

## 2. Forging Tajik Identity: Ethnic Origins, National–Territorial Delimitation and Nationalism

### Who are the Tajiks? The Problem of Tajik Ethnogenesis

Contemporary usage of ‘Tajik’ generally narrows to sedentary, Persian-speaking Sunni Muslims in Central Asia and Afghanistan (with a few exceptions such as Dari-speakers who claim Pashtun lineage). Beyond this simple categorisation, many scholars stress that ‘Tajik’ refers to Persian-speakers of diverse origins.<sup>1</sup> As for the language of the Tajiks—variously referred to as Persian, Farsi, Dari or Tajik—the historical linguistic changes in Central Asia within the Iranian-language family should be noted. The Eastern Iranian languages in Central Asia were superseded by a mutually unintelligible Western Iranian language (Persian)<sup>2</sup> several hundred years after the Arab conquests in a process that began well before the Arabs entered the region.<sup>3</sup> According to the Tajik historian Bobojon Ghafurov, the appeal and power of religious, cultural, political and economic factors all contributed to the spread of Western Iranian.<sup>4</sup>

While the claims of some Tajik writers that their direct ancestors include Noah’s son Shem or Biblical Adam himself<sup>5</sup> should be attributed more to poetic imagination than to plausible historical fact, Tajik society demonstrates a surprising continuity over centuries. Official Tajik histories trace the completion of the Tajik’s ‘ethnogenesis’ and the beginning of their ‘statehood’ to the era of the Samanid Empire (ninth–tenth centuries).<sup>6</sup> Contemporary Tajik scholars

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1 Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, ‘Tajikistan and Afghanistan: The Ethnic Groups on Either Side of the Border’, in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 4; Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 9; Saodat Olimova, ‘Regionalism and its Perception by Major Political and Social Powers of Tajikistan’, in *Tajikistan at a Crossroads: The Politics of Decentralization*, ed. Luigi de Martino (Geneva: Cimera, 2004), p. 144.

2 That is, Farsi, Dari, Tajik.

3 Muriel Atkin, ‘Tajiks and the Persian World’, in *Central Asia in Historical Perspective*, ed. Beatrice F. Manz (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), p. 127.

4 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, p. 107. Ghafurov writes further: ‘The Persian language spread from Marv, Balkh and other administrative, economic and cultural centres of Northern Khuroson into Movarounnahr [Central Asia], gradually taking the place of Eastern Iranian languages such as Soghdian and Tokharian (Bactrian).’

5 Orifjon Yahyozodi Khujandi, *Khujandnoma, yo qissaho az ta’rikhi Khujand va khujandiyon* (Khujand: Nashriyoti davlatii ba nomi R. Jalil, 1994), pp. 7–8.

6 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, pp. 494–501; Kirill Nourzhanov, ‘The Politics of History in Tajikistan: Reinventing the Samanids’, *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2001); Marlene Laruelle, ‘The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology’, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2007).

claim that ‘the formation of the Tajik nation was completed during the rule of the Samanids’.<sup>7</sup> Ghafurov, an influential historian who was the first secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan from 1946 to 1956 and thereafter the director of the Moscow-based Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, writes of the Tajiks as a clearly defined group from the Samanid era.<sup>8</sup> Ghafurov, commenting on the ‘process of consolidation of the Tajik people’, uses contradictory language: ‘Although the formation of the Tajik people had already been completed by the 9th–10th centuries, in the following centuries it [that is, Tajik identity] did not remain unchanged.’<sup>9</sup> This phrasing allows Tajik scholars to claim all populations that preceded this era be included as ancestors of Tajiks and all cultural, linguistic and population changes after this era as not lessening the importance of the final ‘consolidation’ of Tajik identity. The Tajik archaeologist and historian N. N. Negmatov makes a similar claim of Tajik antiquity, albeit in somewhat more neutral terms, when he identifies all the Iranian-speaking populations of Central Asia during and before the Samanid era and argues that ‘[a]ll these people were ethnically related and spoke languages and dialects of the Middle Iranian and New Persian language groups; they were the basis for the emergence and gradual consolidation of what became an Eastern Persian-Tajik ethnic identity’.<sup>10</sup> Tajikistan’s President, Emomali Rahmon, while extolling Ghafurov’s works in the most flattering terms, dispenses with any academic caution and writes:

I have had to stress again and again that it would be wrong to think that the first page in the history of Tajik statehood was written with the founding of the Samanid state. Long before the Samanid epoch, the Tajiks had already established a number of states. Little wonder that the Tajiks are recognised as one of the oldest peoples of Central Asia who laid down the very foundations of civilisation in these ancient lands ... The Tajiks have a history stretching back many thousand years.<sup>11</sup>

7 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, p. 494. There is a terminological confusion present in recent Tajik and Russian studies: the Tajik words *melleyat* and *mellat* (nationality and nation) as well as their Russian equivalents, *narodnost* and *natsiia*, are often used as synonyms.

8 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, pp. 494–501.

9 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, p. 500.

10 N. N. Negmatov, ‘The Samanid State’, in *The History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. IV, ed. M. S. Asimov and C. E. Bosworth (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), p. 94. Also: N. Negmatov, ‘The Phenomenon of the Material Culture of Central Asia in the Samanid’s Epoch’, in *The Contribution of the Samanid Epoch to the Cultural Heritage of Central Asia*, UNESCO Colloquium, Dushanbe 1998 (Dushanbe: Adib, 1999), pp. 157–64.

11 Emomali Rahmonov, *The Tajiks in the Mirror of History, Volume I: From the Aryans to the Samanids* (Guernsey, UK: London River Editions, n.d.), pp. 5–6. Rahmon also traces the Tajiks to the mythological Peshdodids (who Rahmon notes ruled in the fifth, fourth and third millennia BCE): *ibid.*, pp. 64–5. Rahmon seems to be also framing a response in his writing. For example: ‘When Tajikistan finally gained independence and the process of state disintegration was progressing rapidly, we observed that there were some forces in our society which tended to belittle the historical role played by Tajiks, and to exaggerate the influence from other nations.’ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

It would not be correct to call the Samanid Empire the first Tajik state.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it was the last time the bulk of Iranian lands were under the domain of an Iranian ruler. Within the Samanid administration there was a discernible ethno-religious division: an Iranian chancery, staffed with recent converts, coexisted with the predominantly Arab *ulama*, while the core of the army consisted of Turkic slaves or mercenaries. Eventually, the attack of the Qarakhanid Turks ended its reign in 999, and dominance in Central Asia passed on to Turkic rulers. The contemporary social and political relevance of Tajik historiography and ethnogenesis, in particular their relation to post–Soviet state/nation-building, to the Government of Tajikistan, and to the various Tajik intellectuals (with a particular stress on the Samanids—all-important due to their status as the last ‘Iranian’ dynasty before the domination of Turkic dynasties),<sup>13</sup> are further explained later in this chapter.

The presence of a Tajik nation (or more precisely, a distinctive ethnicity, since the concept of ‘nation’ is a relatively recent phenomenon, which dates from the late eighteenth century) in the tenth century finds little corroborative evidence. It would be interesting, however, to speculate about the emergence of the primary form of ethnic community in Central Asia—the *ethnie*, in Anthony Smith’s parlance. An *ethnie* is a given population, a social group ‘whose members share a sense of common origins, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity’.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Tajiks, the problem of collective cultural individuality put in historical perspective is twofold: a) their distinctness from non-Iranian peoples of Central Asia, and b) their dissociation from the populace of Iran proper. The question of association with a specific territory in the tenth century is an easy one. The indigenous Iranian population constituted an absolute majority throughout Mavarannahr (Central Asia), both in cities and in villages. More importantly, this association had commemorative overtones: Ferdowsi’s epic poem *Shahnama* includes Transoxiana (Central Asia) in Iranshahr,<sup>15</sup> and stresses this region’s opposition to Turan (lands under the domain of Turkic peoples). On other counts, however, tracing a Tajik identity is much more complicated.

