there was little attention for ethnic minorities. Especially young marginalized people who already have tensions with other ethnic groups are sensitive for this, because they feel their nation should be protected for the ‘other’.

This research has shown that conflicts and conflict potential should be analysed by combining the three theoretical approaches, to which possible other theories can be added. Where often research focuses on one theoretical approach, it is useful when analysing conflicts to take different perspectives into account. A conflict should be regarded as a process, which not only affects the society as a whole, but which is also rooted in society. A conflict is not an event in itself. Furthermore the research has shown that although theoretical frameworks are very useful, it is also always important to take into account the conflict’s own specific characteristics. This is also why there is not a blueprint for each conflict to solve or prevent. The history and context should be taken into account. In the Ferghana Valley these characteristics are for a great extent determined by the history of the Soviet Union, which created artificial borders and with them destabilizing cross-border issues. Furthermore the history paved the way for nationalistic governments, in which there was little attention for minority rights, contributing to ethnic tensions.

The role of youth with regard to conflicts should not be underestimated. As the Ferghana Valley is one of the most densely populated parts of the Ferghana Valley with a majority of people under the age of thirty, young people are very important to take into account. Especially because they are the ones who suffer the most from unemployment and they are the easiest to influence when it comes to ethnic feelings and nationalism. Conflict potential increases because of this large group of young people. They want to have prospects for the future but they do not have anything to look out for. Therefore it is important that conflict prevention in the Ferghana Valley mainly focus on young people, which is already being done to a growing extent.

6.2 Recommendations

In this last part of the conclusions some recommendations will be made for further research and NGOs.
Recommendations for further research

This research was not able to make an equal analysis for the Ferghana Valley as a whole, because research was only conducted in Kyrgyzstan. This is why this thesis focussed more on Kyrgyzstan than on Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

It would be interesting if more research could be done to these two other countries. Interesting topics would be to what extent opposition groups find support in the Ferghana Valley, and to what extent they are organized, maybe in the form of Islamic groups. Also research could be done to feelings of grievances between ethnic groups in these parts of the valley. Furthermore it would be good if greater insight could be achieved in to what extent criminal groups and drug trafficking increases the instability in the region. And to what extent they are linked to Islamic militant groups and political elites.

Also an analysis could be done to young people in the Ferghana Valley. What do they think and how do they see their future? Also because more and more people are migrating to Russia, especially the young educated men, leaving their families behind.

Research to these aspects could create more insight in the conflict potential and the role of youth in the Ferghana Valley. I acknowledge that some of these topics are very sensitive and it is not easy to do this research in especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Especially in Uzbekistan the government is very suppressive and has even expelled international NGOs and UN organisations. That is also why I did not do it myself.

Furthermore, other theoretical frameworks – besides ethnicity, socio-economic and political – could be taken into account leading to a completer analysis method for conflict areas.

Recommendations for local and international NGOs

The research has shown that many factors are of influence for conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley. For non-governmental organisations it is difficult to do something about the political situation, therefore they should mainly focus on income-generating activities, cross-community building and young people. These focus areas could also be combined.

An example would be to realize more vocational trainings, in which young marginalized (uneducated) people learn practical jobs. Also trainings in entrepreneurship can stimulate people to start their own business, which will stimulate economic development. Cultural projects can help building bridges between the ethnic groups.

However, it is important that not only the people who are willing to participate are included, but also the marginalized people who took part in the violence or who are not interested in the other ethnic group. Those are the ones who are living in the streets and who are hard to reach. A lot of effort should be put in targeting those marginalized people, as they are the problem of the society. An active approach should be taken including local heads who know their communities.

Furthermore, during the research in Kyrgyzstan it became clear that cooperation between NGOs could be improved. Many NGOs did not have talked to each other before and they were very interested when I told them that I talked with other organizations. NGOs were very interested in the activities of other NGOs, but they had not talked to them themselves while they are working on the same topics and in the same city. So a pro-active attitude amongst international and local NGOs could result in better cooperation and realizing more successful projects.
Literature


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Maps, Figures, Tables & Photos

Map 1.1

Figure 2.1

Map 3.1

Map 3.2

Table 3.1


Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

Map 3.3

Photo 3.1

Photo 4.1
Own picture

Photo 4.2
Own picture
Appendix 1 – Prepared interview questions

How would you describe the situation in the Ferghana Valley at the moment? Are there problems in the Ferghana Valley? How would you describe the problems in the Ferghana Valley? What do you see as the main causes for problems in the Ferghana Valley? Is the situation only tense in Osh? What about other parts?

Possible answers: ethnic differences/economic conditions/political situation/drugs traffickers/border disputes/religion/other

“How to what extent is ethnic diversity of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?”
What are the differences between Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks in the Ferghana Valley?
Are there inequalities between the different ethnic groups?
Has the relation between the ethnic groups always been so tense?
Do the ethnic differences contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?

“How to what extent are socio-economic conditions of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?”
What are the socio-economic conditions in the Ferghana Valley?
Do the socio-economic conditions contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this? Are there differences in socio-economic conditions within the Ferghana Valley?

“How to what extent is the political situation of influence for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?”
What is the political situation in the Ferghana Valley and the bordering countries?
Does the political situation contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?

“How to what extent is the history and context of importance for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?”
What incidents have happened before in the Ferghana Valley? Do the past and current incidents still contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? Is it possible to forget the incidents? What are the prospects for this? To what extent will the Osh events be an example for other regions within the Ferghana Valley?

“How to what extent are cross-border problems of importance for the conflict potential in the Ferghana Valley?”
Are there other problems which can influence the tension in the Ferghana Valley?
Do drugs traffickers contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?
Do radical groups contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?
Do border disputes contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?
Are there other factors which contribute to tension in the Ferghana Valley? If yes, how? What are the prospects for this?

“What is the role of young local people in the unrest in the Ferghana Valley?”
What is the situation of young local people in the Ferghana Valley? Do they have access to education? Are there enough job opportunities? How do they regard the problems in the Ferghana Valley? How do they contribute to the problems in the Ferghana Valley?