4. Traditional Society and Regionalism in Soviet Tajikistan

The Soviet system was characterised by the incessant attempts of the state to establish overwhelming control over society. The belief that it had succeeded in penetrating all other social units, regulating social relationships down to the grassroots level, while appropriating and distributing resources at its discretion gave rise to the totalitarian concept of Soviet politics in the 1960s. This theoretical construction has, however, been criticised as far from perfect ever since (though it still appears in the literature on Tajikistan).1 Many others have, in their work on Tajikistan, presented an analysis of qualified Soviet state effectiveness.2 After World War II, with the fight against the basmachi long finished and the worst of the purges over, a picture emerges of a Soviet and a Tajik state with mixed effectiveness. For example, the local branches of the KGB were staffed by high-ranking ethnic European officers who could not speak local languages and were often rotated to new areas, and by local officers who were enmeshed in the local community and ‘tended to keep troubles “inside the family”’3. Other factors show a Soviet state that is far from totalitarian. For example, the Loqay Uzbeks were at times confrontational with the state as late as the 1960s. While the government did defeat the last large Loqay ‘uprising’ in the 1960s by the use of force, the government—uncharacteristically for an effective totalitarian state—also offered concessions to the Loqay community.4

The main argument of the opponents of the totalitarian concept appears to be that ‘the continuous process of social mobilisation, the expansion of education, and the growth of numerous professional groups and organisations created in Soviet Russia a much greater range of nuclei, the kernels of civil society’.5

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1 For example, Shirin Akiner characterises ‘Soviet modernisation’ as being ‘highly authoritarian’ and implemented within a ‘totalitarian system’, while Olivier Roy seems to go even further, stating that ‘the Soviet Union constituted a totalitarian system in which the state was the alpha, beta and omega of all socio-political existence’. See: Akiner, ‘Prospects for Civil Society in Tajikistan’, pp. 154–6; Olivier Roy, ‘Soviet Legacies and Western Aid Imperatives in the New Central Asia’, in Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Amyn Sajoo (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 126. Akiner and Roy, however, both of whom have written extensively on Tajikistan, contradict and/or qualify these statements throughout their writing.


3 Roy, ‘Soviet Legacies and Western Aid Imperatives in the New Central Asia’, p. 129.


This notion was applicable to Tajikistan as well; however, here the Soviet state faced the toughest competition not from the offspring of its own development, but from the social institutions of tradition.\textsuperscript{6}

The policy of Sovietisation in Central Asia envisaged the establishment of a ‘modern industrial-type society devoid of social antagonisms, where social interests would be uniform and national distinctions would be erased’.\textsuperscript{7} In the specific conditions of this region the implementation of this policy would supposedly invoke: a) accelerated economic growth, urbanisation and cultural development—‘catching up’ with the European part of the USSR; b) the liquidation of traditional patterns of socialisation—most notably, secularisation and dismantling of local ties and parochial loyalties; c) the installation of a new mode of socialisation based on uniform communist values; and d) the creation of viable Soviet nations on the basis of existing ethnic groups.

Answering the question of why the Soviet experiment in grandiose social transformation ultimately failed lies beyond the scope of this book. It is imperative, however, to try to understand why people in Tajikistan could not be ‘successfully assimilated as “new Soviet men”’\textsuperscript{8} over almost seven decades. It appears that the following social actors had the ability to challenge the monopoly of state agencies in making and enforcing rules in Soviet Tajikistan

- family
- religious community
- sub-ethnic regionalism.

Exploring their dynamic relationship with the state is likely to corroborate the notion that even in the age of modernity ‘the Central Asian social system is oriented to the past in its value system as well as in its social structure’.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{6} There is an ongoing debate on the exact meaning of the words ‘tradition’, ‘traditional’ and ‘traditionalism’ in contemporary sociological literature. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that ‘tradition’ comprises ‘the statements, beliefs, legends, customs, understandings, terms, and categories of experience and social relationship that are handed down from one generation to another. Tradition, used alone, can never explain a people’s behaviour, since behaviour is always situational, contextual, and circumstantial. But there are frames of meaning, biases, and entrenched understandings that people have received from their past, which are already intact when they are confronted with exigencies, and these affect how people understand their problems, how they perceive what is of immediate or of prior importance, and thus how they will be prone to act.’ See: Robert L. Canfield, ‘Ethnic, Regional, and Sectarian Alignments in Afghanistan’, in \textit{The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics. Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan}, eds Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. 88.


The Family and Traditional Patriarchy

In Tajikistan, where the transition to a modern small family is yet to be completed, the importance of the family was and is greatly enhanced by its function as a primary unit of economic, ideological and cultural activity. The traditional Tajik family has survived almost intact seven decades of ruthless pressure towards a Soviet-type modernity, retaining its main values and its adaptive role vis-a-vis society at large. The sources of such vitality are concealed in the demographic, structural and behavioural parameters of the kinship groups in Tajikistan.

There are three types of patriarchal undivided families in Tajikistan: 1) parents living with married sons; 2) families of married brothers who run one household; 3) uncles with married nephews. In the early 1990s, these types constituted more than 21 per cent of all families in Tajikistan, but, given the fact that their size was much bigger than the average nuclear family, they embraced more than half of the population in the republic. Table 4.1 shows that in rural areas families with seven or more members (the national average family size being 6.1) dominated the demographic landscape in Tajikistan, accounting for 51.1 per cent of all families.

Table 4.1 Number and Size of Families in Tajikistan, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Families with the membership of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>798 914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td>319 684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td>479 230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Avlod, a word of Arabic origins, is a term used in Tajikistan to describe an extended patriarchal family that serves as an informal mutual support structure. Kamoludin Abdullaev refers to the avlod as ‘the basic unit of sedentary Tajik

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12 In Arabic, avlod means ‘sons’.
society and dominant institution of power’, while noting that the ‘avlod system provided survival, autonomy, and adaptability to its members, serving traditionalism and sustainability of the society’.\(^{14}\) In a big patriarchal family in Tajikistan, the oldest active\(^{15}\) male member concentrates power in his hands; he controls all major expenditures, he determines the division of labour within the family, and he decides upon the future of junior members—who should continue education and who should go to work in the fields, and so on. Even if grown-up sons separate from the parental household, they cannot claim absolute economic independence, for they continue to belong to the kinship group of a higher order—the so-called avlod, which ideally embodies all males descending from the common ancestor seven generations before. Avlod, in its ideal form, is based on: a) commonality of property (mulkiavlodi) in land; b) tight spiritual bonds, vested in common sacred places (mazors), an assortment of the spirits of the dead (arvoh), and traditions of blood feuds; c) compact settlement of its units, usually around one big yard—havili; and d) a uniformity of action in relations with the outer world. Under Soviet rule mulki avlod was craftily adapted to the realities of collectivisation; collective farms in Tajikistan were often created on the basis of pre-existent communal landownership, and, like their ancestors, members of an avlod continued to work jointly on the same allotment, disguised as a kolkhoz brigade.\(^{16}\)

Of course, these characteristics belong to the avlod in its idealised form. Numerous exceptions and variations exist. For example, one anthropologist noticed that the elite families she met in Dushanbe, the Hisor Valley and Samarkand traced their prestigious lineages quite far back to a notable ancestor. Meanwhile, amongst the villagers she studied in Varzob, no-one was able to trace their lineage further back than four generations. Instead of patrilineal lineages, they stressed (often horizontal and occasionally matrilineal) networks of kin in the present, as these networks had—in their daily struggles to survive and get ahead—a high level social and economic significance.\(^{17}\) Exceptions may


\(^{15}\) Elderly men of advanced age often transition into a role that is akin to retirement and their influence decreases.


\(^{17}\) Gillian Tett, Ambiguous Alliances: Marriage and Identity in a Muslim Village in Soviet Tajikistan (PhD Thesis: University of Cambridge, 1996), pp. 67, 69–71. For example, Tett notes (p. 66): ‘Since no one workplace could provide access to all resources, the ideal network to have was a varied one, with some contacts in the town, some in the mines, some in shops and some at the farm. Very few villagers ever achieved this. However most households attempted, in however limited a way, to set up channels of contacts in a range of economic niches. There were several ways of doing this. However, one of the most basic was to have different members of a household, or a recently divided household, work in a range of economic niches.’
exist also in regards to terminology. In labelling a descent lineage or a kinship group or network in Tajikistan one will find local and contextual variations such as: avlod, qaum, elkheshi, khash, toyfa, kynda, tup, and so on.\(^{18}\)

Subsidiary smallholdings also constituted part of the avlod property and played an increasingly important role in maintaining the economic viability of kin structures in circumstances where collective farms were constantly reorganised, enlarged, combined or transformed into state farms. During the 1980s, the number of people who worked exclusively on private family plots in Tajikistan increased sixfold and reached 7 per cent of all those employed, and in some areas, such as the Gharm district, such people accounted for almost one-third of the entire rural workforce.\(^{19}\) Even employees of collective farms tended to spend a substantial amount of their time on private allotments: in 1985 an average kolkhoznik would work only 187 days at the farm, devoting the rest to his or her personal garden, orchard or vegetable patch.\(^{20}\)

As Sergei Poliakov, the most prominent scholar of ‘traditionalism’ in Central Asian societies, has written, ‘the second part of rural economy—what is referred to as private small-holdings of kolkhozniks and workers of state farms … is not regulated, controlled and explored by the state’.\(^{21}\) In Qarotegin (now known as Rasht) in the 1980s, it was the order of the day for a family to earn 30–50,000 roubles a year simply by selling apples from the avlod orchard—a sum equivalent to the annual salaries of 18 to 30 people working at the farm.\(^{22}\) All revenues from wages and commercial activities went to the family fund and all spending was controlled by the head of the avlod, even in cases where junior members of the family lived separately.\(^{23}\) The head’s authority was unquestionable and he effectively prescribed the rules of behaviour to the members of the family.

