Muslims
IN CENTRAL ASIA
Expressions of Identity
and Change
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Religious, National, and Other Identities in Central Asia

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The link between religious and national identity is an axiom in the study of the peoples of Soviet Central Asia. This viewpoint holds that many members of the major nationalities of that region do not differentiate between being a Muslim and belonging to their particular nationality. Even people who are not religious in a spiritual sense are said to participate in Islamic rituals because these are seen as expressions of membership in the nationality [Aslakov, 1983: 54, 65; Bennigsen and Lemerçier-Quelquejay, 1968:188; Islam v SSSR, 1983:30, 50–51, 117; Saidbeev, 1984:5, 217, 218, 230; Dadabaeva, 1980, Dadabaeva, 1983:258]. Yet Central Asians also have other loyalties that do not fit tidily into the equation between religion and nationality.

There is ample reason to believe that the religious-national linkage is indeed strong among the indigenous peoples of Central Asia. It may even have helped legitimate the comparatively recent political emphasis on national identity. For, while people have felt loyalty to groups larger than their nuclear families since time immemorial, there is nothing automatic about associating on the basis of nationality, whether in Central Asia or anywhere else. As Ernest Gellner justly observes, “nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny are a myth,” which those who advocate nationality-based groupings create by selecting and molding existing cultural traits [Gellner, 1983:48-49]. Thus a nationality is not the same as an ethnic group, which does not necessarily have a political program of its own. A nationality is an inherently political form of social organization, whose advocates argue for the primacy of a nationality’s interests (as defined by the advocates) in determining the cultural and political goals of the group and, in some cases, the dimensions of the state.

In Central Asia, before the Soviets launched the nation-creating process in the 1920s, 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. Among the criteria for these divisions was ethnicity, though this was rarely linked to the political quest for nation-states. Yet other bases for division at times conflicted with religious or ethnic ties; these included loyalty to dynasties, local political chiefs, tribes or clans, economic interests, geographic subdivisions of the region, and political ideologies.

Nowadays in Central Asia, there are several different ways of defining one’s identity in addition to the religious-national synthesis. Each person can choose to stress any of a number of traits to which he or she can lay claim on the basis of background and environment. Many of these have survived since before the revolution, while others became important in the Soviet era. Anya Peterson Royce’s observation on the functional nature of ethnicity applies equally well to other kinds of identity, which also reflect people’s needs as they deal with society.

Ethnic identity is one of many identities available to people. It is developed, displayed, manipulated, or ignored in accordance with the demands of particular situations. . . . At the level of the individual, ethnic identity is both a mental state and a possible strategy. . . . In a very real sense, ethnic identity is an acquired and used feature of human identity, subject to display, avoidance, manipulation, and exploitation. (Royce, 1982:1, 185)

The strength of the Islamic component of national identity in Central Asia does not always bring with it a strong sense of belonging to a broader, supranational Islamic community, in keeping with the ideals of the faith. Furthermore, Central Asians can
of the inhabitants of the region, who were not accustomed to describing themselves in those terms and 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” or “Uzbek” did not reflect that individual’s ethnic consciousness but rather his estimate of which answer would enable him to remain in his home. In some cases, members of a single family chose different nationality designations [Bregel', 1983]. In addition, there are a number of small ethnic groups in Tajikistan which are studied by ethnographers but are not recognized by the regime as full-fledged nationalities, in the sense that they have no access to education, publications, or broadcasts in their own languages. For official purposes, they are counted as Tajiks, regardless of how they describe themselves or the language they speak as their mother tongue.

Even the very existence of a Tajik nationality, however defined, has caused controversy. The term has been used for centuries to distinguish Persian speakers from speakers of Turkic languages in Iran, Central Asia, and Afghanistan. Heated disputes over the word’s origin and how it came to be applied will not be resolved here. What is of concern here is the way members of what is now the Tajik elite use to their own advantage within the Soviet system the debate on whether the Tajiks constitute an ethnic group distinct from either their Turkic neighbors or other Persian speakers beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. In this context, “elite” may be defined very broadly as those people who have some combination of education beyond the middle-school level and access, through party membership, employment, or other means, to privileges not granted by the Soviet system to the vast majority of ordinary citizens. (These privileges can take various forms, among them greater access to desirable goods and services and power over others.)

