

# Silk Road Storytelling







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## Narrative and image in transnational exchange

The Silk Road, a place of fascination  
Symbol of cultural and commercial exchange  
Where being a stranger is normal and hospitality prized  
Travellers and nomads, self-reliant and free  
Carrying only what is absolutely necessary  
Nomadism as lifestyle for today's world  
And metaphor of our short life on earth  
It is a culture sustained not by libraries, theatres and  
temples  
But in stories and narration  
All a romanticised oversimplification?  
Maybe!  
But a way to begin our journey, alone and together.

*Gordon Mitchell, Poet, Almaty, 2 May 2018*



"In Post-Soviet Central Asia many ethnic groups reside in more than one location, leading to plurilocality and translocal identifications as well as remigration to the titular nations. Plurilocal ties form competing translocal communities with different world-views. The Post-Soviet translocalities in the Central Asian nation states see the Russian Federation as model for state development, the Turkish translocalities prefer the Kemalist-Turkish state as a model, and Trans-Islam favours Muslim states and Sharia law as a basis for Central Asian state-building. In many urban or rural locations, co-exist several ethnic groups leading to polyethnicity or multiculturalism. Difference and sameness challenge or are counter-processes of nation building in Central Asia. The question arises: whether it is heterogeneous or is it homogeneous settlement structures which are more likely to face (violent) conflicts?"<sup>1</sup>

*Dr. Markus Kaiser, President of the German-Kazakh University, Almaty, 2 May 2018*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kaiser, Markus: Forms of transsociation as counter-processes to nation-building in Central Asia, in: Central Asian Survey, Vol 22, No 2/3, 2003, pp. 315-331 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0263493032000157799>



## Stories and images

People sometimes are willing to kill because of a story. Accounts of victimhood, with characters in fixed roles, abound in conflict regions. Storytellers are tricksters and liars. Their work can do great good as well as harm. It is an art that can be learned. A concern for peace requires accurate reporting and civic journalism. At the same time work, which is deliberately fictional, has its own place in making people able to analyse stories critically.

The workshop participants were from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. They heard each other's personal stories and observed the emergence of new stories. Together they journeyed from Almaty via Bishkek, to Osh, and back again all the time creating their own stories. This process would produce texts and images in the second half of this booklet, which are both entertaining and troubling. The story offers a place to think and communicate. By combining narrative with visual images, it becomes possible to be more aware of composition and perspective. Pictures offer a means of recall, exploration and interpretation, with an open-endedness that leaves the audience with something to do.

*Gordon Mitchell*





“Чтобы искусно отразить историю о людях через видео, достаточно снимать свободных людей.”

“To express a great story on people through video, it would be enough to film free people.”

*Nurzhan Turarkhanuly is a filmmaker based in Astana, Kazakhstan*





## Places, memory and imagination

Places and spaces have an emotive nature and a particular power to impact on people emotionally.<sup>1</sup> The engagement between people and different places, such as powerful natural landscapes, city squares with tangible memory, or with mundane places of everyday life, all evoke individual emotional reactions and foster different types of remembering, ranging from the national and the social to the individual. During the workshop the participants visited politically charged places in cities of two Central Asian countries. These places are associated with important and emotionally-laden past events in both countries, such as the student riots of 1986 in Almaty, two revolutions in Bishkek in 2005 and 2010, and the interethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek people in Osh in 2010, as a consequence of the second revolution in the country.

Thinking together at these places, and reflecting on the historic events, enabled the students to establish a close personal and emotional connection to particular places and conflicts. Thereby, they were able to negotiate and create their own meanings in the form of retold and imagined stories, visualised by images and video. In their creative works, the participants offered their unique insights into the places and the past events, based on individually or/and collectively generated understandings, perceptions, experiences and memories of each other's pasts.

*Zarina Adambussinova*



<sup>1</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)





## Peripatetic thinking

A seven-hundred kilometre journey, over the mountains between Bishkek and Osh, which took twelve and a half hours each way, brought ever-changing landscapes. The kaleidoscope of new people in cities and villages, and emotionally laden places offered a constant stream of impulses. Moving from place to place, brings new images and new thoughts. These are moments in which we can see ourselves and our fellow travellers as they relate to the places. Travelling can be wearisome, and places were experienced between sleeping and waking. Stories, which emerged over the period of a few days, offered a means of reflecting on these moments. Poetry composed on the journey was another level of reflection, which became a platform from which to think about the joys and irritations of the creative process. Photographs taken on the way offered yet another level, for thinking about the entire process.