Certain elements are indispensable for the formation of a viable *ethnie*. The use of a collective, identifying name is one of the most important. Usage of the word ‘Tajik’ as a mode of self-definition, however, was not registered before the second quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>16</sup> Attempting to determine the origin of the term ‘Tajik’ and its social use throughout history is an exercise in

12 Masov, *Tadzhiki*, p. 125.

13 Nourzhanov, ‘The Politics of History in Tajikistan’; Laruelle, ‘The Return of the Aryan Myth’.

14 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 66.

15 Iranshahr was used to denote the entire realm of the Persian Sassanid Empire.

16 Abu al-Fazl Baihaki, *Istoriia Mas’uda 1030–1041* (Tashkent: Izdatelstvo AN Uzbekskoi SSR, 1962), p. 725.

speculation. Folk etymologies, single historical references, scholarly guessing, various shifting social usages and highly politicised attempts to find ancient origins all must be navigated when attempting to find the origin and historical usage of 'Tajik'.<sup>17</sup> It has been generally accepted amongst scholars that the term was initially used in Mavarannahr to refer to the Arabs (probably, it was derived from the Arab *Tai* tribal name). Afterwards it became a collective name for both Arabs and local converts to Islam (predominantly Iranians) and only much later was this term transformed into the ethnonym of an entity amongst Central Asian Iranians.<sup>18</sup>

Language and religion are considered the most basic traits of an *ethnie's* shared culture. Under the Samanids, ordinary people continued to speak local dialects (Soghdian, Khorezmian, and so on), while Dari was primarily the language of official documents and court life, only beginning to spread en masse in Bukhara, Samarkand and Ferghana.<sup>19</sup> Literary modern Persian remained uniform in Western Iran and Central Asia until the fifteenth or even sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, behavioural patterns, legal procedures and educational systems based on *shari'a* stayed almost identical in both regions. Under the Samanids, the bulk of Turkic tribes beyond the Syr-Darya converted to Islam; it was a severe blow to the image of the Turk as a perennial enemy of the Iranian. The Sunni–Shi'a dichotomy was yet to become a watershed among different ethnic communities.<sup>21</sup>

Anthony Smith argues that 'a strong sense of belonging and an active solidarity, which in time of stress and danger can override class, factional or religious divisions within the community',<sup>22</sup> are the decisive factors for a durable ethnic community. This was not the case amongst Iranians in Mavarannahr before, during and after Samanid rule. Internal divisions in principalities, valley communities or other territorial subunits were more potent sources

17 For example, see: Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, p. 501, n. 83; Maria Eva Subtelny, 'The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik', pp. 48–9; John Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia: Construction and Contention in the Conceptions of 'Uzbek', 'Tajik', 'Muslim', 'Samarqandi' and Other Groups*, PhD Dissertation, Harvard University (1994), pp. 137–42, 144; C. E. Bosworth and B. G. Fragner, 'Tadjik', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, eds P. Bearman et al. (Brill, 2009), Brill Online: <<http://brillonline.nl/>> As for the Tajik President, he says that '[t]he word "Tajik" is identical to "Aryan" (meaning "noble, highborn")'. From the viewpoint of modern Tajik language the word "Tajik" is interpreted as "crowned" or "of noble origins"'. See: Rahmonov, *The Tajiks in the Mirror of History*, p. 94. A prominent example of a single historical usage is Ghafurov, citing an eleventh-century quote wherein a man in a sultan's court said 'We, who are Tozik'. See: Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, p. 501. For a criticism of Ghafurov's reference, see: Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, pp. 129–30, esp. n. 30.

18 A number of Tajik experts adhere to a different theory, which implies that the word 'Tajik' originated from the Persian '*Taj*' (meaning 'crown') and that as early as the eighth century Iranians of Mavarannahr, especially in the mountainous areas, called themselves Tajiks—that is, the 'Crown Headed'. Thus, these Iranians emphasised their supposed superior genealogy over all other local peoples. See: N. N. Negmatov, *Gosudarstvo Samanidov* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1977), p. 219.

19 *Istoriia Tadjikskogo naroda*, Vol. II, kn. 1, p. 222.

20 Sadriiddin Aini, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatelstvo AN SSSR, 1960), p. 963.

21 It would later find its reflection in *Gurugli* through the mediation of the Turkic text. See: G. M. H. Shoolbraid, *The Oral Epic of Siberia and Central Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1975), p. 103.

22 Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 137.

of identity than affiliation to an *ethnie*. Khuttal, Chaganian, Isfijab, Khorezm and princedoms of Badakhshan nominally acknowledged the supremacy of the Samanids, yet in practice they ‘were ruled by local dynasties according to their old traditions’.<sup>23</sup> Four distinct regions had formed by the twelfth century on the present-day territory of Tajikistan that were characterised by political and cultural autonomy: 1) Northern Tokharistan and Khuttal (that is, southern Tajikistan); 2) the Zarafshon Valley; 3) the basin of Upper and Middle Syr-Darya, including Ustrushana, Khujand and Western Ferghana; and 4) the Pamirs. With some variations, these specific geographic-cultural areas have survived until today. Prior to the Mongol invasion, their populations *never* acted in unison to repel aggressors; moreover, cases of mass resistance to aggression were almost unheard of in Mavarannahr.

In summary, it is impossible to single out a distinct Tajik *ethnie* in the tenth century. Central Asian Iranians remained an integral part of a wide Iranian ethnic community that came into being in the Achaemenid era, and from which they drew their name, history, inspiration and shared culture. The Samanid period, however, can be regarded as a landmark in the process of the ethnogenesis of the Tajiks. It produced an encoded fund of myths, memories, values and symbols—the core of the future *ethnie* in Tajikistan. Eventually, the Samanids themselves moved into the realm of the legendary tradition of contemporary Tajiks.<sup>24</sup> As the future showed, the centuries-long absence of economic unity and a common polity did not lead to the dissolution of the Tajiks. The sense of shared origins and cultural markers allowed them to survive in the ocean of Turkic tribes, and later gave them a chance to reconstruct (or forge) their history, pedigree and ethnicity.

## Tajiks and Turks

Tajiks have had a close historical and cultural relationship with the Turkic peoples. In Central Asia there is much shared culture and it is impossible to neatly divide two distinct Tajik or Uzbek cultures thanks to linguistic, cultural and genetic mixing that resulted from the massive in-migration of Turkic peoples into Iranian-populated lands;<sup>25</sup> however, the process of Turkicisation

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23 Negmatov, *Gosudarstvo Samanidov*, p. 30.

24 For example, the main green bazaar in Dushanbe has been named after Shah Mansur (961–76), who is viewed as the epitome of a fair and caring ruler.

25 John Schoeberlein-Engel, ‘Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia: The Myth of Ethnic Animosity’, *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1994), pp. 7–9; Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, pp. 21, 23; Sergei Abashin, ‘The Transformation of Ethnic Identity in Central Asia: A Case Study of the Uzbeks and Tajiks’, *Russian Regional Perspectives Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2003), p. 32. Abashin uses ‘Turkic’ and ‘Iranian’ rather than ‘Uzbek’ and ‘Tajik’ in reference to the historical process of language, population and culture mixing.

was not accompanied by serious depredations or genocide. Statements to the effect that 'from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries the Turks ... advanced into Turkestan increasing the Turkic population there and destroying the Iranian culture'<sup>26</sup> should be treated with extreme caution. This period witnessed the further growth of cities<sup>27</sup> and the important role of Persian language and culture. As John Armstrong has noted, before the rise of the Ottomans, 'all Turkic regimes used Persian as their Court language'.<sup>28</sup>

In the tenth century the ethnic boundary between Iranians and Turks and the cultural boundary between sedentarism and nomadism were roughly the same. The whole medieval history of Mavarannahr can be written in terms of the relationship between steppe pastoralism and oasis agriculture. These contacts went far beyond warfare and the exchange of goods. Samuel Adshead, while describing the symbiosis between the two modes, applies the words 'complementarity' and 'compenetration', and gives a lucid picture of political interaction:

On the one hand, the sedentarist found the best defence against one set of nomads was another set of nomads. On the other hand, if the nomad wanted to organise an empire out of his conquests, it was best done from an oasis with its granaries, money, literacy and unifying religion. The oasis needed government and protection: the steppe could provide both. The steppe lacked administration and education: the oasis could provide both.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the tenth century, sedentarist Transoxiana had demonstrated an almost infinite ability to accommodate nomadic tribes invading its territory. Within two or three generations the steppe-dwellers usually gave up their habitual way of life and language. Some experts believe that only 'the vast, sudden incursion by pagan Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century' (and their Turkic allies) broke the routine;<sup>30</sup> however, archaeological and anthropological data point to the fact that already in the eleventh century the situation in Mavarannahr was undergoing a radical transformation. There was a far greater influx of nomadic Turkic peoples during the earlier Qarakhanid era.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Marie Czaplicka, *The Turks of Central Asia in History and at the Present Day* (Amsterdam: Philo, 1973), p. 72.