Abdullaev notes that while the Soviet system ‘eroded’ the avlod to a certain extent, it continued to exist as a ‘parallel system of power’.\(^{24}\) Navruz Nekbakhtshoev also argues that the Soviet structures and programs indirectly altered the avlod, as well as pushing it out of the ‘legitimate public space’; however, he notes that


\(^{23}\) The family of Tanchi Kholmurodov, a typical patriarchal family in the Qurghonteppa region, consisted of 12 people; two of his elder sons were formally independent, but still brought all their money to their father. The family worked as a single brigade in a state farm, with an aggregate annual wage of 12,000 roubles. Tanchi Kholmurodov used the money as he saw fit (for example, he had bought a car and a motorcycle), and ‘nobody felt hurt about it’. See: *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 20 March 1975.

despite these changes the *avlod* is still an important concept in Tajikistan today, as noted by the use of ‘which *avlod* are you from?’ as a common question.\(^{25}\) The answer to this question would include a recitation of ancestry because of the importance of the exchange of ‘genealogical information’ in determining ‘identity’ and ‘difference’, as kinship differences are not visible.\(^{26}\) For the Uzbeks in Tajikistan who no longer have ‘tribal divisions’, the social structure is also based on the *avlod*, though significantly less than for Tajiks. The *avlod* structure ‘encompasses’ approximately 46 per cent of the detribalised Uzbeks compared with 82 per cent of certain Tajik ‘subgroups’\(^{27}\)—the Kulobis being at the highest range.\(^{28}\) Meanwhile, Shirin Akiner argues that the *avlod* is most prevalent among the resettled groups from Darvoz and Qarotegin (Gharm), who resisted assimilation most noticeably.\(^{29}\)

The *avlod’s* main distinction from the undivided patriarchal family is the fact that it presents, in its ideal form, the entity of *all* relatives over seven generations, both dead and alive, and as such can incorporate more than one family.\(^{30}\) Both types are derivatives of the primordial agnate clan, which means that they are essentially kinship systems. The concept of *avlod* is related to the phenomenon of *mahalla*—the neighbourhood community in a city block or village. Residents in a given territory often form a cohesive and exclusive entity that has its own organs of self-administration (*mahalla* committees, sanctioned and recognised by the civil authorities), gathering place (usually a mosque) and an array of ritual events. The *mahalla* committees are rarely elected but rather are formed by people of influence—be they local elders, spiritual leaders, wealthy merchants or, in the civil war era, armed gangs’ commanders. They carry out a wide range of duties: they

- form public opinion
- monitor observation of *shari’a*, *adat* and localistic patterns of behaviour

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\(^{25}\) Nekbakhtshoev, *Clan Politics*, p. 29. Navruz Nekbakhtshoev provides an example of the use of *mahallas* for interaction between Tajiks, noting the typical question between Tajiks who have just met each other: ‘*Shumo az kadom mahalla?*’ (Which *mahalla* are you from). Nekbakhtshoev notes that it is a general ‘where are you from?’ question that may require further inquiry once place of origin is determined. The next, even more localised identity question, if locality is insufficient for the interaction, is given as ‘*shumo az kadom avlod?*’ (literally, ‘which *avlod* are you from?’).

\(^{26}\) Nekbakhtshoev, *Clan Politics*, pp. 22, 29.


\(^{28}\) Olimova and Bosc, *Labor Migration in Tajikistan*, p. 56.

\(^{29}\) Akiner, *Tajikistan*, pp. 24, 42.

\(^{30}\) An example of the classic *avlod* is a group of families who reside in the village of Qulbai Poyon: a certain Tohirbay, who died in the 1910s, had 10 children—four of them married offspring of uncles on the father’s side, four married children of uncles on the mother’s side, and two remaining sons took wives from amongst distant relatives. Three generations later, Tohirbay’s *avlod* consisted of more than 200 people, who cherished his memory and maintained a strong family cohesion. See: O. A. Sukhareva, ‘Traditsiia semeino-rodstvennykh brakov u narodov Srednei Azii’, in *Sem’ia i semeinye obriadyi u narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana*, ed. G. P. Snesarev (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), p. 122.
impose penalties on violators, including money payouts and ostracisation
• sanction real estate transactions
• collect municipal taxes
• organise ceremonial affairs—for example, weddings and funerals.

It is, however, the mahalla’s role as a means of transmission of socially significant information and of regeneration of the traditional ways of life that appears to be paramount for understanding political processes in contemporary Tajikistan. Poliakov, describing the situation in the late 1980s, has written that

the mahalla … has ideological life entirely and firmly in its hands. The committee and its active members, the elders, use very refined techniques to direct the education of the youth. The channelling and, even more important, the interpretation of information is extremely simple: the forty-year-old father passes it from the mosque to his twenty-year-old son and his year-old grandson … In rural areas the mahalla controls all aspects of life for people … even more completely than it does in the city. 31

One more recent study notes that in villages in Tajikistan the mahalla takes on an extra meaning. Here the mahalla can be used to refer to the entire community, and even to the community leader, the rais. 32 Many have noted the longevity of the mahalla as a relevant social institution. Other scholars write that the guzors 33 and mahallas that pre-existed the Soviet Union in Central Asia were integrated into Soviet power structures and functioned as a unit of the state. 34 Olivier Roy cites the mahalla as a relevant entity before, during and after the Soviet era in Tajikistan. He argues, in line with his analysis of other identity categories and institutions, that the mahalla survived collectivisation and population transfers and was ‘reincarnated’ in the collective farm. 35 Similarly, in an urban context, Soviet-era population transfers often involved people from the same mahalla being resettled in the same apartment building. 36

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31 Poliakov, Everyday Islam, pp. 78–9. Similarly, in a contemporary study on both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Sabine Freizer notes that mahallas, which ‘formed’ in the pre-Soviet era, regulated and assisted many aspects of a person’s life. Certain elders within the community mediated disputes, helped organise communal life-cycle celebrations, and facilitated (mutual) assistance. The mahalla was essentially a ‘forum where local values, rules of behaviour and common needs were defined’. See: Sabine Freizer, ‘Central Asian Fragmented Civil Society: Communal and Neoliberal Forms in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan’, in Exploring Civil Society: Political and Cultural Contexts, eds Marlies Glasius, David Lewis and Hakan Seckinelgin (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 116.
33 A small neighbourhood community, sometimes a single street.
34 Schoeberlein-Engel, Identity in Central Asia, pp. 266–7; Poliakov, Everyday Islam, p. 77; Freizer, ‘Central Asian Fragmented Civil Society’, p. 116. Freizer writes that the mahallas ‘often functioned in symbiosis with communist institutions’.
36 Poliakov, Everyday Islam, p. 77.
It is appropriate to note in this context that the mahalla mosque in Tajikistan is not necessarily a centre of purely religious activities. In fact, its function as a communicative hub of the community—gapkhona or mehmonkhona—is at least equally meaningful and certainly dates to pre-Islamic times. Unlike the Friday mosque, the mahalla prayer space is primarily perceived as ‘the public gathering point of the male population of the mahalla; kitchen utensils are kept there and hearths are set up in its yard’. In the mountainous areas east of Dushanbe the meeting place of a mahalla mosque is often referred to as alovkhona, or ‘the house of fire’—clearly a survivor of Zoroastrian rites.

Male unions, widely known throughout the ancient world from Greece to China, remain very much a reality in today’s Tajikistan. Their regular assemblies, known as gashtak, gapkhuri, gap, ziyofat, osh, tukma, jura or maslihat in various localities of the country, share several common features:

- taboo against women’s presence
- initiation procedures for newcomers
- absolute authority of the leader—bobo, or ‘grandfather’ (hence the nickname of Sangak Safarov, the infamous Tajik warlord in 1992–93: bobo Sangak)
- obedience and even servility of younger members to the older ones, but only within the limits of a given gashtak.

The late 1980s saw a rapid revival of the tradition of male unions in Tajikistan. It was especially evident in the cities, where they operated under the mask of newly allowed public associations and sports clubs. It has been noted, however, that in modern gashtaks vertical ties between generations are giving way to horizontal links, according to professional, criminal or other common interests.

It is noteworthy that youngsters in such formations are encouraged to go in for combat sports, such as sambo, judo and karate. Yaqubjon Salimov, a racketeer and minister of interior of Tajikistan from late 1992 to 1995, acquired some of the necessary skills for his career in the 1970s fighting for his gashtak based in the Dushanbe suburb of Obdoron against rivals from Shomansur.