Whatever resentment Tajiks may feel toward Russians, who are widely perceived as haughty toward others and manipulative of the Soviet system to their own benefit, there is little Tajiks have felt they could do to voice such feelings openly, given the realities of Soviet politics. That many Russians perceive the system as discriminating against them to the benefit of other nationalities is a reminder that there are few “objective” absolutes in nationality relations. However, there is also a regionally powerful na-
tionality which evokes similar resentment among the Tajik elite—the Uzbeks—and a regional climate of Turkic pride, which the Uzbek elite has done much to encourage. These are targets which are vulnerable to Tajik criticism because they are strong only relatively, on a regional level, but not at the center of power. Moscow harbors a deep-seated, although exaggerated, fear of Pan-Turkism inherited from the tsarist empire. Members of the Tajik elite have tried to exploit that fear to their own advantage, making tactical use of the fact that the Tajiks are an Iranian rather than a Turkic people.

Considerable ethnographic evidence supports the argument that, despite the difference of language, there are many cultural similarities between Uzbeks and Tajiks, who have for centuries lived in close contact in cities like Samarkand and Bukhara and settled agricultural communities in what are now Tajikistan and eastern Uzbekistan. However, some Uzbeks carried this much further, denying the existence of a separate Tajik people and arguing that Tajiks are in fact fellow Turks who have forgotten their original language. Thus the 1920 constitution of the short-lived Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, in which Uzbek and other Turkic Communists had considerable influence, recognized only three “indigenous nationalities,” the Uzbeks, Kirghiz, and Turkmens, denying the Tajiks any status apart from Uzbeks (Bartold, 1963:468). Some Uzbek Communists subsequently opposed the creation of the Tajikistan republic and continued to reject the concept of a Tajik nationality for many years thereafter (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970:19, 240–41).

Nowadays, members of the Tajik elite seek to play on the central leadership’s fears of Pan-Turkism by arguing that they have a common interest in opposing it. According to this argument measures which strengthen the Tajik sense of identity in a political or a cultural sense benefit Moscow by undermining the alleged Turkic threat to the Soviet regime. Tajik sources have repeatedly described Pan-Turkism as vehemently anti-Tajik, or, as one writer put it, the Pan-Turkists were the “mortal enemy of our people” (Ghaftorov, 1987; see also “Namunai,” 1984:89). Furthermore, this argument contends that the creation of the Tajikistan republic in the 1920s dealt a blow to Pan-Turkism (Istorlia, 1983:139; “Paurkurkizm,” 1984:469). Since that time, this argument holds, the publication of studies praising Tajik literature and the spread of Tajik-language instruction have demonstrated the falsehood of Pan-Turkist claims that all the peoples of Central Asia are Turkic and should be united in one greater Turkic state (Ghaftorov, 1987; Nabiev, 1986; Kucharov, 1987; S. Aini, 1986:66; “Kalomi navisanda,” 1987:1; “Namunai,” 1984:89).

In recent years, the Tajik elite has shown signs of resentment of what it sees as Turkic condescension toward Tajiks and has responded with a “counter-condescension” of its own. For example, an article in a mass-circulation teachers’ magazine has compared the heritage of the Tajiks and the Kirghiz to the detriment of the latter. According to this article, noted Kirghiz author Chingis Aitmatov is right to worry about what elements of the Kirghiz heritage deserve to be preserved by civilization because the Kirghiz are a formerly backward people with no written language (before the Soviet era). In contrast, Tajik civilization is one of the world’s oldest; the masterworks of classical Tajik literature are an integral part of the treasures of world literature (Tursunov, 1984).

One popular way of challenging Turkocentric views is by interpreting negatively themes associated with Turkic pride. The Tajik elite has even inverted the pro-Turkic explanation of the Tajiks’ origins (as Turks who no longer speak Turkish) to call the Uzbeks Turkicized Iranians, who still owe much to their Iranian roots. This argument appears in a number of works, perhaps most influentially in those of Bobojon Gafurov (1908–1977; Russian spelling: Babadzhon Gafurov), First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan from 1946 to 1956 and the dominant figure in postwar Tajik culture until his death. His argument on this subject was reiterated posthumously in the 1980s by the publication of a Tajik-language edition of his The Tajiks (Toitik) in a fairly large press run. This work has been hailed in the Tajik press as a “national holy of holies” (Tursunov, 1984).