27 For example, the populations of Samarkand, Bukhara and Termez in the eleventh century stood at 100 000, 70 000 and 50 000 people respectively. See: *Istoriia Tadjhikskogo naroda*, Vol. II, kn. 1, p. 222.

28 John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 248.

29 Adshead, *Central Asia in World History*, p. 25.

30 Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, p. 40.

31 As T. K. Khojaiov writes, '[t]he greatest influx of anthropologically Mongoloid tribes to the territory of Central Asia dates from the Qarakhanid epoch. It is even more perceivable than in the period of Mongol invasion.' See: T. K. Khojaiov, *Etnicheskie protsessy v Srednei Azii v epokhu srednevekovia* (Tashkent: Fan, 1987), p. 59.

The historically close relations between Turkic and Iranian-speakers did not have just political and socioeconomic consequences, but ethnic and linguistic ones as well. This time the newcomers settled in rural areas as well as in towns; they not only retained their tongue but also eventually gave it to lands with ancient Iranian traditions. In Richard Frye's words, the spread of the Turkic languages in Transoxiana was 'nothing short of amazing'.<sup>32</sup> On top of the numerical strength of the Turks, the Qarakhanids' conversion to Islam, which supposedly took place under Satuq Bughra-khan (died about 955),<sup>33</sup> must have facilitated the infixion of the Turkic element in Mavarannahr enormously. Even before the Mongols, many Turkic toponyms had appeared in the Zarafshon Valley.<sup>34</sup> The interaction among Tajiks, sedentarised Turks and nomadic Uzbeks remained a highly complex process. Culturally, only language clearly demarcates the Tajik and Uzbek categories, and the prevalence of bilingualism lessens the importance of this division.<sup>35</sup> In Eastern Bukhara, where Tajiks constituted the majority of the population, large numbers of Uzbeks ultimately lost their native tongue and clan divisions, and adopted the way of life of the indigenous sedentary population.

The stereotypes of the 'ideal' appearance of Turkic peoples (including Uzbeks) and Iranian peoples (including Tajiks) are very different; however, the population of sedentary Central Asia has been intermixed for so long that it is impossible to accurately distinguish Tajiks from Uzbeks on physical appearance (phenotype) alone, particularly those who live on the plains and in the lower valleys.<sup>36</sup> The lowland Tajiks share more physical characteristics that are stereotyped as Turkic while mountain-dwellers share fewer linguistic and physical features with Turkic peoples.<sup>37</sup> A large number of the Uzbeks in Central Asia have Iranian ancestry while Tajiks who live outside the isolated mountain communities have

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32 Richard N. Frye, *Islamic Iran and Central Asia (7th–12th Centuries)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), p. 308.

33 Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes*, p. 145.

34 Barthold, *Sochineniia*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 253.

35 Olivier Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia?' in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Gare and Shirin Akiner (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 136, 144; Payam Foroughi, 'Tajikistan: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Conflict, and Socio-Economic Disparities—Sources and Solutions', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2002), pp. 45; Muriel Atkin, 'Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia', in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 50; Eden Naby, 'The Emerging Central Asia: Ethnic and Religious Factions', in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, ed. Mohiadin Mesbahi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 36, 38, 44; Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 8.

36 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 8; Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, pp. 21, 54–5, 294. See also Donald S. Carlisle, 'Geopolitics and Ethnic Problems of Uzbekistan and its Neighbours', in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 75–6.

37 Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, p. 148.

some Turkic ancestry.<sup>38</sup> In line with this description, it is noted that mixed marriages are common in Tajikistan,<sup>39</sup> with the Ferghana Valley the area where mixed marriages are most common.<sup>40</sup>

On the whole, the ethnic composition of the inhabitants of Tajikistan in the nineteenth century was characterised by extraordinary heterogeneity: apart from Tajiks and Tajik-speaking Turks (called Chaghatai in southern *vilayets*), there were also various Uzbek tribes,<sup>41</sup> Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Jews, Iranians, Afghans, Arabs, Lesgins, Armenians and Indians.<sup>42</sup> The Tajiks were subdivided according to their affiliation with ancient cultural and historical regions: Kulob (medieval Khuttal), Panjakent (in Zarafshon Valley), Asht (Upper Syr-Darya) and Qarotegin (foothills of the Pamirs); the Kulobis may have accounted for more than 60 per cent of the Tajik *ethnie* in Eastern Bukhara.<sup>43</sup>

In terms of genealogical memory, the oral tradition of the Asht Tajiks is illustrative of the tendencies in the Tajik ethnic community in the late nineteenth century. Asht was a locality in North-Western Ferghana that consisted of a number of *qishloqs* (villages)—with very different histories and ethnic composition—that could be divided into three groups. First, the titular *qishloq* of Asht allegedly had an uninterrupted cultural tradition since the Achaemenid period and its inhabitants readily referred to *Shahnama's* Rustam, Alexander the Great and Qutaiba as contributors to their original Soghdian genealogy. Second, the citizens of Ponghoz claimed that their *qishloq* was established by migrants from the south, Darvoz in particular, whom they called 'real Tajiks', as opposed to the local mixture of Soghdians and Turks ('also Tajiks'). Third, 'real Tajiks' and 'also Tajiks' were very persistent in stressing their dissimilarity with the predominantly Uzbek-dwellers of Kamysh-Qurghon in terms of 'customs, outlook and especially consciousness', though they admitted that Uzbeks had been living in the region 'for a long time, too'.<sup>44</sup>

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38 Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 8.

39 Foroughi, 'Tajikistan', p. 45; Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', pp. 136, 144; Naby, 'The Emerging Central Asia', pp. 36, 38, 44; Schoeberlein-Engel, 'Conflicts in Tajikistan and Central Asia', p. 8.

40 Naby, 'The Emerging Central Asia', pp. 36, 38, 44.

41 The number of Uzbek tribal names varies from 32 to 92. See: P. P. Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii Srednei Azii. (XVI – seredina XIXv)* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo vostochnoi literatury, 1958), p. 128. Actually, the collective name 'Uzbeks' was used in Bukhara only in juxtaposition with other ethnic groups, such as Tajiks or Karakalpaks; the clan identification was far more important for these nomads.

42 *Istoriia Tadjikskogo naroda*, Vol. II, kn. 2, pp. 67–8.

43 B. Kh. Karmysheva, *Ocherki etnicheskoj istorii tuzhnykh raionov Tadjikistana i Uzbekistana* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), p. 45.

44 The full paragraph is based on the study of a Soviet ethnographer: L. A. Chvyr, 'Ob istoricheskikh predaniakh ashtskikh tadjikov', in *Kavkaz i Sredniaia Azia v drevnosti i srednevekovie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), pp. 163–76.

## The Evolution of Tajik Statehood

The Tajik ethnicity has emerged as a result of cultural meiosis, through a succession of archetypal civilisation complexes: Aryan, Hellenistic, Greater Iranian, Perso-Islamic and Turkestanian. Each stage of this process left an imprint on the collective knowledge systems of the Tajiks, characterised by a specific ‘politics of memory’. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tajiks had retained the notion of sameness by maintaining cultural boundaries that kept them separate from Turkic ethnic groups in Central Asia—with some localised exceptions as in the case of the Uzbeks. The weak *solidarity* component of their *ethnie*, however, the inability to overcome dissonances *within* those boundaries, reflected in competing cultural elements on the sub-ethnic level, diminished their chances to seek national status in the modern era.