In rural districts of Tajikistan, mahalla and gashtak are almost invariably mere extensions of avlod. The last is, first of all, a kinship structure and as such performs primarily controlling and regulatory functions. The term mahalla has a territorial connotation and is essentially an organisational system. Gashtak, originally a subunit of avlod, has been acquiring a new universal function: the

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37 Poliakov, Traditsionalizm v sovremennom sredneaziatskom obshchestve, p. 71.
40 Confidential source in Dushanbe, January 1996.
establishment and maintenance of viable ties amongst members of a certain occupation in the community vis-a-vis external forces, including the state. In the cities the distinction between the three is blurred, but what really matters in this case is the fact that, for the bulk of the Tajiks, the collective form of self-consciousness is yet to be replaced with the individualistic one. For many, their lives are still determined to a great extent by long-established codes and the will of various kinship and communal structures, even if those structures have undergone alteration and adaptation in the Soviet era. A representative sociological survey conducted in 11 republics and regions of the USSR between 1988 and 1990 showed that 49 per cent of the population of Tajikistan was guided in their behaviour primarily by the rules prescribed by the family, compared with 26 per cent in Moscow; the rules set by the state and society at large proved to be nowhere near as authoritative as in this Central Asian republic.\(^{41}\)

Patriarchy, interpreted as a ‘kinship-ordered social structure with strictly defined sex roles in which women are subordinated to men’,\(^{42}\) serves as a fair indication of the persistence of traditional patterns in Tajik society. The entry of women into public life, sponsored and encouraged by Soviet authorities, had weakened patriarchy to a substantial extent, but the socialisation of women, especially in rural areas of Tajikistan, remains centred on the patrilineal family and focuses on childrearing, limiting their mobility and access to employment and education (Table 4.2). It has been estimated that in Tajikistan a woman with a family of five spends an average of 45 hours a week running the household,\(^{43}\) which effectively precludes her from pursuing alternative life options.

### Table 4.2 Comparative Social Indicators in Tajikistan and the Soviet Union as a Whole, 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social indicators</th>
<th>USSR</th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender ratio: females per 100 males</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force: % female</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education: % of college population that is female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertility rate</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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The legal status of women in Tajikistan is not different from that of men, but in practice patriarchal forms of control over women, such as the senior male’s domination in the avlod, restrictive codes of behaviour and a specific public opinion that holds female virtue the sine qua non of family honour, cast strong doubt on the universal effectiveness of emancipatory measures implemented in Soviet Central Asia. In private life especially, a significant proportion of Tajik women has not achieved freedom from traditional patriarchal structures. A study conducted in 1990 amongst female students of Dushanbe tertiary institutions—arguably one of the most fully socialised and mobile strata of the populace—has yielded quite revealing results (Table 4.3).

### Table 4.3 Motivation for Marriage amongst College Students, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motives</th>
<th>National composition of the family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual love</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonality of spiritual interests</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to have a family</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ will</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In rural areas, the role of the family in determining the future for a girl is near absolute. Parents would more often than not give a daughter away without asking for her consent, on the basis of economic considerations and the interests of the avlod. The importance of dynastic marriages for nomenklatura clans in Tajikistan will be illustrated in a subsequent chapter; for now it is appropriate to stress the general point made for the traditional society: ‘family leaders, government elites, and religious officials may promote marriages between different families as a means of enhancing or defending their political and social status, of gaining property and other wealth, or of extending business contacts and networks … The same can be said for nonelite families.’ There are ‘still many matrimonial arrangements between cousins amongst Tajiks, such as marrying [a] mother’s brother’s daughter and marriages between two brothers’ children. In fact, mountain Tajiks disapprove of marriages between non-relatives.’ Betrothal at the age of nine or even two is not infrequent in Yaghnob, for example. Of course, the actual marriage is usually postponed until the age of consent, but the
bride-to-be constantly remains ‘the subject of attention and speculation, not in terms of beauty and physique, but the emerging aptness as a house-keeper and worker. These qualities are valued most of all.’

The feeling of being trapped between traditional and modern ways of life often results in tragedy: Tajikistan was the only republic in the USSR where women constituted the majority (52 per cent) of those who committed suicide; self-immolation was an especially gruesome method of settling scores with life amongst women ‘confined to the family circle’. A lengthy quotation from a Tajik academic probably gives the best account of the state of affairs in the republic at the end of the Soviet era:

The Tajik woman, who has experienced fear of derision, punishment, and solitude for centuries, has been trying to fulfil all whims and demands of the husband and his family with obedience and has been enduring injustice, cruelty and abasement. They have penetrated her flesh and blood and have been transmitted from generation to generation, to daughters and grand-daughters. This situation, fortified by public opinion and learned through experience, traditions and family and marriage customs, has oriented the Tajik girl towards married life and the role of the mother of a large family at a very early age. The same experience has cultivated in her such features as indecisiveness, servility, reticence, unquestionable subordination to the husband and parents’ will, modesty and high regard to a woman’s virtue and a mother’s duty.

For 70 years traditional family structures and values in Tajikistan continued to exist parallel to and independently of official ideology, concealed from the eyes of strangers and proving to be ‘something difficult to control even for a Soviet-style state’. With the weakening of the communist monolith in the late 1980s, they began to play a more salient role in local politics. When alternative political organisations and social movements, such as Rastokhez and the Democratic Party, emerged in Tajikistan, their rank-and-file membership consisted more so of avlods, mahalla committees and men’s unions related to the political leaders by blood or otherwise, rather than individuals sharing their programmatic ideals. The Islamic Revival Party, despite its stated ideology, employed the same tactics.

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48 Saodat Safarova, ‘Vyzov, broshennyi zhizni’, *Pamir*, No. 8 (1988), pp. 140, 142. In 1987, 57 cases of female suicide were registered in the Leninobod oblast. None of them was properly investigated.
52 This is discussed later in a dedicated section on the Islamic Revival Party.
In times of political instability, traditional institutions tend to play an ever-growing part in providing security and welfare to the populace in Central Asia. It has been revealed that even in the period of Soviet stagnation, and even in such a cosmopolitan and heavily industrialised city as Tashkent, at least 30 per cent of indigenous males were actively involved in the gap and tukma activities. In Tajikistan, where the process of urbanisation was far less advanced and a high percentage of city-dwellers were still employed in agriculture, this figure must have been much higher. Moreover, beginning in the late 1980s, quasi-traditional structures began to evolve in hitherto unaffected areas. In the Dushanbe suburb of Bofanda, for example, residents of four nine-storey apartment buildings decided in 1989 to pool their efforts to cope with day-to-day problems, such as frequent power failures and garbage disposal. They furnished a gathering place in the yard (which also served as a mosque), and elected a mahalla committee, comprising a vocational schoolteacher, a cinema director and the supplies manager of a tannery cum self-taught mullah. This mahalla would not be different from thousands others around the country, but for the fact that 80 per cent of Bofanda residents at the time were workers at the Tajik textile combine and thus mostly non-Tajiks. As a result, only 10–15 people attend purely religious events in that community, while the rest are more interested in maintenance and leisure activities. During outbreaks of civil disorder in 1990 and 1992, all the grown men of the mahalla formed a self-defence unit, regardless of their nationality or political and religious affiliation.

In summary, the kinship-familial setting of Tajik society has coped well with the realities of Soviet rule. The seemingly omnipresent and omnipotent party-state machine failed to alter significantly the major attitudes to the problems of human existence and cultural order amongst the Tajiks. The communist regime, although it was the only sanctioned political system in the society, could not transform what Shmuel Eisenstadt has called the second level of organisational activities—that is, the traditional collectivities and communities ‘whose systemic boundaries are organised or patterned around symbols or likeness of common attributes and of participation in them, but which are not necessarily structured as systems with clear organisational boundaries’. The interaction of the state and traditional society did limit the effectiveness of the state, but the way in which the two operated helped, in certain situations, to gain people’s acceptance of communist rule. For example, in one village an observer noted that by the late Soviet era most of the government officials were from the village itself. These officials, being tied by traditional bonds, used the state to assist

54 Information gathered during fieldwork in Tajikistan in February 1995.
those in their family and patronage networks. The result was an acceptance of Soviet rule and then, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, ‘deep shock, confusion, and disbelief’, followed a year later by yearning for a return to the ‘former Communist status quo’.  

Traditional Social Institutions in the Collective Farm

During the communist era the Soviets maintained control at the national level over the distribution of resources and the promotion of cadres; however, in the rural areas the Soviet security apparatus and central government representatives had much less of a presence than in the cities. In the rural areas during the early Soviet era the government allowed already established local leaders to be the middlemen between the people and the state. This allowed some local leaders to maintain their own power bases. The government did not destroy the pre-existing solidarity groups (such as qaum, avlod, mahalla). Instead it often formed collective farms (kolkhozes) from some of these groups, allowing their structure to remain intact throughout the Soviet era. Within the kolkhoz, the qaum and mahalla were often duplicated/transferred wholesale into the work brigades and housing estates (uchatska). In Olivier Roy’s words, the kolkhozes ‘became the new tribes of Central Asia’. The phenomenon of the creation of collective farms on the basis of pre-existing avlods, as described by researchers in the 1950s, was noted above. Sergei Poliakov makes a similar argument based on later research. He describes land administration in rural Central Asia as having been changed ‘in name, but not in substance’ by collectivisation, with local patterns of authority transferred into the collective farms and the ‘customary way of life unaffected’. And, like Roy, Poliakov also notes that collective farms and work brigades in rural Central Asia were formed on the basis of traditional communal solidarity groups. He provides as an example 13 avlods in a town in northern Tajikistan being established as 13 kolkhozes. And after these 13 farms were united into a single kolkhoz, these avlods became discrete work brigades.