Moving from place to place brings new images and new thoughts. These provide moments in which we can observe ourselves and our fellow-travelers as they relate to the places. Thinking on the road is known as 'peripatetic philosophising', named after Aristotle's approach (384-322 BCE). He and his friends would move to various public places in Athens as they engaged in shared philosophical reflection. Being cut adrift from daily concerns and being exposed to new situations, can provoke us into fresh thinking about pressing questions of our human existence. Encounters

with extreme spaces offer moments of contested meaning, where we are almost compelled to position ourselves in relation to what might have happened there. Walking has a rhythm which may shift thinking along, and is an opportunity for thoughts to drift around in unconcentrated ways. It allows for comfortable silences, and makes it easy to switch conversation partners now and then, or to be alone for a while.

*Gordon Mitchell*





*Almaty, where are the stories to set us free?  
Hiding, dodging, ducking and diving  
Stories calling us names, tormenting, disturbing  
our sleep  
Bishkek, what the heck?  
Osh, oh my gosh!  
Hallucination  
Where's the fascination, the illumination?  
Where are the stories to set us free?  
Osh, here we come, having fun.*



*(Between Almaty and Bishkek, 4 May 2018)*

*Oh gosh!  
Galloping through narrow  
valleys  
And over high mountain  
passes  
Alongside rushing waters  
Goes us  
in a white Mercedes bus  
The horse of today's Manas<sup>1</sup>*

*But oh gosh!  
We are all asleep  
Sleeping beauties, drifting  
in time  
Past lonesome toilets  
Waiting for human shit  
These loos with views  
Balancing comforts:  
Smell at bay but a long way  
away.*

*Oh gosh!  
We are asleep again  
Dreaming stories  
To wake up in Almaty for  
tea  
But no, here comes Osh!*

*(Between Bishkek and Osh, 5 May 2018)*

<sup>1</sup> Manas is the hero of the Kyrgyzstan national epic, named after him.



*Goodbye Osh*

*What the heck, on our way to Bishkek  
We have sleep walked  
Dreamed and talked  
Chased the stars and collected diamonds.  
Dug in the dirt of our mind  
... nothing to find.*

*Between frustration and creation  
Between sleeping and waking  
Floating, not knowing the difference  
Somehow stunned  
We say farewell Osh.*

*(Departing Osh, 7 May 2018)*



## Peace is all we need

by Mamatkazy Rasuluulu

Interview with Savar Zarema, Coordinator, “Youth of Osh”, an NGO founded after the conflict in 2010

“It was quite difficult time for all of us and not only for conflicting groups. There were different opinions, assumptions and views on the conflict. But what I know is Kyrgyz and Uzbek people have been living in Osh for ages. For both of them, it is important to stay where their roots are and keep a family house for further generations.”







## Future must be bright

by Aizere Malaisarova

This story was inspired by the riots that took place in Almaty in 1986. It is about a student who got involved in the march against the government, without fully understanding its purpose. The moral of the story is perhaps, that unawareness and lack of will can lead to bad consequences. Therefore, I called the story "Future must be bright".

A student was sitting in his dormitory room. For the whole of his life he had done only what he was told to do. So that night, he was studying chemistry diligently. It was noisy in the corridor. His mates were discussing something lively. One student entered his

room without knocking: "Hey man, can you make Molotov cocktails?" "Yeah, he said warily, what for?" "For our future", he replied. This phrase inspired the student so much. He got involved in the talks students held about the planned march on the main square, but he couldn't understand a word. He liked it, when they used such interesting and unclear words as "democracy", "freedom to vote", "freedom of opinion", describing their future government. In the nights before the Day X he was making an inflammable mixture in an old abandoned garage. His mates brought him a lot of bottles, gasoline and old bedsheets.