Gafurov’s account of the origins of the Uzbeks is formally correct, never disparaging them directly but instead asserting that the Tajik and Uzbek masses have much in common, not only in their way of life but also in their joint struggle against oppression. Yet he also portrays the Uzbeks as profoundly indebted to the Iranians genetically as well as culturally. The two people stem, he contends, from a single “race,” which is Central Asian Iranian. Uzbek are racially different from the other main Turkic peoples of
Central Asia, the Kazakhs and Kirghiz, showing far less Mongol influence. As Turkic tribes began moving into Central Asia, from the sixth century A.D., they came into contact with the various Iranian peoples already living there. The Uzbeks evolved from this Turkic-Iranian synthesis by the eleventh century, long before they were called "Uzbeks." According to this view, the Uzbeks, though speaking a Turkic language, are in large part descended from the ancient Iranian inhabitants of the region and are heirs to those ancient Iranian cultures. By the time the Uzbek people had taken shape, the Tajiks were already a fully developed people with a brilliant culture; the Tajiks also accounted for a majority of the population of Central Asia's cities and settled agricultural areas. In later centuries, additional waves of immigration to the region by Turkic peoples made them numerically dominant and also led to the Turkicization of many Tajiks. Thus the Uzbeks remained in essence Turkicized Iranians. The opposite trend, of Uzbeks becoming Tajikicized, was rare, according to Ghafurov. Even the Turkic languages of the new majority derived much of their vocabulary from Persian and another Iranian language (as well as Arabic) and many a Turkic poet wrote in Persian as well (Ghafurov, 1983:3, 494-96; idem, 1985:34-35, 40-45).

A similar revisionism appears in the way Tajiks interpret the centuries of Turkic dominance in Central Asia. Thus the Turkic peoples' military and political strength in the region does not reflect admirable achievements but primitive rapacity. In this view, civilization building in Central Asia was the work of Persian speakers, the Samanids (874-999), who began as provincial governors and eventually established a strong Islamic-Persian state in Central Asia, eastern Iran, and northwestern Afghanistan. They patronized the development of Persian literature, which Soviet Tajik historiography treats as one of the glories of the Tajik heritage. The Samanid realm was replaced by the rule of primitive, Turkic nomadic tribesmen, who reversed Samanid policy by ignoring the very essence of civilization—the development of cities (Muscoev, 1985:42).

The attack on Turkic pride in a heritage which esteemed military valor goes much further, contending that Turkic military achievements were of the negative sort—aggressive conquests—and that when martial resolve was most needed, in defense against the Mongol conquerors, the Turkic ruler of Central Asia fled. In contrast, Tajiks protest that their people's military prowess has been unjustly disparaged by some Turks simply because the Tajiks were not aggressive. Yet they fought bravely to defend their homeland against brutal, Nazillike "conquering nomads" and later rebelled twice against the (Uzbek) rulers of Bukhara (S. Aini, 1986:75-76). This argument first appeared in a minor essay by Sadriddin Aini (1578-1954), a Tajik writer who was the dominant figure in Soviet Tajik culture until his death. The argument was revived when the essay was reprinted in the Tajik-language literary magazine in 1986. Aini remains an officially revered figure in Tajikistan, so, in this context, invoking his name to make this anti-Turkic argument is an attempt to declare it above criticism (analogous to the way Marx's and Lenin's names are invoked for polemical purposes in the Soviet Union as a whole). No storm of protest has arisen in response to this contentious declaration.

The Tajik elite's resentment of what it sees as Uzbek condensation stems also from clashes of interest in mundane matters. For example, Uzbekistan dominates the regional electric planning body and uses that authority to ensure that electric generating facilities are built to meet Uzbekistan's needs, while allegedly slighting Tajikistan's (Plotnikov and Atakhanov, 1985:13). The Tajik elite has also criticized contemporary Uzbekistan's heavy-handedness toward Tajiks and their heritage, including the destruction of various historic sites valued by Tajiks (Osimi, 1988, "As mavqel," 1988). Tajikistan's government has protested to Uzbekistan about alleged inadequate protection of the Tajik language in the latter republic ("Khahari informations," 1989, see also "Mapokura," 1989). The current political climate in the Soviet Union is favorable for such criticism of Uzbekistan, given the much-publicized campaign by the Gorbachev regime against malfeasance by that republic's officials.

Another way the Tajik elite can use its ethnic identity to advantage within the Soviet system is through Soviet style "affirmative action," the policy of representing minority nationalities in the Communist Party, government, professions, and skilled trades. Defects in the process, most prominently tokenism and continued underrepresentation in certain specialties, certainly exist, but these are not necessarily the only important features for people like the Tajiks, who were not their own masters for centuries before the revolution either. In the Soviet Union, the dif-
ference between the way of life of those who have any access to privilege, however limited, and those who have none is sufficiently great to give "affirmative action" attractions despite its flaws. Tajiks and other minorities may be more interested in obtaining feasible gains within the system than in holding out for an unattainable ideal. Many Tajiks have availed themselves of the benefits of "affirmative action." The most conspicuous way this system works is in the selection of many, but not all, of the high-ranking party and state personnel in the republics, but it affects a great many more people beyond these select categories at the top.