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56 Tett, Ambiguous Alliances, pp. 76, 78, 191, 196.
57 Roy, The New Central Asia, pp. 85–6. Roy calls these leaders the ‘new beys and khans’.
59 Ershov et al., Kultura i byt tadzhikskogo kolkhoznogo krestianstva, p. 62.
62 Poliakov, Everyday Islam, pp. 17, 140. Furthermore, he notes that ‘in distributing personal-use plots to collective farm workers … the boundaries of the old “tribal” and “avlod” holdings were strictly observed’. Ibid., p. 17.
There was an attempt by the Soviets to break apart these traditional solidarity groupings, starting in the mid 1950s, when the state restructured the *kolkhoz*. At this time the government (at a higher level) started to appoint the head of the *kolkhoz* and to consolidate multiple *kolkhozes* into one state farm (*sovkhoz*).\(^{63}\) These changes, however, did not destroy the solidarity groups, which often remained intact. Sometimes, the *kolkhoz* itself became a new solidarity group. In either case, relatively autonomous communities persisted.\(^{64}\) Collectivisation placed considerable resources under the control of collective farm bosses; however, the patterns of farm-boss strength and patronage varied considerably throughout the Soviet Union, and within Central Asia, though generally speaking the Soviet state relied on farm bosses for mobilisation of rural labour, resource distribution, effective use of technical resources, and fulfilment of agricultural plans. The collective farms soon became ‘critical instruments of social control’.\(^{65}\) The *kolkhoz* leadership, thanks to its monopoly on the distribution of resources within the community, as well as the option of physical force, was able to control the inhabitants of the *kolkhoz*. The *kolkhoz* was also able to assist members who had left the community. *Kolkhozniks* who moved to cities were able to rely on a network of former members of their *kolkhoz* as well as the collective farm leadership’s connections in the Communist Party bureaucracy.\(^{66}\)

State control over collective farms was inadvertently weakened during Khrushchev’s time in office and even further during Brezhnev’s tenure. By this time collective farm chairs ‘emerged as Soviet style local strongmen’.\(^{67}\) Farm chairmen and factory bosses were engaged with regional politicians in patronage networks in which the exchange was protection and access to resources for the bosses in return for illicit income for the politicians. For example, in Qurghonteppa the Leninobodi elite had endeavoured to install their own people

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63 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 85–9, 102–6; Roy, ‘Soviet Legacies and Western Aid Imperatives in the New Central Asia’, p. 128. Bliss describes the process of creating larger units: ‘The originally small cooperative farms (*kolkhoz*) were first amalgamated into larger units and then, sometime in the early 1970s, the majority of these were turned into purely state-run farms. This created a strong economic unit with a mandate extending far beyond the actual work of a farm. The *sovkhoz* organised and maintained the entire infrastructure, ranging from water and energy supplies to running the nursery and primary schools. Democratically elected members of each *sovkhoz* were not able to make real decisions or carry out any administrative functions, because everything depended de facto on the leader of the *sovkhoz* and his budget.’ See: Frank Bliss, *Social and Economic Change in the Pamirs (Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan)* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 246.

64 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 85–9, 102–6; Roy, ‘Soviet Legacies and Western Aid Imperatives in the New Central Asia’, p. 128. Eventually, according to Roy, the Communist Party settled on a policy of manipulating existing regional factions against each other instead of trying to reconfigure them.


66 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 88. Kilavuz writes further: ‘The *kolkhoz* was the main source of its members’ work, social welfare and social services, income, irrigation and housing. The Soviet system gave the *brigadirs* (*kolkhoz* brigade leaders) immense power within the *kolkhoz* they directed. The *brigadirs* had control over the economic resources in the *kolkhoz*, and the power to distribute these resources as they wished.’

67 Markowitz, *Collapsed and Prebendal States in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 38–9, 54, in regards to Tajikistan.
(Leninobodis, those of Leninobodi descent or ethnic Uzbeks) as collective farm chairs and district *raikom* secretaries in order to control the region’s wealth-producing bases, while Kulob, with its relatively modest economic base, was of much less interest to the Leninobodi elite. In Kulob, local authority figures embezzled agricultural profits while taking over local law enforcement and judicial agencies as a way to protect their scheme. By the end of the Soviet period, farm bosses and regional politicians in Kulob exercised ‘significant influence’ over law enforcement agencies and the courts while increasingly relying on illegal income. As for the Gharmi Tajiks in Qurghonteppa, they were, towards the end of the Soviet era, more focused on ‘free enterprise’ and positioned themselves in opposition to the collective farm directors, who were often Uzbeks or Kulobis.

**Regionalism: The Ultimate Cause of Social Polarisation**

Apart from familial and religious affiliations, which overlap and complement one another, there is another important source of identity that arguably matters most for Tajiks in the context of political processes. Much of the population of Tajikistan self-identifies not by ethnicity, but by locale. Amongst Tajiks, individuals identify themselves by town or region of origin. The use of ‘Tajik’ is, of course, only for identifying oneself to outsiders.

French scholar Olivier Roy was one of the first in the West to attempt an analysis of ‘the influence of political loyalties based on geographic origin’ in shaping conflict in Tajikistan, defining this phenomenon as ‘localism’. He also drew a very important distinction between ‘localism’ and the social fragmentation along clan and ethnic lines, thus contrasting with so many authors who are tempted to mix together ‘the long-suppressed clan, regional and ethnic rivalries’ in Tajikistan.

Roy’s early work, however, is somewhat sketchy, and its other major postulate, that ‘the present fragmentation is largely a product of the Soviet period’, could be misleading. Regional identities were not created during the Soviet era, but had in fact already been important at both the elite and the non-elite levels. Soviet policies, however, gave these identities the ‘meaning and structure’ that

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they currently have by politicising regional identities, giving them relevance at both the elite and the non-elite levels. ‘Which region are you from?’ is a standard inquiry in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, although in Tajikistan the question became more sensitive after the civil war. Individuals may cite the wider region of their origin or a town within it, depending on the situation. Nevertheless, many here identify with their region of origin, even after being three generations removed. People identify with their paternal grandfather’s place of birth, and in order to identify with that region, according to popular belief, an individual’s ancestors must have been there for a minimum of three generations.74

In Tajikistan, regional identity can be seen as a factor in not just group conflict and competition, but also in many types of other social behaviour such as marriage preferences for co-regionals and university socialisation patterns, where there are reports of students from the same region eating, drinking and living together, with the occasional fights between groups of youths from different regions.75 Locally based identities, whether at the regional, village or mahalla level, can be significant when a person leaves their home. In their new location their origin is frequently employed to seek assistance from co-regionals.76 ‘Regionalism’, according to presidential candidate Davlat Khudonazarov, ‘manifested itself even in the spatial distribution of Dushanbe, where people of the same region often lived clustered together.’77

It has been shown in the preceding chapters that the entire course of Tajik history, both before and after the 1917 revolution, has been conducive to the emergence and survival of distinctive sub-ethnic communities that could never merge effectively into a modern nation. Called mahallagaroyi or mantaqagaroyi in the Tajik language, this phenomenon will hereinafter be referred to as ‘regionalism’, which appears to be a more precise term than ‘localism’, both linguistically and in view of the realities in today’s Tajikistan. In this study, the region is understood to be an area with a recognisable community that has78

74 Kilavuz, Understanding Violent Conflict, pp. 80–1, 88.
• distinctive physical traits, such as weather, length of growing season, vegetation, and similar features
• a distinctive history
• special cultural characteristics such as dialect, costume, architecture, use of given tools, rituals—what is referred to in anthropology as a ‘culture area’
• natural and artificial barriers—for example, mountain ranges and administrative borders
• a focus of gravitation, such as a trade centre and/or political or historical capital
• an ad-hoc problem: environmental pollution, crime, ethnic tension, and so on.

Akiner lists the cultural ‘markers’ of the various sub-Tajik regional identities as including ‘group histories, social structures, customs, music, folklore, and material culture (e.g., traditional styles of clothing and ornamental designs)’. Kilavuz provides a very similar list of markers when she writes that significant differences, especially cultural, are given for those from the different regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The people themselves cite regional differences amongst the same ethnic group that manifest in ‘dialect, physical appearance, traditions and customs’. In regards to language, Muriel Atkin notes that while members of the Tajik elite can speak literary Tajik (and Russian), most people speak various Tajik dialects, divided most broadly between northern and southern dialects, with ‘several further subdivisions’. Kilavuz cautions that while the regions may have their own characteristic dialects, with differences even within the region, many people have the ability to speak in different dialects, including the standard literary form promoted by the government. Akiner adds ‘psychological stereotyping’ as a significant factor in marking group boundaries amongst Tajiks. The examples of stereotypes she provides are that: Qaroteginis (Gharmis) are ‘flexible and adaptable’; Kulobis are ‘conservative and obstinate, reluctant to compromise’; and ‘northerners like consensus and continuity, [and] are good at manipulating people’.