The policies pursued by the latest in the series of invaders, the Russian Empire, were conducive to the preservation of sub-ethnic consciousness amongst Tajiks. Cultural differences between people living to the north and to the south of the Hisor Range, or Valley Tajiks and Mountain Tajiks, were aggravated by administrative borders established by tsarist officials. In addition to this major dichotomy, smaller communities defined by geographic and historical features, although subject to ethnic awareness, remained remarkably passive in furthering it; this was the situation where ‘an individual knows (s)he possesses a certain ethnic trait(s) which is no more meaningful than his or her other cultural, physical, social or territorial characteristics’.<sup>45</sup> The 1917 revolution in Russia brought the promise of change to this stalemated pattern.

In Central Asia the Bolsheviks at first had to rely heavily on local ‘national communists’—essentially radical reformist intellectuals. In 1920, there were four communist parties in the region: the Russian Communist Party, the Turkestan Communist Party, the Bukharan Communist Party, and the Khorezmian Communist Party. The relationship amongst them was not without problems. At times national communists directly confronted the centre, as in January 1920, when Turar Ryskulov, the chairman of the Regional Muslim Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, put forward the ideas of forming a Turkic Republic that would embody not only Turkestan but Bukhara and Khiva as well, and a united Turkic Communist Party to govern it.<sup>46</sup> Even more blatant manifestations of dissent occurred in Bukhara, where a number of high-ranking party and state officials, including the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Bukharan People’s Republic, Usman Khojaev, defected to forces of the rebel

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45 James McKay and Frank Lewins, ‘Ethnicity and the Ethnic Group: A Conceptual Analysis and Reformulation’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1978), p. 415.

46 A. Ishanov, *Rol Kompartii i Sovetskogo pravitelstva v sozdanii natsionalnoi gosudarstvennosti uzbekskogo naroda* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1978), pp. 80–1.

commander Enver Pasha in late 1921. Moscow applied a three-pronged policy to tighten its grip over Central Asian communist organisations: it dispatched experienced Bolshevik cadres to the region;<sup>47</sup> it recruited new indigenous personnel from circles other than the traditional intelligentsia;<sup>48</sup> and finally, by recurrent purges, it removed ‘class alien’ elements from the party structures.<sup>49</sup> In May 1922, the Central Asian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party was organised and assumed control over all existing communist structures. From that time, decisions made in Moscow could not be altered by local party organisations, which in fact were gradually transformed into mere executants of directives from the Russian Communist Party Central Committee.

## National–Territorial Delimitation

The establishment of a uniform territorial administrative system based on centralised control from Moscow was another important step on Central Asia’s way to ‘USSR, Inc.’. Known as the national–territorial delimitation of 1924, this process of drawing borders remains a highly controversial issue in terms of its motivation and far-reaching results.<sup>50</sup> In Rakowska-Harmstone’s words:

[T]he process of delimitation was designed to grant political autonomy to major ethnic groups, in line with the stated policy of the right to national self-determination; the degree of formal autonomy granted depended on the degree of political development. Other reasons for

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47 From February to December 1921, 869 party officials from Russia were posted to Turkestan. See: A. I. Khon, *Deiatelnost Kommunisticheskoi partii po osushestvleniiu novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki v Turkestane* (Tashkent: Fan, 1986), p. 163.

48 One of the most important sources of the formation of the new native elite was the Red Army, when Central Asian recruits underwent illiteracy liquidation courses and massive communist indoctrination. In the 1920s military service was viewed by local poverty-stricken peasants as a potent means to increase their social status and receive material benefits: the draft of volunteers to the Red Army in Tajikistan in 1927 was over-fulfilled by 20 per cent. Many Tajik soldiers were assigned to administrative positions in their republic immediately upon demobilisation. See: O. Khudoiberdyev, *Boevaia družhba, rozhdennaia Oktiabrem* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), pp. 102–5.

49 In 1922, 14 000 members were expelled from the BCP, leaving a total membership of 1560. See: Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 82. The TCP lost 32 705 members of the original 49 206 from October 1921 to January 1923. See: Khon, *Deiatelnost Kommunisticheskoi partii po osushestvleniiu novoi ekonomicheskoi politiki v Turkestane*, p. 52.

50 A lucid generalisation made by Victor Zaslavsky can be fully applied to Tajikistan: ‘Soviet nationality policy ... was one of the most successful policies of the Soviet regime, enabling it to reconcile a strong unitary state with a federal structure, and maintain internal stability in a country harbouring deep ethnic divisions. Ruthless suppression of nationalist movements, institutionalisation of ethnicity, large-scale affirmative action and transfer payment policies, institutional isomorphism of ethnoterritorial units—all these major planks of Soviet nationality policy must be taken into account if both its successful functioning and its eventual disastrous outcome are to be explained.’ See: Victor Zaslavsky, ‘Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies’, *Daedalus*, Vol. 121, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p. 98.

the delimitation, equally important if not explicitly stated, were the Russian desires to facilitate All-Union (federal) control and to keep local nationalities apart by application of a ‘divide and rule’ policy.<sup>51</sup>

While it may be true that Tajikistan is ‘the most artificial and flawed of all the Soviet territorial creations’,<sup>52</sup> was this ‘artificiality’ a deliberate strategy of ‘divide and rule’ on the part of the Soviets? This assessment for Central Asia as a whole is shared by many scholars and appears time and time again in the literature.<sup>53</sup> Some make short references to the strategy. Muriel Atkin, for example, refers to national delimitation as ‘*divide et impera*’ (divide and rule).<sup>54</sup> Others, such as John Schoeberlein-Engel and Olivier Roy, provide similar explanations;<sup>55</sup> however, the last two scholars qualify their remarks. Schoeberlein-Engel notes that the ‘conventional wisdom’ that portrays national delimitation as part of a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy has not been ‘adequately documented’,<sup>56</sup> while Roy questions whether national delimitation was a ‘Machiavellian calculation’, ‘bureaucratic incompetence’, or ‘the power interests of local factions at work’.<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, it would be misleading to regard the process of setting internal Soviet republic borders as a scheme conceived and implemented exclusively by Bolshevik masterminds in Moscow. In reality, the delimitation was greatly influenced by nationalist forces in Central Asia. In regards to English-language literature on the subject, an alternative view was presented by Isabelle Kreindler, who argued that the apparently ‘illogical’ Central Asian administrative divisions are a result of the ‘complexity of the task—intermingled, illiterate populations, unstudied dialects—rather than a deliberate policy to weaken Muslim peoples’.<sup>58</sup> When more significant attempts to adequately document national delimitation based on primary sources were eventually made (in English), it became clear that the ‘divide and rule’ theory is quite weak, most prominently as illustrated

51 Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*, p. 27.

52 Shirin Akiner, ‘Melting Pot, Salad Bowl—Cauldron? Manipulation and Mobilization of Ethnic and Religious Identities in Central Asia’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1997), pp. 386–7.

53 A good example is Svante E. Cornell, ‘The Devaluation of the Concept of Autonomy: National Minorities in the Former Soviet Union’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1999). Francine Hirsch, who researched national delimitation in Central Asia cites other authors who provide the same ‘divide and rule’ argument for Central Asian borders: Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism* (London, 1953); H el ene Carr ere d’Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of Nations* (New York, 1993); Robert Conquest, *The Last Empire* (London, 1962), p. 29; Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), p. 88; and S. Sabol, ‘The Creation of Soviet Central Asia: The 1924 National Delimitation’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1995), pp. 225–41. All as listed in Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 160–1, ns 59, 61.

54 Atkin, ‘Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia’, p. 48.

55 Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), p. 68; Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, p. 25.

56 Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, p. 23.

57 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 69.