On the Day X, they were marching together fearlessly towards the wall of police shields. They were all wearing black t-shirts and masks and carrying Molotov cocktails. But with the first screams and smashing sounds, flames and smoke clouds, he lost his courage. He looked at the bottle in his hand. The only thing he thought about was "escape". The one who involved him in this recklessness shouted at him: "Why do you stand still? Throw it!" He grabbed the bottle but couldn't raise his hand. A policeman hit his back with a baton. The bottle burst and the policeman fell gut-down on the glass. The student sprang back, right into the hands of another policeman. He was grabbed and pulled into a dark wagon. He heard someone breathing heavily but he couldn't see anything. Afterwards his mate tumbled in.

The student felt himself frustrated. Hopelessness was hanging in the air. He was sure that he was not guilty because he hadn't burnt anything. At the same time, he could clearly call to mind how he had come to be filling those ill-fated bottles with gasoline. What would the next few hours bring? Or the not so "few"? He could neither get expelled nor imprisoned. He had a scholarship and he would not be accepted in his home village without a diploma. His mother would never get over his arrest....

According to the official sources, in December 1986, 8500 people were arrested, 99 were sentenced, 2 were sentenced to the death penalty and 246 students were expelled from universities.

# Dostuk<sup>1</sup>

by Ainel and Ulukbek

When the conflict in Osh happened, people were terrified and scared, because ties of interethnic friendship were weakening. No one wanted the war, people wanted to live happily in peace. The name of our project 'Dostuk' is translated as 'Friendship'. And in our project we want to show how the conflict affected the relations between two ethnicities and how friendship overcame all obstacles. In the end, we understood that no matter how serious and dreadful conflict was, the events of 2010 didn't split up the people in Osh. Those events have strengthened interethnic friendship, people got closer to each other enormously. Friendship, which considered as the basis of stability in the society and the country, is the only weapon against the war.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a true story. It is the script for a film.

Улукбек Сыдыков:

"Я не мог понять, почему началась война, кто я ее начал. Потом я узнал, что это называется межэтническим конфликтом. И все-таки я не мог понять, почему."

Uluk: Here we come to my best friend's house, and then we will tell our story. The reporter will film our story. Do you agree? Sure.

Ulukbek

Ulugbek

("Friendship" canteen)

## Acquaintance

Uluk: We've known each other since our childhood. Ulug was the first guy with whom I became friends. Mostly because we went home the same way. And secondly we had similar views, characters, names. Perhaps this became the catalyst of our friendship.

Ulug: The funniest thing is that people get confused when they see us, because I look like Kyrgyz, and he looks like Uzbek. But in fact, it is all vice versa. And this is the purest truth!



## Before the conflict

Uluk: Every summer my parents and I visit my grandmother. It is kind of tradition. That year I went to her two days before the conflict. We were lucky to leave the city with no clue about arising conflict. Everything was good at the beginning, but two days later everyone started behaving weird, were worrying and discussing something. Parents tried to repair TV to watch the news.

I was wondering what was happening. I was small then, and didn't care too much about events. And when I asked them what was going on, they told me that the war had begun. It caused comprehension. I couldn't understand why the war had begun, who started it. Then I learned it was an interethnic conflict. And again I couldn't understand why.

There were no huge conflicts since 1990s, it was quite a long time ago. This is how I knew about conflict, so I stayed in a village for the whole summer.

My parents returned to Osh after one month, when situation became more stable. People needed products, so they were returning to the city. They told me that the city was empty, streets and malls were burned down, windows were broken, and marauding was at the highest level. I returned to Osh, when more people were going back. However, it was still scary. We had curfew every day, parents didn't allow children to go further their districts. This is how it was.

Ulug: The day before everything had started, me and my family were resting as usual. We went to a pool, had a dinner and went to sleep early. I woke up in the morning at 6-7 am because of noises and hums. My mom came to me and said to look what is happening outside. I went to the balcony and saw districts burning one after another. In the room my father was calling to everyone and asking what was going on. And it appeared that an interethnic war had started.