Akiner also argues for the importance of geographical influences, particularly the mountain–plains dichotomy, on the distinct sub-Tajik identities, citing these regions of Tajikistan—having distinct ‘economic, political and cultural environments’—traditionally having a low level of interaction with each other.

82 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 80–1. She then goes on to cite the primacy of ancestry over dialect in determining identity.
83 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 7, n. 3.
in the Soviet era. By the end of the Soviet era, the majority of Tajiks lived in rural areas and more than 80 per cent of the rural population still lived in their place of birth, in one of more than 3000 villages. Rural social life in Tajikistan, the least urbanised of the Soviet republics, was still ‘comparatively isolated and inward focused’. At this time many villages in Tajikistan were mono-ethnic, and where they were multi-ethnic they may in fact be divided into mono-ethnic neighbourhoods. In addition, Tajik villagers are, according to several Soviet-era researchers, ‘highly endogamous’. Atkin, however, warns that these conclusions should be viewed with caution due to the ‘imprecision’ of the Uzbek and Tajik nationality categories.

Aziz Niyazi sets a contrast when describing Tajiks in southern Tajikistan, noting that they are more isolated and ‘self-contained’. He posits that they (Kulobi and Gharmi Tajiks) are, in comparison with valley Tajiks (for example, Ferghana Valley Tajiks), subjected to more fragmented local subcultures. The term ‘Gharmi Tajiks’ (hereinafter ‘Gharmis’) refers to Tajiks from the now defunct Province of Gharm—a usage that began after the large-scale transfer of Tajiks from Gharm Province to the lowlands of the Vakhsh Valley; however, the term ‘Qaroteginis’ is also used, as Gharm Province included the Qarotegin Valley, as well as the smaller Darvoz and Vakhyo valleys. Qarotegin and Darvoz, as well as provinces such as Kulob, roughly match pre-Soviet areas that were ruled as semi-independent 

In the following analysis, regions and regionalism are treated as predominantly cultural categories; many issues pertaining to regional sub-ethnic identities in Tajikistan in historical perspective have already been discussed. The crucial point about regionalism in contemporary Tajikistan is that, unlike in America or Europe, it does not denote the interrelationship between the several areas in the total nation, and, therefore, has a pronounced divisive meaning. Economic factors and institutional variables (such as regional representation in decision-making bodies) play a subordinate role in shaping self-awareness in a given region compared with the fundamental ‘givens’ of communal affect; still, they warrant a thorough examination, for they do influence the intensity of this self-awareness and the ways it transforms into political action.

**The Regions**

The administrative demarcation in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was largely implemented along pre-existent boundaries. The constituent regions were
incorporated into the All-Union division of labour, but the level of economic integration inside the republic remained low—the potential for productive cooperation between oblasts and raions of the republic in the late 1980s was 12–18 per cent.91 The specific Soviet economic policy, however, was only one element in the intricate mosaic of inter-regional interests and contradictions in the republic, which in recent years have acquired the following configuration.

I. Leninobod

Now renamed Sughd, the Leninobod oblast (or viloyat in Tajik) in the north with its centre in Khujand has always been the most developed and populated part of Tajikistan (Table 4.4). Its economy is based on grain, cotton-growing and modern industry: in 1992, 616 of the republic’s 733 factories were located there.92 In 1994, this region accounted for 62 per cent of the state budget’s revenues.93 The spirit of entrepreneurship has never been extinguished amongst the Khujandis; even at the height of Stalin’s rule they continued with private productive activities, mainly on family allotments, and with trade, which allowed for higher living standards than elsewhere in Tajikistan.94 Consequently, the cooperative movement initiated in the USSR in the late 1980s, and the process of small privatisation that followed, has yielded impressive results. The variety of privatised, semi-privatised and de facto-privatised enterprises operational in Khujand (usually headed by government officials of some kind) in the immediate post-independence period was astounding.95

Inside Tajikistan, the Khujandis have a reputation of being pragmatic people obsessed with making a profit and prone to striking dubious deals and gambling.96 It is also believed that

93 The authors are indebted to Dr Azizullo Avezov, director of the Khujand Branch of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Tajik Academy of Sciences, for the data related to the economic performance of the regions supplied during a series of interviews in March 1995 in Khujand.
95 For example, the government has a 40 per cent stake in the Khujand-based ‘Sham’ Joint-Stock Company, which was established in 1988 on the basis of several cotton-processing plants; another 40 per cent belongs to the employees and the remaining 20 per cent to private investors. In 1994, however, all profits of the company were utilised single-handedly by Sham’s president, Fattoh Azizov, a close of the then Prime-Minister Jamshed Karimov, and the state’s participation in running the enterprise was reduced to supplying raw materials and energy at heavily subsidised prices. (Taped interview with a confidential source in Khujand, 7 March 1995).
96 Their collective nickname, budanaboz (‘quail fight fan’), testifies to this stereotype. At present, budik is heard more often, and carries with it the connotation of someone lacking the characteristics of an honest, straight-talking man with manly habits.
the political ideal of the Leninobodis is a combination of rigid authoritarian central power and freedom of private entrepreneurship and initiative … The freedom of entrepreneurship by no means is associated with freedom per se, it is realised through communal mechanisms with their authoritarian character, paternalism and negation of individualism.\(^{97}\)

The Leninobod/Sughd oblast is an organic part of the multi-ethnic Ferghana Valley and, in terms of infrastructure and even ethnic composition, it is closer to Uzbekistan than rump Tajikistan; suffice to mention that Uzbeks make up 43 per cent of the population in the northernmost Asht raion.\(^{98}\) This region was connected with Dushanbe by one narrow mountain road, which was out of operation several months a year; there is no direct railway link, and the only reliable means of transportation for many years was airplane. The sense of isolation from the rest of Tajikistan is so entrenched that Khujandi businessmen flying from their hometown to Dushanbe would routinely say that they were going "to Tajikistan".\(^{99}\) Valley Tajiks who live in the north have been traditionally viewed as half-Turkicised by mountain Tajiks in the south and south-east of the republic. In their turn, some Khujandis go to great lengths to assert their purity and cultural superiority, claiming, for example, that they are direct descendants of the Aryans, Cyrus the Great and Ismoil Somoni, and that only ignorant people would say their capital city is 2500 years old, because in reality it has a 8400-year history.\(^{100}\)

### Table 4.4 Urban and Rural Populations of Tajikistan, 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Leninobod oblast</th>
<th>Kulob oblast</th>
<th>Qurghonteppa oblast</th>
<th>GBAO^</th>
<th>Gharm group of raions</th>
<th>Hisor raion*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5 092 603</td>
<td>1 554 145</td>
<td>619 066</td>
<td>1 044 920</td>
<td>160 887</td>
<td>224 615</td>
<td>259 258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1 655 105</td>
<td>(32.5%)</td>
<td>522 384</td>
<td>156 130</td>
<td>182 009</td>
<td>20 154</td>
<td>9 510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(25.2%)</td>
<td>(17.4%)</td>
<td>(12.5%)</td>
<td>(4.2%)</td>
<td>(25.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3 437 498</td>
<td>1 031 761</td>
<td>462 936</td>
<td>862 911</td>
<td>140 733</td>
<td>215 105</td>
<td>193 310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(67.5%)</td>
<td>(66.3%)</td>
<td>(74.8%)</td>
<td>(82.6%)</td>
<td>(87.5%)</td>
<td>(95.8%)</td>
<td>(74.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast
* Including the city of Tursunzoda


\(^{100}\) Tirozi jahon (5 March 1994).
Between 1946 and 1991, the top leadership of Tajikistan was invariably recruited from Leninobod (Table 4.5). In addition to the position of first secretary of the republican Party Central Committee, people from the north were traditionally in charge of industry and trade, and, generally, dominated the top party organs. Moreover, the oblast enjoyed the privilege of trading abroad directly, bypassing Dushanbe. Beginning with Jabbor Rasulov, the CPT Central Committee (CC) first secretary in 1961–82, the Leninobodi ruling elite adopted a truly Machiavellian tactic in preserving their control: representatives of other regions did gain access to positions of authority, however, they were selected ‘not as people who cherished [the] interests of their compatriots, but spineless individuals, or, even worse, “marginals” (those who had a Russian or Leninobodi wife, or had been brought up somewhere “far away”), or complete nincompoops, in order to discredit the southern nomenklatura clans in the eyes of Moscow’.101 Hikmatullo Nasriddinov, a Kulobi who was appointed minister for irrigation in 1980, remembers with a degree of bitterness that one condition of his promotion was he could never employ fellow-townsmen in the ministry:

Of course, these incantations of Jabbor Rasulov about inadmissibility of nepotism and favouritism were correct. But I saw that Rasulov himself, as well as his high-placed co-regionalists, did not uphold them. Their words were one thing, and their deeds—quite another. They tried in every imaginable way to plant cadres from the North in positions of influence and income in the mountainous regions.102

Table 4.5 Regional and Ethnic Composition of the CPT Central Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Total membership</th>
<th>Leninobod</th>
<th>Khatlon</th>
<th>Hisor</th>
<th>Gharm</th>
<th>GBAO*</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Unidentified locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123 (1960)</td>
<td>42 (34.1%)</td>
<td>22 (17.8%)</td>
<td>9 (7.3%)</td>
<td>4 (3.5%)</td>
<td>9 (7.3%)</td>
<td>28 (22.7%)</td>
<td>9 (7.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140 (1981)</td>
<td>48 (34.2%)</td>
<td>24 (17.1%)</td>
<td>7 (5%)</td>
<td>8 (5.7%)</td>
<td>11 (7.9%)</td>
<td>30 (21.4%)</td>
<td>12 (8.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast

Notes: Khatlon includes Kulob and Qurghonteppa; Gharm includes adjacent mountain districts; ‘unidentified locals’ are mostly people born in Dushanbe or Tajiks of Samarkand or Bukhara origin and Asians whose affiliation to regions in Tajikistan could not be traced.