58 Isabelle T. Kreindler, ‘Soviet Muslims: Gains and Losses as a Result of Soviet Language Planning’, in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro’i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 36.

by Francine Hirsch.<sup>59</sup> Olimov and Olimova argue that the borders of Tajikistan were not created on the basis of ‘ethnic lines’, which were ‘never a reality’, but on the ‘administrative realities’ of geography, land usage, economics and communication.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, writing specifically about Tajikistan, the Tajik historian Rahim Masov noted that national delimitation was a complex process in which native Central Asian cadres presented different proposals and argued their cases before the Soviet authorities.<sup>61</sup> In summary, the presumably ‘divide and rule’-motivated policy of national–territorial delimitation proved to be in line with the aspirations of ethnic elites in Central Asia. It is rather the way this policy was conducted that echoes today in numerous inter-ethnic disputes in the former Soviet Union. These tensions are caused either by unclearly defined borders or by the perception that these borders were drawn wrongfully in the first place. As Masov has written, ‘it is still not clear what criterion was decisive for the incorporation of this or that settlement into the newly created republics, how other factors were treated, and whether economic, historical, national and other peculiarities were considered objectively, and whether interests of every nationality were taken into account’.<sup>62</sup> And in Masov’s view, the main villains of national delimitation are not the Soviet central authorities, but rather the Uzbek leaders allied to the Bolsheviks who manipulated the process of national delimitation to create an unfairly large Uzbek Republic at the expense of ethnic Tajik-dominated areas.<sup>63</sup>

In October 1919, the Russian Government stated that ‘self-determination of the peoples of Turkestan and elimination of all kinds of national inequality and privileges of one national group at the expense of another constitute the backbone of the entire policy of the Soviet government of Russia’.<sup>64</sup> Ostensibly this declaration was aimed at overcoming the image of Russians as a domineering force in Central Asia. In January 1920, the *Turkkomissii* published the draft document entitled ‘On the Dismemberment of Turkestan for Three Separate Republics According to National Features’—that is, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.<sup>65</sup> Why was it decided to create these particular national units instead of devising plain administrative divisions according to

59 Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, esp. pp. 160–86. On Tajikistan in particular, see: Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

60 M. A. Olimov and Saodat Olimova, ‘Ethnic Factors and Local Self-Government in Tajikistan’, in *Local Governance and Minority Empowerment in the CIS*, eds Valery Tishkov and Elena Filippova (Budapest: LGI Books/Open Society Institute, 2002), p. 248.

61 Masov, *Tadzhiki*, pp. 158–93. As cited in Akiner, ‘Melting Pot, Salad Bowl—Cauldron’, pp. 373–4.

62 R. M. Masov, *Istoriia istoricheskoi nauki i istoriografiia sotsialisticheskogo stroitelstva v Tadzhikistane* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1988), p. 185.

63 Rakhim Masov, *Istoriia topornogo razdeleniia* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1991), esp. pp. 103–5. Throughout the book, Masov also hurls abuse at ethnic Tajiks who did not resist the process strongly enough. For a more neutral assessment, see: Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan*, pp. 105–10.

64 *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti*, Vol. VI (Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1973), p. 457.

65 A. I. Zevelev, *Iz istorii grazhdanskoi voiny v Uzbekistane* (Tashkent: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo USSR, 1959), p. 452.

territory and population, or simply retaining existing borders, as some Russian orientalists advised? It appears that the leadership of the Russian Communist Party believed the fledgling sense of national identity a force to be countered. As Stalin emphasised at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in April 1923, apart from the danger of Great Russian chauvinism, ‘there is local chauvinism, especially in those republics that have several nationalities. I allude to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Bukhara, and partly Turkestan, where we have several nationalities whose progressive elements may soon begin to compete with one another for primacy.’<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the fact that Bukhara and Khiva had become People’s Socialist Republics by no means alleviated any historical animosity between Tajiks and Uzbeks, or Turkmen and Uzbeks. If anything, the turbulent years of revolution and civil war had politicised previously dormant ethnic elites, so that in the 1920s traditional raiding, plundering and blood feuds were compounded by confrontation along ethnic lines in local party committees. The creation of national entities under Moscow’s strict supervision appeared to be the best way to placate nascent nationalist sentiments, avert a serious conflict in the already ravaged region, and in the long run utilise Central Asian elites in building communism.

There is little doubt that Islamic, tribal and local affiliations remained potent sources of identification for indigenous people in Central Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Still, this region was not immune to the general rise of nationalism in Asian countries, such as in Turkey, Iran or Afghanistan, where it had successfully ousted ideas of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism. In Central Asia, too, ‘the development of a capitalist economic order, the spread of literacy, written communication and modern education culminated in the rise of local and regional elites which ... identified themselves consciously with a particular region and ethno-linguistic group and language. These elites were the architects of the forthcoming nation.’<sup>67</sup>

Arguably, the Tajiks suffered most from the arbitrariness of new administrative borders. Prior to 1924, 47.7 per cent of some 1.2 million Tajiks of Central Asia lived in what was to become the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and 52.3 per cent lived in the Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic (31 per cent of the total population of the Bukharan Republic);<sup>68</sup> however, Tajik participation in Central Asian political life was negligible. As of September 1924, 49 per cent of Bukharan Communist Party (BCP) members were Uzbeks, 22 per cent Russians, 8 per cent Turkmen, 5 per cent Tatars and only 0.7 per cent Tajiks.<sup>69</sup> There were no Tajiks in the BCP Central Committee or in any other important

66 I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. V (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1947), p. 239.

67 Kemal Karpat, ‘The Old and New Central Asia’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1993), pp. 423–4.

68 *Ocherki istorii kompartii Turkestana, Bukhary i Khorezma* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1959), p. 9.

69 Calculations based on: Ishanov, *Rol’ Kompartii i Sovetskogo pravitelstva v sozdanii natsionalnoi gosudarstvennosti uzbekskogo naroda*, p. 191.

positions in the Bukharan Republic. A similar situation prevailed in Turkestan. In 1923, the 77 Turkestani students at the Communist University of Toilers of the Orient in Moscow—the main institution to produce elite party cadres for the Soviet periphery—included not a single Tajik.<sup>70</sup> During 1921–22, the People's Commissariat of Nationalities of Turkestan (Turkkomnats) consisted of four national departments (Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uzbek and National Minorities). Tajiks were under the jurisdiction of the fourth department, on a par with Armenians, Latvians and Germans. Turkkomnats published 60 newspapers and magazines in native languages, but none in Tajik.<sup>71</sup> Stalin, then People's Commissar of Nationalities of Russia, did not include Tajiks in the number of main Central Asian ethnic groups either: 'There are three nationalities in Bukhara: Uzbeks, Turkmens and Kyrgyzs.'<sup>72</sup>

Not surprisingly, there were no Tajiks in the Special Territorial Commission of the Central Asian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, which was created in the spring of 1924 to redraw boundaries impartially according to the predominance of a particular ethnic group in a given territory. The fate of the Tajiks was decided by four Uzbeks, five Kazakhs, one Ukrainian, one Lithuanian, one Latvian, one Russian, one Turkmen and one Kyrgyz.<sup>73</sup> Tajikistan was to become an autonomous *oblast* within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. Uzbekistan received the most fertile, populated and developed territories of Central Asia: Ferghana, Samarkand and part of the Syr-Darya *oblasts* of Turkestan, Western Bukhara, south-eastern Khorezm and the city of Tashkent. Tajikistan was given the far less important areas of Eastern Bukhara and the Pamirs. Henceforth, in October 1924, Tajikistan was deprived of any city, and large concentrations of the Tajik population in Bukhara, Samarkand, Ferghana and Termez stayed outside its borders. While Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen and Kyrgyz officials bargained ferociously for every inch of land, the Uzbek national sub-commission quietly determined borders for the Tajiks. In the meantime, Uzbek newspapers published articles maintaining that the 'small number and dispersedness of Tajiks over great expanses do not allow them to create an independent political life',<sup>74</sup> and that, anyway, the inevitability of assimilation of the Tajiks 'is predetermined by ... social progress'.<sup>75</sup> It was only intervention by the Politburo of the Russian

70 I. M. Muminov, ed. *Istoriia Uzbekskoi SSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei* (Tashkent: Fan, 1974), p. 330.

71 G. P. Makarova, *Narodny komissariat po delam natsionalnostei RSFSR. 1917–1923* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), pp. 82–3.