We were having my cousins staying at our house. One of them looked out of the window, and suddenly my father pulled him back. In that moment, the bullet ricocheted off the window. He was shocked. Later, my grandparents and other relatives, who



lived in 50 meters from our house, came to us – whole family got together. The next day everything calmed down a bit. There is a customs post in our district and the snipers were sitting on the roof of our house – we lived on the fourth floor there, and they were defending the customs post from robbery. We were hearing shots day by day. A bit further from my house, some hassles were happening. People fought with each other, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. All roads were blocked and every evening after curfew hour, the ATC (armored troop carrier) was circling the area.

There were no people on the streets. It wasn't so scary back then, because we were sitting in the house and weren't witnessing all events. However, our friends were terrified when we described everything. This is how the days were passing.

After the conflict

Ulug: Ulug and I met at school. But I didn't go there right in the beginning, after ten days only.

At first we didn't talk at all. Two weeks later we started communicating as before. Young people started it: communicating and having fun together. We started playing football together, studying.

Those months after the conflict everything was unclear, later the situation became normal.



## Football scene

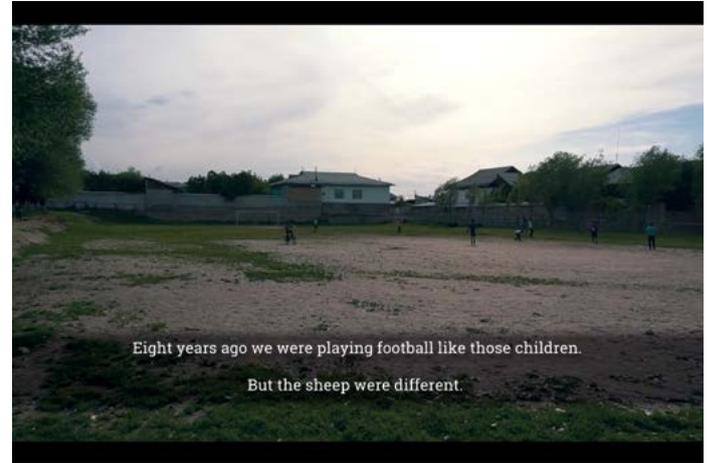
Eight years ago, we were playing football like those children.  
But the sheep were different.

Uluk: my school is mostly Kyrgyz, that is why my parents sent me to school as usual in the beginning. It was quite safe though, because two months had passed already.

At school, everything felt tensely at first, with friends especially. I didn't know how to behave. He was my best friend and I didn't want to break off our friendship because of the conflict. I think this is the specific of our nation in here. If our people weren't so cohesive, we wouldn't have made up with each other. This is the main reason why we are still friends.

In June 2010, the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan was engulfed by inter-ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. According to official data, the death toll reached 418 people. At present times, the tension between nations has subsided, and calmness has reigned in the city.

My friend said once that people did not want any war and strife, and it just happened. They always wanted to live in peace. Despite the conflict of 2010, people got closer to each other. And those events really strengthened interethnic friendship, which considers the basis of the stability in society.



## Cherries

by Zumrat Sanakulova

At that time, I was small  
I don't remember all  
The place I lived in  
Sad story I had seen

The early summer morning I woke up  
Loud shouts in the street burst up  
My mom came to hug me  
She said: We have to leave

Remember I was standing here  
The sun was looking through the sky  
The wind was playing with my hair  
A woman walking in the street to cry

Then the sky covered with a smoke  
Boot footsteps, windows broke  
We were sitting in a small car  
I thought we were leaving far

Then I remember an empty house  
Nothing to eat even for a mouse  
I found cherry trees in the yard  
Berries so delicious can't forget

I look at the place I live in  
The sky is so beautiful and clean  
I look at the cherry tree  
I hope this story will not repeat



This poem is based on a story told me by a very handsome and kind girl from Osh. She was twelve when interethnic conflict broke out in her hometown. I wanted to picture her feelings and flashbacks about this time. Children are very clean creatures and they see what is happening around them with their hearts. These memories are very precious. There is a line in the poem about a small car. Actually, it was an ordinary car but in it there were two families escaping from the city to a safer place. The other flashback about cherries is not random. On that day, the girl remembers, that there was nothing to eat and they found a cherry garden near the house, and her family was eating berries all day long and waiting for the father to bring some food. The father came only next morning. The girl told me that she was crying all night long. She was afraid that he would not come back. This story has a happy end, and I hope every story will have a happy end too.