Source: Printed materials of the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth congresses of the CPT and party telephone directories.

It would be wrong to depict the Leninobodi regional clique as a cohesive entity with a clear-cut political agenda. After all, it is an area where traditional ties and...
allegiances have been most weakened both by communist efforts at modernisation and by the rekindled taste for a market economy. There is an assortment of rival kinship and solidarity networks, which came into existence in the Soviet period and continued to play a pivotal role in contemporary Tajik politics in the immediate post-independence era. The Uroteppa (Istaravshon) ‘clan’ headed by Salohiddin Hasanov, the Panjakent grouping centred on Isomitdin Salohiddinov, the Qayraqqum-Yaghnob cluster represented by Safarali Kenjaev, and the Osimov-Olimov family agglomeration in Khujand, which had viable ties in the religious establishment throughout Central Asia, were only a few of these groups. All of them competed for greater autonomy and larger allocations for their patrimonies, or for political influence on the republican level, in defiance of the more powerful and well-established structures, such as the Leninobod-Kanibodom group of families (the Arabovs-Karimovs), Abdumalik Abdullojonov’s shadowy empire, or ex-premier Samadov’s patronage web. In times of peril, however, the feeling of regional loyalty invariably proves stronger than the resentments of more localised ambitions. This was the case when a Leninobodi, Rahmon Nabiev, was removed from the leadership of Tajikistan in 1985 and the Kremlin was looking for a replacement from amongst mountain Tajiks. This situation continued into the early post-independence era—all strongmen in the region united in order to defend the privileged status of their homeland.

II. Kulob

The Kulob region in the south is a predominantly agricultural zone—in 1989, only 16.5 per cent of those employed worked in industry.\footnote{Itozi Vsesouznoi perepisi naselenia 1989 goda po Tadzhikskoi SSR, Vol. II, p. 348.} Cotton was and still is the single most important crop, and foodstuffs have had to be imported from adjacent districts and Uzbekistan. Rural overpopulation and hidden unemployment became perceivable as early as the mid 1960s, and a decision was made in Moscow to create the South Tajik Territorial Manufacturing Complex (STTMC) to tackle this problem. The project envisaged the accelerated industrial development of the region as well as the continuing increase of cotton production in the newly irrigated lands.\footnote{The Tenth Five-Year Plan (1976–80) stipulated that 65 per cent of growth in industrial and agricultural output in Tajikistan was to be achieved through developing the STTMC. See: ‘Iuzhno-Tadzhikskii kompleks—iz piatiletki deviatoi—v desiatuiu’, Druzhba narodov, No. 2 (1976), p. 188.} Its practical implementation was to be supervised by the republican authorities—that is, people from the north. Naturally, there has emerged an understanding between elite groups from Khujand and Kulob, which reached symbolic heights in 1990 when the two cities became twins.
Kulob featured prominently in the medieval history of Central Asia. Its lancers were famous for their bravery and recklessness. The Kulobis are stereotyped as hardworking people, short-tempered and not particularly bright. Before the creation of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, the Kulobis made up 60 per cent of the population of Eastern Bukhara, and, as has been mentioned, were viewed as real ‘mountain’ Tajiks, in opposition to the Turkicised ‘valley’ Tajiks in the north. In the 1980s, the feeling of past greatness was still alive. A certain Berdyeva, a Supreme Soviet deputy from Kulob, once stirred a sensation when she said in public: ‘I wonder why everyone thinks that a Kulobi woman cannot give birth to a leader.’ Since independence, a concerted program has been initiated by local intellectuals to revise the annals of history and portray Kulob as the cradle of Zoroastrian civilisation, blessed with a great urban culture that reached its zenith 2700 years ago.

Patriarchy and kinship bonds are much stronger in Kulob than in the Leninobod region. Although prior to 1992 local solidarity groups had never played an important role in the republic’s politics, their positions inside the oblast were extremely strong. It was especially evident at the level of separate collective farms—the backbone of Kulob’s economy. The kolkhoz chairman—respectfully referred to by peasants as rais or bobo—usually combined the features of an ‘oriental despot’ and the head of a big patriarchal family. Mirsaid Mahmadaliev, twice Hero of Socialist Labour, headed the Lenin kolkhoz for more than three decades. By the mid 1970s, his kolkhoz had evolved into an impressive enterprise, with 350 tractors, 57 combine harvesters, 35 cotton-growing brigades, six dairy farms, 13 retail shops, seven schools and an assortment of other facilities, which made it entirely self-sufficient and profitable at the same time. Bobo Mirsaid managed the kolkhoz as his own fiefdom without any interference from outside, for he had taken the precaution of becoming a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and had served as a CPT CC member for quite some time. He was also in the habit of inviting influential guests from Moscow and entertaining them in a princely way. Mirsaidov patronised a few young aspiring graduates from

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105 The stereotype of the unsophisticated rural hick manifests itself in ‘Kulobi jokes’ whereby a Kulobi is usually the butt of a joke in which he fails to comprehend some modern technology or practice that is common in the city (Personal observations in Tajikistan and amongst Tajiks overseas, 2007–12). Their nickname, govsor (‘cow-rider’), also speaks for itself, though some Kulobi locals prefer to interpret it as ‘a person who can mount a wild bull’.

106 Karmysheva, Ocherki etnicheskoi istorii iuznykh raionov Tadzhikistana i Uzbekistana, p. 45.


109 ‘Oriental despotism’ is used here in the classical and Marxist sense of the term, not in any popular sense, to describe leadership.

110 Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 7 January 1975.
Kulob; one of them, Qurbon Mirzoaliev, eventually became chairman of the executive committee of the Kulob oblast and continued to feature prominently in the Tajik political arena.

III. Hisor

The Hisor Valley, which includes Tajikistan’s capital, Dushanbe, is another industrialised zone. The aluminium plant at Tursunzoda near the Uzbek border is one of the largest in Asia and, immediately after independence, generated 50 per cent of Tajikistan’s hard-currency earnings.\footnote{EIU Country Report (4th Quarter 1993), p. 54.} By the early 1990s, an unofficial alliance had emerged between the industrial and financial captains of Leninobod and Hisor; the latter had been allowed to occupy high positions in the state bureaucracy as a sign of recognition of Hisor’s industrial and agricultural potential (Table 4.6). The geographical proximity of the two regions as well as close cultural ties complemented the political rapprochement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic zone</th>
<th>Capital investment</th>
<th>Industrial output</th>
<th>Agricultural production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leninobod</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisor</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qurghonteppa</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulob</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gharm</td>
<td>19.1% ((&lt; 2)%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBAO(^\d)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) Mostly investment in the construction of the Roghun hydro-electric power station
\(^\d\) GBAO = Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast


Hisor was a major princedom from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It was subjugated by the Emirate of Bukhara only in 1868, in the wake of the 15-day battle of Dehnav. Local activists have always believed it is unfair that Hisor should be just one of the raions under Dushanbe’s direct jurisdiction; they have demanded its elevation to oblast status and mooted the idea of a ‘reacquisition’ of territories in Qurghonteppa, Qubodiyon, Boisun, Sherobod and even Darvoz and Qarotegin, for ‘they belonged to the realm of the bek of Hisor, or sent him annual metayage and were accountable to him’\footnote{Marhabo Zabarova and Zafar Dustov, ‘Tajlili Navruz dar Hisori Shodmon’, in *Dar justujui farhangi vodii Hisor*, ed. N. N. Ne’matov (Dushanbe: Mamma’go hi ta’rikhi-madani Hisor, 1992), p. 65.} But its relatively small
population and its sheer heterogeneity (45 per cent of the population is Uzbek) effectively precluded a dramatic rise in Hisor’s influence in the republic until the civil war.

The region’s location at a trade crossroads of Central Asia, the presence of hard-currency-earning industries in its territory, the relatively high degree of mobility of the population and the folklore tradition of Hisori polvons—the outlawed fighters against the Manghit authorities—were instrumental in the emergence of organised crime groupings as a potent unofficial institution in the region by the early 1990s. At that time the four main gangs specialised mostly in extortion, smuggling and car theft. They also maintained close contacts with colleagues in Uzbekistan and enjoyed protection in high places in Tashkent.