Tajik speakers have access to higher education in Tajikistan in their own language for the study of a broad range of subjects from some sciences and technical specialties to the humanities (although it is also the case that specialized training in several professions and skilled trades is impossible without a knowledge of Russian). Some departments even weight their offerings to favor Tajiks by maintaining programs in Tajik but not Russian in some fields, such as mathematics, physics, early childhood education, labor economics, and history-pedagogy (Kommunist Tadzhikistana. 1986), although Russians and other nonindigenous peoples comprise a disproportionate number of higher education students and professionals working in the sciences and technology (Sotsial'no, 1986:83–84). Despite ample access to advanced training, educated Tajiks are still not heavily represented in the sciences and technology, but rather in such fields as education, the mass media, culture, and administration (ibid.:66). The mere fact that they are Tajiks, reared to some degree in their own culture, gives them advantages for working in such fields, where a knowledge of "Tajikness" is useful, as opposed to the sciences or technology.

The most competitive fields for admission to Tajikistan State University include several which give Tajiks the option to study their own heritage: history, Oriental studies, and Tajik philology ("Dar rohi murod," 1986). Tajiks are also heavily represented on the faculty in these three fields (Nauka, 1983:89–110). The final highly competitive field is economic planning.

By 1989, as various nationalities tested the limits of the Gorbachev era's tolerance for reform, the Tajik elite, consciously emulating developments in other republics, pushed through a law to make Tajik the official language of Tajikistan, albeit with certain provisions for the use of Russian and other languages ("Qonuni zaboni Respublikai Sovetti Sotsialistii Tojikiston," 1989; "Ma'suliyati buzurg meboyad," 1989). There was a strong overtone of defensiveness in the arguments of the law's proponents, who deemed language an essential component of national identity but lamented the shrinking sphere in which Tajik is used in public life and the poor knowledge of the language even among educated Tajiks ("Muzokina," 1989; "Kori partiya," 1989; Bobojonov, et al., 1989; "Ma'suliyati buzurg meboyad," 1989; "Dar boroi loihai qonuni zaboni RSS Tojikiston," 1989.)

The Soviet manipulation of Tajik national identity was intended not only to undermine calls for a unified Turkistan state but also to reduce the affinity Tajiks might feel for fellow Persian speakers in Iran or Afghanistan. However, the Tajik elite commonly asserts that the Tajiks are an integral part of the wider Iranian cultural sphere and full heirs to more than two millennia of Iranian civilization. This claim is used to counter what is perceived as condescension by others, not only Turkic neighbors but also the central party and state, which still routinely remind the Tajiks of how much they, as a so-called formerly backward people, owe the advanced Russians. Ironically, the claim is also used against the tendency of some Iranians to view Tajiks as peripheral beneficiaries of a civilization created on the Iranian plateau. Despite the Soviet regime's apprehensions regarding Tajiks' links to Persian speakers south of the border, there are ways in which it finds such connections useful for its own purposes, which in turn gives the Tajik elite further leeway to develop this claim.

One way Tajiks assert their kinship to Persian speakers elsewhere is to avoid broaching the subject directly. That is, they treat the ancient and medieval history and cultural achievements of Persians and eastern Iranian peoples in Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan, northern India, and elsewhere as a seamless whole, without divisions according to contemporary definitions of nationalities or states. Typical of this widespread practice are Ghafurov, 1983; see also K. Aini and Maltsev, 1988.) Great medieval Persian-language authors are simply labeled Tajik, regardless of where they were born or made their careers. This designation avoids the taint of foreign influence and makes these authors' works permissible reading in Soviet Tajikistan. However, the linkage is also explicit. Thus, Sadiddin Aini is invited to show that after the Arab conquest of Central Asia, the "whole Tajik-
Persian people” remained “one nation” (S. Aini, 1986:77). A Tajik professor, writing in a large-circulation newspaper, has defined “Iran” as not only the name of a particular twentieth-century state but also the much larger area, from the Indus and Syr Darya to the borders of what are now Turkey, Iran, and Syria, that formed the original homeland of all the Iranian peoples, including the Tajiks (Dodkhodoev, 1986). A related argument is that the Tajiks were a large and powerful people in the past, inhabiting northeastern Iran, Afghanistan, Xinjiang, and other areas, in addition to Central Asia (Siddiqui, 1984:14).