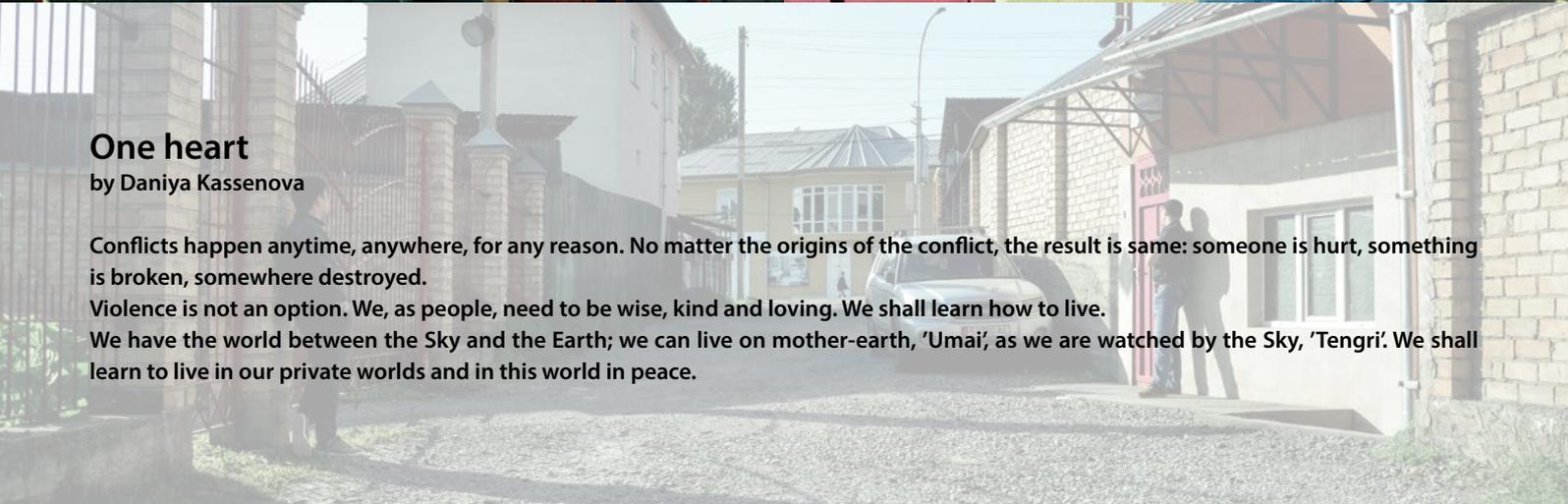
## One heart

by Daniya Kassenova

Conflicts happen anytime, anywhere, for any reason. No matter the origins of the conflict, the result is same: someone is hurt, something is broken, somewhere destroyed.

Violence is not an option. We, as people, need to be wise, kind and loving. We shall learn how to live.

We have the world between the Sky and the Earth; we can live on mother-earth, 'Umai', as we are watched by the Sky, 'Tengri'. We shall learn to live in our private worlds and in this world in peace.







# Dog Story

by Vera Andrianova

Plop plop plop, water drops from the tap, bringing the rhythm in mumbling conversation of the owners. Homer opens his eyes, in the talking box flashes pictures of people near the white building. "Bother", he thinks and goes to beg for a piece of sandwich, but nobody pays attention to Homer, they are all talking anxiously, he feels fear in their voices. Suddenly they hear sounds of smashing glass and a few shots. The owners run to the window, and the dog obeying instinct, stares into the dark rectangle of the window, trying to see anything in the space between flowerpots. "One, two, three, four ..." There are many more people, but Homer can't count. The crowd is buzzing like a hive, breaking windows and pulling things from the stores. "Strange", thinks Homer and goes to the talking box. There is the same, white building, more people, some of them lying on the ground in strange poses, like they are sleeping. The building is on fire, flames burst out of the windows, from one flies out an armchair. "Very, very strange", thinks Homer, and goes sleeping. During the morning walk, Homer with owner walks by ruined shops and smouldering buildings. Walking around crimson puddles smelling of death, and in his head is only one question, "why?".