72 Stalin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. V, p. 250.

73 Masov, *Tadzhiki*, p. 193.

74 M. S. Sadykov, *Istoricheskii opyt KPSS po stroitelstvu sotsializma v Tadzhikistane (1917–1959gg.)* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1967), p. 115.

75 Vishnevsky, *Leninskaia natsionalnaia politika v deistvii*, p. 76.

Communist Party Central Committee on 11 October 1924 that precluded the transformation of Tajikistan into simply one of the districts of Uzbekistan: the Tajik state entity was instead elevated to the status of an autonomous republic.<sup>76</sup>

In December 1924, the first government of the Tajik autonomy of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was created, and in March 1925 the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was officially proclaimed. The inadequate character of the national–territorial delimitation as far as the Tajiks were concerned was accentuated by the fact that the capital of the new republic, in the absence of alternatives, had to be established in the *qishloq* (village) of Dushanbe, which, with less than 1000 inhabitants, had never before served as a cultural or administrative centre.<sup>77</sup> The Tajik autonomy embraced only 63.1 per cent of all Central Asian Tajiks; 35.8 per cent of them remained enfolded by Uzbekistan.<sup>78</sup> The elevation of Tajikistan to a full Union Republic in October 1929,<sup>79</sup> and the acquisition of Khujand and other Tajik lands in Ferghana, rectified the situation only partially. Samarkand and Bukhara, the two paramount cultural, spiritual and economic centres of the Tajiks, remained in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek leaders used underhand tactics to achieve this: the capital of Uzbekistan was temporarily moved from Tashkent to Samarkand, where Tajik citizens were encouraged to call themselves Uzbeks, otherwise they could be sent to ‘brotherly Tajikistan’ to help overcome its backwardness. This policy yielded the following results: in 1917, there were 44 758 Tajiks and 3301 Uzbeks recorded amongst the Samarkandis; the corresponding figures in 1926 stood at 10 716 and 43 304.<sup>80</sup> In reality, however, Tajiks constituted more than 70 per cent of the population of Bukhara and Samarkand *oblasts*.<sup>81</sup>

76 Ocherki istorii kompartii Turkeстана, Bukhary i Khorezma, p. 73. Bergne argues that part of the motivation for the creation of the autonomous Tajik republic was that ‘[a] strongly unified and culturally developed Tajik Autonomous Oblast could serve as a centre of attraction and target for emulation by the neighbouring Afghan Tajiks whose numbers were variously estimated to be about a million’. See: Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan*, p. 49.

77 V. V. Barthold, ‘Zapiska po voprosy ob istoricheskikh vzaimootnosheniakh turetskikh i iranskikh narodnostei Srednei Azii’, *Vostok*, No. 5 (1991), p. 166.

78 Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983), p. 306.

79 The various hypotheses given for the motivations behind the creation of a full Tajik Republic include: ‘establishing a Soviet model Iranian state’ to serve ‘as an example to Asian neighbours’—that is, Iran and Afghanistan (Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan*, p. 114; also: Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*, pp. 71–4); an acknowledgment by Moscow of the fact that Tajikistan ‘met the three criteria for union membership: it was a border area, its leading nationality formed a compact majority, and, after the Khodzhen region was transferred from Uzbekistan to the new republic, its population reached the one million mark’ (Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*, p. 71); the creation of the Tajik SSR was ‘designed to undercut the hegemony of the Uzbeks there, and by the Communist desire to destroy the Pan-Islamic, Pan-Turkic unity of Turkestan’ (ibid., pp. 71–2); the result of lobbying by Tajik and Kazakh elites, as well as by their supporters in Moscow (Anaita Khudonazar, ‘The Other’, Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series [2004], pp. 4–5).

80 Masov, *Tadzhiki*, p. 119. See also: Valerii Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 20.

81 *Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane* (Moscow: TSIMO, 1990), pp. 101, 106.

The new Tajik government had to start nation-state building from scratch. Apart from the fact that eponymous people accounted for an absolute majority (74.6 per cent) of the republic's population, there was little else to bind them together. A Tajik scholar has written that 'Tajiks who lived in the Hisor Mountains did not have knowledge about Tajiks residing in Khujand. And Tajiks of the Zarafshon Valley were not in the least cognisant of the life of Tajiks in Gorno-Badakhshan.'<sup>82</sup> As late as 1935, nine *raions* (districts) of Tajikistan had no telephone and telegraph installations, and seven other *raions* were devoid of any means of communication at all.<sup>83</sup> The level of development of constituent regions in the republic varied considerably: the north (Khujand, Isfara, Kanibodom) had relatively industrialised areas with market-oriented farming; the centre and the south (Hisor, Kulob, Qurghonteppa, Gharm) clung to subsistence agriculture, and had very little access to the benefits of a modern market economy;<sup>84</sup> as for the Pamirs, its people still practised outmoded methods of agriculture and constantly teetered on the edge of survival.<sup>85</sup> The task of bringing all Tajiks together appeared almost impossible, but the nascent Tajik elite had a very powerful instrument at its disposal: the Soviet government machine, with its vast economic potential and efficient coercive mechanisms.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, what can be called a 'territorial nation' was being feverishly constructed in Tajikistan. It was based on a sense of clear-cut boundaries, as well as on a commonality of laws and legal and governmental institutions. Between 1926 and 1929, the previously ill-assorted territorial administrative structure was unified and simplified throughout the republic: the newly created seven *okrugs* (districts) and one autonomous *oblast* were divided into *raions*, which in turn comprised several *selsovets* (primary administrative organs) each. In 1926, the process of mass Sovietisation of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic began, and was successfully completed in 1929 (extraordinary dictatorial organs—revolutionary committees, *revkoms*—had previously been replaced in northern Tajikistan with elected soviets). In 1931, the Constitution of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was adopted, consolidating and sanctioning the changed political system. Finally, the independent Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT) was set up in 1929, with a membership of 1479 (48 per cent Tajiks),<sup>86</sup> compared with the total of 11 communists in

82 B. S. Asimova, *Iazykovoe stroitelstvo v Tadjikistane, 1920–1940* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1982), p. 71.

83 *Ocherki istorii narodnogo khoziaistva Tadjikistana* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1967), p. 233.

84 In 1925, the chairman of the Kulob *viloyat*, Abdulaziev, made this statement: 'I represent a very backward people. We don't have schools. I have a facsimile seal in my pocket and when they bring me a paper [for signature] I stamp it, but I don't know what is written there ... We drink from wooden cups. Our footwear is also made of wood. Everything we have is made of wood. We have never seen glass.' See: Sadykov, *Istoricheskii opyt KPSS po stroitelstvu sotsializma v Tadjikistane*, p. 117.

85 I. Mukhitdinov, *Osobennosti traditsionnogo zemledelcheskogo khoziaistva pripamirskikh narodnostei v XIX – nachale XX veka* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1984), pp. 48, 144, 157.

86 Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia*, p. 100.

Eastern Bukhara in 1924.<sup>87</sup> The Tajik communist elite had grown sufficiently to fill vacancies in state agencies, especially at the grassroots level; while at the beginning of 1925, 80 per cent of personnel in local executive committees were former emirate officials,<sup>88</sup> by 1931 they had been all but expunged.

The growth of a national elite in Tajikistan was facilitated by the general policy of nativisation (*korenizatsiia*) of cadres, conducted by Moscow during 1920–34. As Stalin pointed out in 1923:

[I]n order to make Soviet power dear to peasants of another [non-Russian] nation, it is necessary to make it understandable to them, to have it operating in the native language, to staff schools and organs of government with people who know the tongue, traditions, customs, and everyday life of non-Russian nationalities.<sup>89</sup>

The Commission for Tajikisation of the State Apparatus was set up in Dushanbe in March 1926. In October 1929, the ratio of indigenous personnel in central republican organs reached 14.3 per cent, at the *okrug* level 22.2 per cent and in *raions*, 44.9 per cent (72 per cent in 1933).<sup>90</sup> Of course, all more or less important matters were decided in Moscow, and their solutions were supervised by centrally appointed personnel. Still, the policy of nativisation laid a solid foundation for the emergence of a viable territorial bureaucracy in Tajikistan in the 1970s.