IV. Gharm

The mountainous region of Gharm, east of Dushanbe, is the granary of Tajikistan, due to its mild climate and abundance of water. In addition to the Gharm raion proper, it includes the districts of Komsomolobod (historical Qarotegin), Tavildara, Fayzobod and Jerghatol (the Qarotegin Valley has since been renamed Rasht). The Gharmis, 95 per cent of whom in this region live in villages, have traditionally been engaged in growing fruit and vegetables rather than cotton. An average Gharmi farmer would gain up to 80 times more profit from one acre of citrus trees than his Kulobi colleague growing cotton, spending much less effort. Gradually, the Gharmis accumulated substantial capital through trading agricultural produce on local markets and began to penetrate the republican trade structures, both legal and shadowy, that had been previously dominated by the Leninobodis and Uzbeks. Yet their growing wealth and sprawling commercial activities failed to bring about any rise in the political status of the region. On the contrary, it was downgraded from oblast status to just ‘a group of raions’ in 1955. In the late 1970s, the regional elite’s aspirations were rekindled—this time it was connected with the name of Mirzo Rahmatov, the USSR’s ambassador in Ghana and a personal friend of Brezhnev. Brezhnev’s untimely death in 1982, however, put an end to these hopes.

The principalities of Gharm, Qarotegin and Darvoz were always hard to conquer and administer. They were the last to fall into the fold of Bukhara with the help of Russian armed forces during 1869 and 1870. These areas formed a stronghold

114 Narodnaia gazeta, 18 February 1993.
of the basmachi movement until the late 1930s. The highlanders of Gharm clung staunchly to their traditional institutions, such as the non-divided agnate family, adat and shari’a. They often called themselves oqab (eagle) or Tojiki toza (pure Tajik), and are noted for their religious piety and traditional values. In 1974, a certain sovkhoz in Gharm had no less than 30 mazors (shrines), and in 1977 there was only one girl from Komsomolobod who studied in a tertiary institution.\textsuperscript{117}

The Gharmis arguably suffered more than other Tajiks from Soviet demographic exercises. Tens of thousands of people from this region were resettled to the Vakhsh Valley in the south-west between 1928 and 1931 in order to develop new cotton plantations. The whole project was based on forced labour and scores perished from the drastic change of climate, a 'lack of the most elementary facilities … and an epidemic of typhoid'.\textsuperscript{118} In 1934, the CPT CC passed a special resolution that aimed ‘to carry out, in the shortest possible time, the special investigation amongst the settlers in the Vakhsh Valley, with the aim of getting rid of them’.\textsuperscript{119} As a result of this purge, many Gharmi peasants ended up in the Gulag. After World War II the authorities continued to press the Gharmis to migrate from their homeland—which registered the highest birth rate in the republic (over the period 1979–89 the population in the region grew by 36 per cent, compared with the republic’s figure of 26 per cent).\textsuperscript{120} In the mid 1970s, the construction of a gigantic hydro-power station began at Roghun, which would have required the evacuation of 62 villages and could have led to massive social and ecological changes in the Gharm region.\textsuperscript{121} Approximately 30 000 Gharmis were scheduled to be removed from the flooded area and resettled in Kulob and in the Vakhsh Valley.\textsuperscript{122} Not surprisingly, the population of Gharm felt aggrieved by the government’s plans. The sentiments of internal protest and subdued opposition were widely spread amongst Gharmi settlers (muhajirs) throughout the republic as well. The then Dushanbe-based poet Gulrukhsor Safieva was especially active in voicing the grievances of fellow Gharmis.\textsuperscript{123}

V. Badakhshan

The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in the Pamirs occupies almost half of Tajikistan’s territory but accounts for only 2.5 per cent of the country’s population. It is the least-developed part of the country, totally

\textsuperscript{118} Rakowska-Harmstone, Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia, pp. 118–19.
\textsuperscript{119} Sh. I. Kurbanova, Pereselenie: kak eto bylo (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1993), p. 72.
\textsuperscript{121} Sogdiana, No. 1 (February 1990), pp. 1–2.
\textsuperscript{122} Adabiyot va san’at, 17 August 1989.
\textsuperscript{123} The Cultural Foundation for the Spiritual Wealth of the Tajik Nation, which she came to head in 1990, saw that its important duty was to expose ‘the Communist terror which devoured the best sons and the spiritual treasures of the Tajik nation’. See: Shams, ‘Nist bod Gulrukhsor!’ Haft ganj, No. 19 (31) (1992), p. 7.
dependent on external supplies delivered via two seasonal roads. Badakhshan is characterised by appalling unemployment rates and the lowest standard of living. Amazingly, such basic foods as potato and cabbage were only introduced to the Pamirs in 1938, and 10 years later people still wore homespun clothes. On the other hand, the ratio of people with a college education amongst the Pamiris was the highest in Tajikistan at the end of the Soviet era: 124 per 1000 employed, compared with 100 in Leninobod and 66 in Qurghonteppa. In the postwar period these graduates could not find jobs according to their specialisation in their place of birth and moved to major urban centres of the republic. Progressively, the Pamiris formed a sizeable stratum of Tajikistan’s ‘prestige elite’—that is, writers, artists, scholars, and so on. By 1991, 180 000 Pamiris lived and worked outside the GBAO—more than that oblast’s actual population.

The Pamiris have always differed from other Tajiks in important cultural characteristics, such as language, religion and stronger familial affiliation. Their languages and dialects belong to the Eastern Iranian language group as opposed to the Western Iranian Tajik. The majority of Pamiris adhere to the Ismaili sect of Shiism whilst the bulk of valley and mountain Tajiks are Sunnis. All eight Pamiri sub-ethnic groups retain potent self-consciousness and can identify themselves on at least three levels: by their primary cultural name—for example, rykhen, zgamik, khik and so on—when dealing with one another; by their collective name, pomiri (Pamiri), when interacting with other groups in Tajikistan; and, finally, as Tajiks when outside the republic. In the 1980s, the official line of the Tajik leadership denied the Pamiris their cultural uniqueness: ‘the Pamiris are Tajiks by descent and their languages are nothing more than dialects of Tajik.’

The ancient consanguinal commune with its patrilineal and patrilocal characteristics—natural economy, cult of ancestors, even blood feuds—has survived in the Pamirs. There used to be a joke in Tajikistan to the effect that if communism were ever to be built in the USSR, it would happen in Badakhshan as commodity-market relations were virtually unknown there. Trade was a rather disfavoured occupation there, and when in the 1970s a market was finally opened in Khorog, there was not a single local amongst the vendors. Family solidarity amongst Pamiris, and the stereotype it spawned, is exceptional.
even in the context of Tajikistan; for them, there is nothing inherently bad in nepotism. As an example, there was a case in 1975 when a certain Mahmadakov had managed to plant all 16 of his children in various scientific institutions throughout the republic.\textsuperscript{130}

Although the republican authorities paid lip-service to the necessity of the accelerated development of the GBAO, in reality nothing was being done and the region, with 0.03 per cent of Tajikistan’s total material production, was constantly on the brink of survival.\textsuperscript{131} Since the early 1970s, the Pamiri elite strove to upgrade the region to the status of an autonomous republic in an attempt to change the situation, but to no avail. Even worse, by 1980 all leading positions in the region had been occupied by people from the north—a situation that made an important visitor from Moscow exclaim: ‘What is this invasion of Leninobodis during the Tenth five-year plan all about?’\textsuperscript{132}

\section*{VI. Qurghonteppa}

The Qurghonteppa region in the south-west, which includes the Vakhsh Valley, is the melting pot of Tajikistan. Only sparsely populated before 1917, it became, under Soviet rule, subject to an enormous influx of Tajiks from Gharm and Kulob as well as Uzbeks, Russians, Germans and representatives of other nationalities, who mixed with local Tajiks, Turkemens, Arabs and Baluchi. Between 1926 and 1929 alone, 160 000 new settlers arrived there.\textsuperscript{133} All of them participated in ‘great construction projects of communism’, such as the Vakhsh Irrigation Complex. In 1990, more than one-fifth of the republic’s population lived in the Qurghonteppa oblast; its share in Tajikistan’s industrial output exceeded 15 per cent and 39 per cent in cotton production.\textsuperscript{134}

Qurghonteppa in the early 1990s was where ‘the complex of national inferiority was the strongest and most transparent. It was exacerbated by the emergence of a dual economy, whereby “giants” of industry were not oriented towards local labour resources and traditions, had no links with [the] local industrial complex and formed enclaves of alien “big industry”.’\textsuperscript{135} In rural areas, \textit{kolhхоz} bossism similar to that in Kulob flourished,\textsuperscript{136} with the difference that local collective farms were even richer, particularly in the Kolkhozobod raion, renowned for

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{130} Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 10 October 1975.
\bibitem{133} Sharipov, \textit{Zakonomernosti formirovaniia sotsialisticheskikh obshestvennykh otnoshenii v Tadzhikistane}, p. 80.
\bibitem{134} Nurnazarov and Rahimov, \textit{Khojagii khalqi Tojikiston}, pp. 148–65.
\bibitem{135} Olimov, ‘Ob etnopoliticheskoi i konfessionalnoi situatsii v Tadzhikistane’, p. 85.
\bibitem{136} The Hero of Socialist Labour Ishbek Sattarov, an ethnic Uzbek, came to the Vakhsh Valley in 1929 and later rose to head the ‘Yangiabad’ \textit{kolhхоz}—a position he held for 33 years. See: Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 24 July 1975. His name has been immortalised in a series of literary works and a village has been named after him.
\end{thebibliography}
its long-staple cotton. The struggle for dominance in Qurghonteppa involved Kulobis, Gharmis and Uzbeks (the last made up almost one-third of the population). In the 1980s, power in Qurghonteppa was divided between an obkom first secretary from Kulob, the chairman of the executive committee from Gharm and the head of the local cooperative society (Tojikmatlubot)—an ethnic Uzbek. Needless to say, newly established settlements in the Vakhsh Valley were organised on ethnic and regionalistic lines, and, for example, ‘if there happened to be a wedding in an Urghut kolkhoz, their Gharmi neighbours were not likely to be invited’.