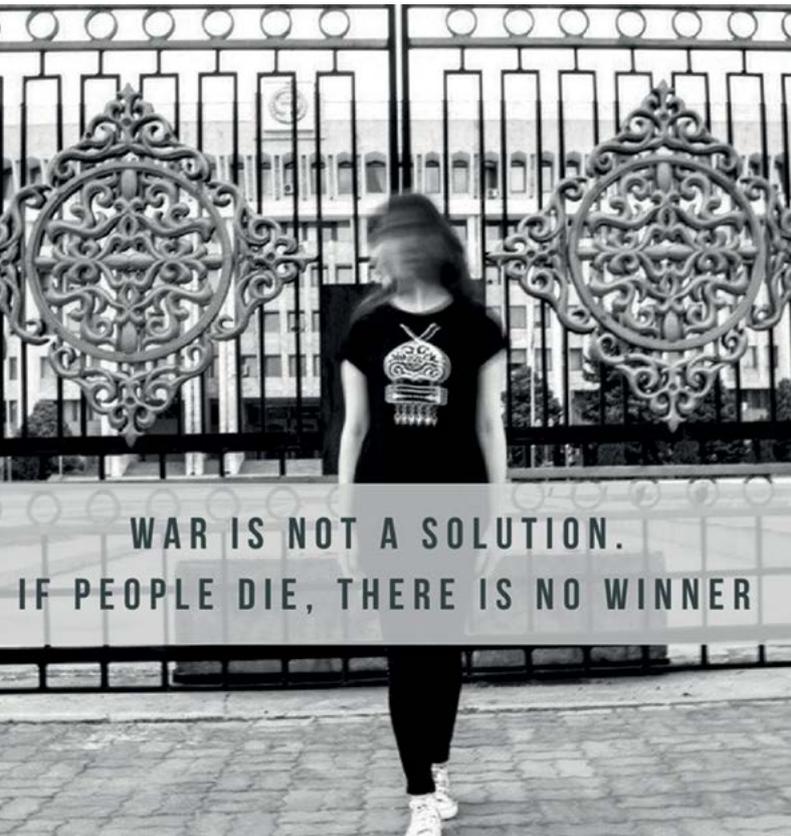
The painting was made when she was a child. Actually she describes her feelings in her painting and memories in a story regarding the revolution in Bishkek in 2010. She was a little girl when it occurred. After the revolution her mother with their dog, Homer, went walking to check, if the State Museum on the main square was not damaged. Homer died last year.

# Faceless watcher

by Diana Issenturliyeva

It is a story of one person, two cities, three sides: one, two, three.

When there is a conflict between two sides, there is also one side that watches everything. It is the faceless watcher. And it is his story.





EVERYTHING IS IN YOUR HANDS

When there was in Bishkek in 2005 an antigovernment revolution, he was there. It was a symbol of peace and friendship. But no one cared. He tried to say NO to the war but no one listened. However, his power was very strong ... and it was necessary. The revolution finished. Citizens realized that war is not a solution, because if people die, there is no winner.

A revolution in April 2010 took away many lives, but after the watcher appeared, the war was finished and Bishkek is a peaceful city nowadays.

But after the revolution in Bishkek, there was an ethnic war between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh. Evidence of this war can be found in the city hall. The watcher came here to bring peace and friendship to the citizens of Osh. Due to his actions the war was finished.

He had achieved his goal and left.

There is one more thing. This person, the watcher ... he does not exist, he is imaginary.

There was nobody who appeared and the war finished. There was neither peace nor friendship. There was a war.

The watcher did not help, he played no part. It is people who are responsible for everything.

No one will solve your problems, because everything depends on you. Everything is in your hands. Do not lose it. Do not waste your time on wars. No one will win.

## Bought and sold

by Aidai Atakulova and Perizat Mukambetova

### Part I: A poem "Great Silk Road"

by Aidai Atakulova

The Great Silk Road

Beauty and Fascination.

Cradle of East civilization

Waking people's imagination.

The caravan of centuries

People, stories and beauty.

The caravans left prints

On the deserts of Gobi.

But merchants are selling now different goods

Now pain and despair are sold.

In the ancient and precious bazaars

You can now buy cheap souls and cheap lives.

People, who want to be slaves.

People, who want to sell slaves.

People, who want to buy slaves.

This is the road of slaves.