The advancement of a common Tajik culture was potentially another important factor for fostering a sense of national cohesion; however, the loss of the tremendous cultural and intellectual resources of Samarkand and Bukhara inhibited this process. The dialect of these two regions was supposed to form the basis of a contemporary literary Tajik language, but there were not enough qualified people in Tajikistan to promote it. Nor did the introduction of Latin (1928) and then Russian (1940) alphabets instead of the old Arabic script help to preserve the great medieval tradition. On the other hand, it was not until the advent of Soviet power that the rich cultural heritage and history of the Tajiks became subject to systematic research and popularisation. In 1930, the special Committee of Tajik Studies was established in Dushanbe, and two years later it was transformed into the State Research Institute, dealing with an array of topics in Tajik history, language, literature and ethnography.<sup>91</sup> The Soviet authorities also sponsored national cinematography, fine arts and other forms of intellectual activity that altogether constituted ‘the new motor of ethnic

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87 Ishanov, *Rol' Kompartii i Sovetskogo pravitelstva v sozdanii natsionalnoi gosudarstvennosti uzbekskogo naroda*, p. 191.

88 Vishnevsky, *Leninskaia natsionalnaia politika v deistvii*, p. 85.

89 Stalin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. V, pp. 240–1.

90 Vishnevsky, *Leninskaia natsionalnaia politika v deistvii*, p. 104.

91 Sadykov, *Istoricheskii opyt KPSS po stroitelstvu sotsializma v Tadzhikistane*, p. 293.

revival'.<sup>92</sup> The unprecedented spread of education created an ever-growing social stratum receptive to the ethnic myths reconstructed and elaborated by the Tajik intelligentsia.

## Politicisation of Ethnic Identity

After World War II there was a reversal in primary ideological emphasis in the Soviet Union from class to ethnicity. Previously nationalism was officially viewed as a stage in the evolution towards a class-based socialist society.<sup>93</sup> In Yuri Slezkine's words, nationalism became, with the full support of Soviet authorities, a 'sacred principle of marxism-leninism'.<sup>94</sup> As a result, according to Valery Tishkov's analysis of Soviet social sciences, the view of ethnicity became politicised and primordialistic (the equivalent is easily found in Western scholarship). There was heavy emphasis on ethnogenesis, with social scientists providing writings to trace a group origin as far back as the upper-Palaeolithic era, to identify cultural heroes, and to demonstrate the existence of a people with 'their "own" territories and their "own" states'.<sup>95</sup> Victor Shnirelman provides a very similar critique,<sup>96</sup> and notes that this 'invention of the past' is used to raise self-esteem, usually in relation to neighbouring groups, and to demand 'special rights and privileges with respect to others who lack their glorious past'.<sup>97</sup> According to Alisher Ilkhamov, in response to the perception of growing nationalism—particularly in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic—the central Communist Party initiated a parallel process whereby they 'gave the green light to ethnographic investigations that would raise doubts about the homogeneous nature of the modern Uzbek nation and question the reasons for

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92 Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 160.

93 Yuri Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1994). Slezkine writes that as part of this process 'linguists and ethnographers expected—and tried to bring about—the fusion and consequent disappearance of linguistic and ethnic communities' (ibid., p. 137). See also: Yuri Slezkine, 'The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928–38', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1991), pp. 476–84. According to Adeeb Khalid, it was in the mid 1930s that 'official Soviet discourse came to accept—indeed, to assert—that national and ethnic identities were real and permanent, but it still did not compromise on the basic universalism of historical progress'. See: Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 65.

94 Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment', p. 414.

95 Valery A. Tishkov, 'Inventions and Manifestations of Ethno-Nationalism in and after the Soviet Union', in *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, eds Kumar Rupasinghe, Peter King and Olga Vorkunova (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 42.

96 Victor A. Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past? Competition for Ancestors among Non-Russian Intellectuals in Russia* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 1–12, 58–61. Shnirelman notes the importance of autochthonism (that is, a certain group has always inhabited its current location) and particularism (de-emphasising common roots and stressing differences) (ibid., p. 12).

97 Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past*, p. 2.

the inclusions of certain ethnic groups'.<sup>98</sup> As a result, it is possible to find clearly separate discourses on nationalism, identity and ethnic origins in the Soviet-era scholarship.

The search for a 'glorious past' is not an irrelevant, isolated intellectual pursuit. While academics may provide the basic material, those 'amateurs in the field' such as popular writers, journalists, educators and artists are the ones who play a significant role, and often in a manner that is 'less restrained' and 'highly selective'.<sup>99</sup> Shnirelman notes that as part of this search for a past, 'an ethnic group may encroach upon or even appropriate the past and cultural legacy of another group, leading to misunderstandings, arguments and tensions'.<sup>100</sup> These types of claims are not without their material logic, as the 'special rights and privileges' part of Shnirelman's explanation above demonstrates. All governments use historical symbols and historiography to cultivate patriotism, explain and justify policies, and secure the acquiescence and cooperation of the people in times of crises. Symbolic encapsulation of the themes of regime legitimacy, common identity and cultural revival through historical references is particularly crucial for emerging nations. The newly independent Central Asian countries present no exception to this pattern.<sup>101</sup>

The Tajik official histories, for their part, traced the completion of their 'ethnogenesis' to the Samanid era (ninth–tenth centuries).<sup>102</sup> Shirin Akiner claims, in an assertion that can only be safely applied to nationalist intellectuals and select politicians, that '[h]istoriography is to Tajiks an intensely emotive, fiercely contested political issue'.<sup>103</sup> Contemporary Tajik nationalists stress not only their Persian (Western Iranian) heritage, but also their Soghdian (Eastern Iranian) heritage in order to counteract the claim of 'their Turkic neighbours' (that is, Uzbek nationalists in Uzbekistan) that Turkic peoples are the original inhabitants of Central Asia and that the Tajiks are latecomers.<sup>104</sup> An excellent

98 A. Ilkhamov, 'Archeology of Uzbek Identity', *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Spring 2006), p. 27.

99 Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past*, pp. 58–9. Similarly, as Schoeberlein-Engel notes about Central Asia, 'the debate amongst those who promote or oppose Uzbek nationalist claims ... is built more on emotion than on history'. See: Schoeberlein-Engel, 'The Prospects for Uzbek National Identity', *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 2 (1996), p. 13; Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, pp. 66, 72.

100 Shnirelman, *Who Gets the Past*, pp. 2, 60–1. Shnirelman notes that this is especially true when the encroachment involves claims on others' territory.

101 Nourzhanov, 'The Politics of History in Tajikistan', n.p.

102 Ghafurov, *Tojikon*, pp. 494–501; Nourzhanov, 'The Politics of History in Tajikistan', n.p.; *Tadzhikskaja Sovetskaja Sotsialisticheskaja Respublika* (Dushanbe: AN TadzhSSR, 1974), p. 88, as cited in Subtelny, 'The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik', p. 53; Laruelle, 'The Return of the Aryan Myth'.

103 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 10. This is clearly not a new phenomenon, as demonstrated by Guissou Jahangiri in her analysis of Tajik-centric journals involved in the Tajik intellectual discourse in the 1920s. See: Guissou Jahangiri, 'The Premises for the Construction of a Tajik National Identity, 1920–1930', in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, eds Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997).