### Regionalism in Practice

The statements of Soviet authorities to the effect that ‘the spread of literacy, general rise of culture caused by industrialisation and reconstruction of agriculture have made the groups of Tajiks closer to each other’ are not particularly convincing. Certainly, it would have required the concerted efforts of several generations to achieve any positive shifts at the popular cultural level. An immensely thorough study of Tajik folktales completed in 1971 linked most of their moralities and plot lines to Iranian, Sanskrit, Arabic and even Chinese influences, which was not surprising; however, experts noted the unusually high level of localised variation in motifs, functions and language forms of the 419 analysed texts coming from different regions of Tajikistan. Shodmon Yusuf, an eminent Tajik political opposition figure, commented on one occasion that ‘the so-called Tajik people do not have a single song that would satisfy all regions [of Tajikistan]’.

Tensions among six historical-geographical regions of Tajikistan failed to diminish as the grotesquely uneven development patterns lingered. They could be checked temporarily either by coercive methods (such as campaigns against mestnichestvo, or localism, under Stalin and Khrushchev) or by channelling more resources from the centre (as was the case under Brezhnev), but they were always present. Interaction amongst regional elites has formed the core of all symbolic processes and practical endeavours in Tajikistan. During the Brezhnev era, the Tajik party-state structure demonstrated an almost infinite capacity to control regional ambitions in the republic. Moscow’s stabilnost kadrov (stability of cadres) policy allowed the web of informal ‘understandings’ and exchanges

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137 Rubin, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 211.
amongst the regional elites in Tajikistan to become institutionalised. In the 1980s, it was the order of the day for the authorities to issue quotas for regional representation in the republican legislature, industrial management and law enforcement agencies, or to decree how many doctorate degrees should be given to each region.\textsuperscript{142} These practices found reflection at the popular level in a common saying that ‘in our republic nobody sits idle: Leninobod rules, Kulob guards, Qurgonteppa ploughs and Pamir dances’. As long as Tajikistan fulfilled its economic obligations to the Union and complied with the general line prescribed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Moscow did not seem to object to the peculiarities of local personnel policy.

In the Soviet period bargaining for resources on behalf of the regions was an essential part of political activism in Tajikistan. It was also an arcane process, hidden from public view. In September 1961, during the CPT congress, Saidali Jumaev, first secretary of the Gharm raikom, must have stirred quite a commotion when he criticised the republican leadership for its lack of interest in the development of his region.\textsuperscript{143} After the congress Jumaev was sacked. Twenty-five years later, people in Tojikobod staged a protest against neglect of their needs on the part of Dushanbe; 60 or 70 of their delegates came to the capital and marched to the building of the CPT Central Committee. The next day all editors of republican, regional and district newspapers received an order to refrain from mentioning Tojikobod forthwith, in any context, in order ‘to expunge this word from people’s memory altogether’.\textsuperscript{144}

Competition and overt animosity amongst people from different regions can have various manifestations. The most obvious of them is the wedding taboo—\textsuperscript{145}—for example, representatives of the Tajik sub-ethnic group of suguti, who live in Varzob to the north of Dushanbe and are anthropologically close to the Hisoris, would never marry Kulobis, though technically both of them are mountain Tajiks.\textsuperscript{146} The division between mountain and valley, or between northern and southern Tajiks, where the Hisor mountain range serves as a geographical marker, certainly remains intact. As a well-known Tajik poet, Saidali Mamur, has put it:

\begin{center}
\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item XIV s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi parti Tadzhikistana: Stenograficheskii otchet (Dushanbe: Tadzhikskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo, 1962), pp. 260–1.
\item Narzullo Dustov, \textit{Zakhm bar jismi vatan} (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1994), p. 28.
\item The most comprehensive study of the social, political and economic aspects of marriage alliances (including an analysis of ethnic, regional and local restrictions in coupling) is by a British anthropologist. See: Tett, \textit{Ambiguous Alliances}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
\end{center}
'Where do you come from?' is the first thing you ask,
Then you check all my ancestry—that's a difficult task.
North or South—should it really matter that much?
Put this discord away, and in peace shall we bask.

Why don’t you ask what I keep in my hand?
Your only query is about my homeland.
Alas, you have never offered me help,
There’s stone in your heart, all good feelings are banned.147

It is the division amongst six main regions, however, that presented the major cleavage in Tajik society, especially in the immediate post-independence era. Indeed, anthropologically, the Kulobis and the inhabitants of Gharm and the Western Pamirs are very similar, but there is little love lost between them. With this in mind, it is hard to disagree with a Tajik journalist’s opinion that

the most tragic absurdity in the history of Tajikistan is a hostility that lasted for many years between the people of the Pamirs and the people of Kulob. No one was able to explain clearly the reason for this confrontation which in the past had been confined to hooligan tricks, and from the beginning of the political struggle it has led to the heavy and bloody conflict.148

As a hypothesis, it can be argued that contemporary political struggles are reinforced by the historical memory of the populace: Kulobis formed a part of the Afghan army when it ravaged the Pamiri principalities in the late nineteenth century. The narrative of the Afghan army’s massive atrocities (and the role played by the Kulobis) has been passed on from generation to generation.149

Stereotypes and prejudices of a similar kind are widely spread throughout Tajikistan. In the words of academician Tursunov: ‘regionalism has firmly settled in the consciousness of our people, and not its backward section at that; the regionalistic self-awareness manifests itself at all levels of social stratification, especially, to our shame, amidst the intelligentsia.’150 Within the rigid framework of the Soviet system it could never acquire the form of violent political action. Moreover, it had been de facto institutionalised and, henceforth, could be controlled and manipulated to a certain extent. The ruling regional elite from Leninobod did not need to invoke traditional institutions of power

147 Translation from the Tajik text quoted in: Buri Karimov, Qurboni du Zakhma (Dushanbe: Oryono, 1992), p. 129.
149 Some elders in Badakhshan may still believe that ‘Afghans [and Kulobis with them] are from the confounded kin of Satan. Their place is in hell, in the eternal flames and inferno.’ See: M. S. Andreev, Tadzhiki doliny Khuf (Stalinabad: Izdatelstvo AN TSSR, 1953), p. 23.
to maintain its privileged position; its legitimacy was guaranteed by Moscow. Generally, in the Soviet period traditional social structures and popular Islam on the one hand, and regionalism on the other, operated on different planes: private and public. These phenomena were closely linked, however, and there always remained a possibility that informal networks would be activated as the primary mechanism for establishing the authority of a clique with roots in a particular region.

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The Soviet drive towards modernisation of Tajikistan yielded ambiguous results. Accelerated economic development, growth of education, secularisation of culture and political mobilisation of the masses altered the fabric of Tajik society considerably. The profundity and irreversibility of these changes, however, were questionable. After all, 70 years of the communist experiment and millennia of continuous cultural tradition in this country are incomparable in historical perspective. Modernity presumes that local ties and parochial perspectives give way to universal commitments and cosmopolitan attitudes; that the truths of utility, calculation, and science take precedence over those of the emotions, the sacred, and the non-rational; that the individual rather than the group be the primary unit of society and politics … that the identity be chosen and achieved, not ascribed and affirmed.151

The most important failure of Soviet rule in Tajikistan was that it could not reform the world view of the Tajiks, based on traditional allegiances and the omnipresent spirit of collectivism, which made an individual completely dependent on institutions such as the family, neighbourhood, solidarity network and, at a higher level, on a coterie of fellow-regionalists. A prominent Soviet anthropologist, Lyudmila Chvyr’, produced a scathing verdict on the state of affairs in the republic at the end of the communist period: ‘Inhabitants of each of these regions considered only themselves to be the real, “pure”, “genuine” representatives of their people, regarding others as Tajiks of sorts, surely, but not quite conforming to the ideal of “Tajikness”’.152

In a handful of cities, in industrial enterprises, scholarly institutions and government agencies, activities were ostensibly no different from patterns of mono-organisational socialism elsewhere in the USSR. At the same time,

in rural areas that were of little interest to Moscow-based industrialisers and where ‘even the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) proved to be incapable of setting up a network of informers’, 153 an ethno-cultural mentality based on traditional patrimonialism, popular Islam and regionalism had survived unscathed, and any breakdown in the mechanisms of social control would inexorably transpose it into the realm of political action.