Slaves, who addicted to drugs.

Slaves, who set own price.

Slaves with ruined lives.

Slaves with dirtiest souls.

Lust and slavery carried by this road,

Connecting the East and the West.

One common pain, one common road

Taking the lives from the breasts.



## Part II: A story

by Perizat Mukambetova and Aidai Atakulova

- Привет, как дела?!

- Спасибо отлично. Ты до сих пор помнишь наше место, где мы впервые познакомились?

- Конечно помню. Это место и тот день перевернули всю мою жизнь.

I met him one year ago, and I fell in love with him. Oh, he is calling, he said that we should meet today. I hate myself for loving him and I hate him for making me love him, again and again .... I have planned thousand ways to leave him, but every time I see his eyes, feel his smell and hear him laughing, I am falling in love with everything connected to him. Today we are going to meet again.

"Hello, darling. How is it going?"

"Very well, do you still remember this place? We met each other here for the first time."

"Of course, I do. This place and that day has turned my life."

I was going to cry because of his words.

"That day and this one are so special for us ...."

At that moment, I saw a ring in his hand, he was about to put that ring on my finger, and my memories started to fly in front of my eyes.

I was 18 years old when we made our first trip with my mother, we went to Turkey. Within a few days, I completely fell in love with a handsome Turkish guy, and I convinced my mother to live in Turkey. We



were living happily together, and after several months we had moved to help his mother because she had cancer. First, he convinced me to be a go-go dancer, and after a while he sold me to the Albanians. For more than one year I was purchased by hundreds of people. I could not escape because I had not my passport. Several times I tried to commit a suicide, but they stopped me and beat me. The police found us and I was deported. After returning to Bishkek, I was alone without anything. I had decided to do a 'serious' job, and then, one day I met him. Everything has a beginning, and that was our beginning ....

"No. I will not marry you. I do not love you."

I left him, that was planned by me before. I did not want to leave my own dirt on him, I decided to be sold again for many nights.



# Take a thought

by Ilim Abaiuulu and Eldaniz Gusseinov

From year to year, Central Asian people  
lived together.

Then, to their territory came a bad weather.  
It was bad, it was bloody, it was terrible.  
Like everyone, I wanted to live side by side,  
it was impossible.

7th April 2010, events in Osh,  
It was awful, like crashing father's Porsche .  
The end of wars, so much tears,  
We wish to forget, to delete those terrible  
years.

People should open their heart to world,  
To look at themselves from outside.  
All whole scope inside to tight,  
To burn with the fire of love and to light.

Thanks to Zarina and Gordon for the teach,  
You made our worldview more reach.  
Those days were the best and the top,  
We will wait for the next workshop.

Жанжаал бутту, жакшылыкка умтулдук,  
Ый-мунду, таарынычты калтырып.  
Жамандыктан аран гана кутулдук,  
Толпой бийик акыйкатты багынтып.

Все мы хотим про все это позабыть,  
Наш свой маленький мир сохранить.  
Чтобы солнце дарило людям радость и  
свет,  
Чтобы мир на планете, не было бед.

Жарай адамдар сагызсыз омур суреди,  
Солай дуниеде достык болады.  
Озбекстан, Кыргызстан, Казахстан  
агайлар,  
Жене алардын арасы жок автоматтар.