104 Muriel Atkin, 'Tajikistan's Relations with Iran and Afghanistan', in *The New Politics of Central Asia and its Borderlands*, eds Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 97–8.

example of this is in a recent article by Shamsiddin Kamoliddin, a researcher at the Institute of History in Uzbekistan, wherein he makes the uncited claim that modern-day Uzbeks are descended from sedentarised ‘proto-Turks’ who were the indigenous population of Central Asia *before* the arrival of Indo-European peoples. He further claims (again uncited) that these Turks had inhabited the region (and specifically not as nomads) since the second millennia BC, only to be forced out by ‘Aryan invaders’.<sup>105</sup> As a reply to these extremely dubious historical assertions, Tajik nationalists can easily point in turn to the claim made by the prominent Tajik academic Bobojon Ghafurov that the ‘Iranian eastern populations did not come to Central Asia out of nowhere but constituted themselves there, on the ground’.<sup>106</sup>

## Soviet Nationality Policies

Muriel Atkin notes that before the Soviet nation-building process in Central Asia, the ‘overwhelming majority of indigenous inhabitants considered themselves part of the Muslim community but also saw that community as subdivided into groups which were different and, not infrequently, mutually hostile’.<sup>107</sup> Atkin lists these divisions as ethnicity, religious ties, loyalty to dynasties or local tribal chiefs, tribal or clan affiliation, economic interests, geographic locations and political ideologies.<sup>108</sup> Subtelny provides fewer identity categories, listing tribe, town or religion.<sup>109</sup> Sergei Abashin provides a more comprehensive list:

The basic cultural frontiers in pre-Russian Central Asia were not shaped along ethnic or ethnic-national lines. The main divides used to differentiate ‘one of us’ from someone ‘foreign’ were based on position in the social hierarchy, religious separation into Sunni, Shi’ite, or Ishmaelite, membership of different Sufi brotherhoods, economic-cultural categorization between settled, mountainous, nomadic or semi-nomadic groups, family or tribal distinctions, or by regional classification.<sup>110</sup>

By the beginning of the Soviet era, in Abashin’s words, the many ‘cultural and social categories and “named groups” that existed in Central Asia was [sic] artificially and administratively reduced to an extremely limited range of

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105 Shamsiddin Kamoliddin, ‘The Notion of Ethnogenesis in the Ethnic Atlas of Uzbekistan’, *Archeology & Anthropology of Eurasia*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 43–4.

106 B. G. Gafurov, *Istoriia tadzhikskogo naroda v kratkom izlozhenii* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1949), p. 26, as translated and cited in Laruelle, ‘The Return of the Aryan Myth’, p. 56.

107 Atkin, ‘Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia’, p. 47.

108 Atkin, ‘Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia’, p. 47.

109 Subtelny, ‘The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik’, p. 51.

110 Abashin, ‘The Transformation of Ethnic Identity in Central Asia’, p. 32. Abashin argues that these categories are ‘much more important than a “functional” characteristic like language’.

“nationalities” or “national groups”<sup>111</sup>. The manipulation of identity categories began at an early date. One example is from the 1920 census, in which there was, in addition to difficulty in assigning ethnic identity to those within the Tajik-Uzbek categories, ‘deliberate misidentification for political purposes, particularly in the Tajik-Uzbek case’.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Atkin writes that many people ‘feared being forcibly relocated to ensure that a given nationality would be entirely contained within “its” own republic. Thus some of the self-designations as “Tajik” and “Uzbek” did not reflect that individual’s ethnic consciousness but rather his estimate of which answer would enable him to remain in his home.’<sup>113</sup> The Tajik historian Rahim Masov takes the above themes to a much higher level, dedicating much of his writing to demonstrating what he perceives to be the ethnic injustices inflicted upon Tajiks by both Uzbeks and fellow Tajiks. Masov convincingly demonstrates that many Tajiks outside the present-day area of Tajikistan were forced into the ‘Uzbek’ category through discrimination, falsified census results, local bureaucratic subterfuge, and various other methods.<sup>114</sup>

Soviet social scientists’ work was ‘closely tied into the official ideology and politics of ethno-nationalism dominant in the Soviet state—with ethnic groups forming pseudo-federal administrative units or Republics’.<sup>115</sup> In Soviet Central Asia, Uzbek and Tajik cultural histories were ‘redefined’ on the basis of language and territory; however, many of those now determined to be Uzbeks and Tajiks had often shared the same territory, culture and languages throughout recent history, so the ‘compartmentalization of individual elements from this common background into “Uzbek” and “Tajik” was bound to create confusion and overlap’.<sup>116</sup> Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont maintain that Soviet ethnographers took many diverse Persian-speaking and Turkic-speaking groups and gathered them into two categories, Tajiks and Uzbeks respectively, and ‘treated them as homogeneous entities’;<sup>117</sup> however, this focus on the Soviet central government’s plans does not take into consideration the manipulative roles played by local allies of the Bolsheviks. As an example, Carlisle points especially to Fayzulla Khojaev, a Jadid (Muslim reformer) and Moscow’s ‘primary native ally’.<sup>118</sup> Obiya Chika focuses entirely on Khojaev’s career and identity, noting that as his career

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111 Abashin, ‘The Transformation of Ethnic Identity in Central Asia’, p. 33. An example of this wide variety of ‘named groups’ that were to be administratively eliminated is a census list from 1924 of Uzbek tribe and clan names in Bukhara, which, when sub-clan categories are included, has more than 100 categories. See: I. Magidovac, ‘Administrativnoe delenie’, *Materialy po raionirovaniu Srednei Azii*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 29–60, as cited in Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, pp. 153–5.

112 Sengupta, ‘Imperatives of National Territorial Delimitation and the Fate of Bukhara’, p. 411.

113 Atkin, ‘Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia’, p. 49.

114 Masov, *Istoriia topornogo razdeleniia*, pp. 16–18, 78, 105, 113.

115 Tishkov, ‘Inventions and Manifestations of Ethno-Nationalism in and after the Soviet Union’, p. 42.

116 Subtelny, ‘The Symbiosis of Turk and Tajik’, p. 52.

117 Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont, ‘Tajikistan and Afghanistan’, p. 5.

118 Carlisle, ‘Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks’, p. 26.

progressed he 'seemed to show a drastic change of self-identity—from Bukharan to Uzbek',<sup>119</sup> and that ultimately he was the most active of any Central Asian leaders in the process of national delimitation.<sup>120</sup> Masov is particularly critical of the role played by Khojaev and other local leaders—both Uzbek and Tajik—in manipulating the process whereby the population of Central Asia was divided ethnically into nationality categories and geographically into republics.<sup>121</sup>

Sergei Abashin describes the process whereby an ethnic consciousness developed amongst Soviet citizens:

Over seven decades, Soviet power was responsible for huge changes in people's self-consciousness. Moscow mobilized all of the instruments and resources necessary to achieve this: a national state, a national culture, national language and literature, national education and national media (particularly television). Among the most powerful tools for introducing ethnic self-consciousness to the masses were internal passports and the census, which, in effect, was a survey of the population's ethnic-national allegiance. Every person had to be formally registered as a specific 'nationality,' which he/she could not change later, even if he/she wished to. Education also contributed to this socialization process. Thus, in the Soviet period, a citizen's consciousness, the sense of belonging to the Uzbek or Tajik state, came increasingly to resemble ethnic self-consciousness, as in identifying with a certain culture, language and history.<sup>122</sup>

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After demarcation the government in Tajikistan introduced a standardised Tajik language, expanded the reach of the media and formed 'national, political, cultural and educational institutions', while intellectuals 'gave shape and substance to the Tajik heritage',<sup>123</sup> creating a palpable sense of shared national identity, particularly when viewed in juxtaposition with other newly created Central Asian republics. Driven from above and confined to the highly visible public domain in big cities, Soviet modernisation was limited in its success in excoriating the parochial, sub-ethnic identities. These limitations were seen

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119 Obiya Chika, 'When Faizulla Khojaev Decided to be an Uzbek', in *Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, eds Stéphane Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao (London and New York: Kegan Paul, 2001), p. 100.

120 Chika, 'When Faizulla Khojaev Decided to be an Uzbek', p. 103.

121 Masov, *Istoriia topornogo razdeleniia*. In particular, the appendix of Masov's book (starting on page 115) provides a view into the internal workings of the committees presided over by local leaders.

122 Abashin, 'The Transformation of Ethnic Identity in Central Asia', pp. 33–4.

123 Shirin Akiner, 'Prospects for Civil Society in Tajikistan', in *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Aryn B. Sajoo (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 153.

most acutely in rural society, as demonstrated polemically by Sergei Poliakov in his study of the ‘traditional’ lives of Central Asians.<sup>124</sup> In regards again to identity categories, the local loyalties and associations were often ‘incorporated’ into the larger nationality categories. As a result, these pre-existing identities continued to survive ‘unofficially’ below the level of nation and nationality, as will be further illustrated later in this book.

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124 Sergei P. Poliakov, *Everyday Islam: Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), esp. pp. 53–144.