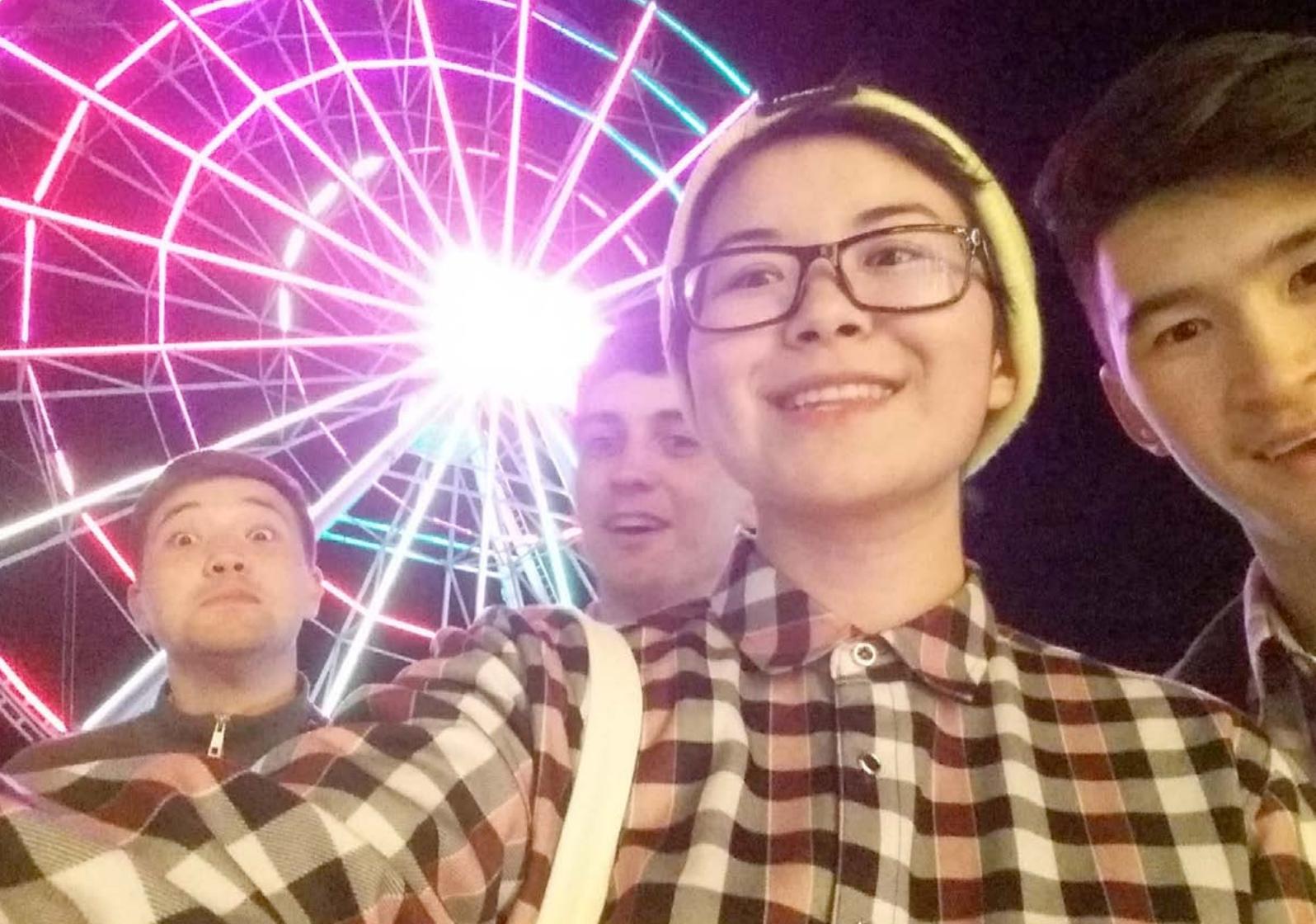
Wenn man will etwas zu ändern  
Müssen darüber Leute denken  
Ob es unser Welt verbessern wird  
Oder nächster Krieg beginnt

*Goodbye travellers and storytellers  
Goodbye Osh, Goodbye Bishkek  
And for some like me, goodbye Almaty  
We have dug in the dirt of our minds  
For stories of all kinds  
That keep escaping  
Dodging and diving  
Hiding in smartphones  
Seeking any outlet  
Even falling down a Tai Shan toilet*

*Lost and doubting  
Searching and finding  
Have brought new friends  
Which we hope never ends  
Diamonds and gold  
We are the few  
who escaped Nicolay's menu.  
The strong tellers of stories  
And now goodbye,  
Oh my gosh, this is sad.*

*(Almaty, 8 May 2018)*





Ilim Abaiuulu  
Vera Andrianova  
Aidai Atakulova  
Eldaniz Gusseinov  
Diana Issenturliyeva  
Daniya Kassenova  
Aizere Malaisarova  
Mamatkazy Rasuluulu  
Perizat Mukambetova  
Ainel Rakhymzhanova  
Zumrat Sanakulova  
Ulukbek Sydykov



## Impressum

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