Although Soviet policy from the 1920s to the 1940s emphasized that written Tajik was a separate language from, not a dialect of, Persian as written in Iran and elsewhere (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970:242-43), contemporary, educated Tajiks commonly stress the kinship between the two, using the compound name “Persian-Tajik” (“forsiu tojiki”) to describe the language and literature. The head of Tajikistan’s Academy of Sciences until recently, Muhammad Osmii (Russian spelling: Asimov) has stated that Persian, Dari (Kabul Persian, a lingua franca in Afghanistan), and Tajik are essentially a single language despite numerous differences in specialized vocabularies and spoken dialects, adding that, “our classical literature, which was written in the Dari Persian language, is the common property of the Iranians, Afghans, and Tajiks alike” (Rafii, 1987:4). A similar view has support in the republic’s political elite as well, notably the head of the republican government, Gaiiibnazar Paliev (“Dar bori lihat qonuni zaboni RSS Tojikistan,” 1989). That fundamental unity is seen as surviving into the present in a linguistic, though not a political sense, for, as one prominent Tajik philologist stated, “we come up against no impenetrable barriers among contemporary Persian, Dari, and Tajik. . . . The concept of a translation from Persian to Tajik or from Tajik to Persian is like talking about black milk or burning snow” (Ikromii, 1984). The 1989 law making Tajik the state language of Tajikistan treats “Persian” and “Tajik” as synonyms (“Qonuni zaboni Respublikai sovieti sotsialistii Tojikiston,” 1989).

Not only does the Tajik elite argue for the kinship between Tajiks and Persian speakers beyond the Soviet border, but it also contends that the Tajiks played the pivotal role in the creation of Persian civilization. This was at first a controversial view among Soviet scholars (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970:234-35), but has long since become the standard interpretation in Tajikistan. For a generation, Bobojon Gafurov played a leading role in promoting this interpretation (Mukhtarov, 1984), which has remained in favor since his death in 1977.

Gafurov contended that the Persian language of the medieval literary masterpieces and high Islamic-Persian civilization originated in Central Asia, among the ancestors of the Tajiks. According to this interpretation, Tajik had already acquired its main characteristics and was spoken in Central Asia, northeastern Iran, and northern Afghanistan before the Arab conquest began in the seventh century, although the language was called “Persian” rather than “Tajik.” In the centuries following the Arab conquest, Persian displaced a number of other Iranian languages spoken in Central Asia. These displaced languages had a lasting influence on the vocabulary and pronunciation of the Persian dialects spoken there, making them markedly different from dialects spoken further west. It was only these eastern dialects which first bore the name “Persian.” The language of the medieval literary masterpieces was this Persian of the Tajiks, which developed between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Gafurov denied western parts of the Iranian world any contribution to its development, contending that they received the language as it eventually spread from its Central Asian birthplace. Its use as a literary language was a progressive development, Gafurov argued, because it marked a rejection of dominance by the Arab caliphate (Gafurov, 1983:496-501, 504-8, 510).

There are ways in which the Tajiks’ links to the wider Persian-speaking world are useful to the Soviet regime. Soviet-sponsored publications in Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan have used official interpretations of Tajikistan’s history and its transformation under Communist rule to impress kindred peoples outside the Soviet Union (Najmow, 1985; Mahmadaminow, 1985; “Kitob,” 1987). Academic institutions in Tajikistan, such as the Society for the Study of Tajikistan and the Iranian Peoples beyond its Borders (1925-1930) as well as, more recently, the Tajikistan Academy of Sciences and Tajikistan State University, have produced topical as well as historical, literary, and linguistic studies regarding Persian speakers abroad. Some of the people who studied Persian in the Faculty of Oriental Languages at Tajikistan State University...

The Soviets have used the cultural similarities among peoples living north and south of the Soviet-Afghan border in an attempt to bolster the founding Communist regime in Afghanistan. This has included such measures as bringing young people from Afghanistan to study in Tajikistan, including at the polytechnic institute and the state university (Mirziyoev, 1984; Tabibulloeva, 1982:68; Shukurov, 1982:80; Tasmin, 1987), sending Tajik academics to Afghanistan to teach and help build Afghanistan’s Academy of Sciences, and arranging cooperative projects for the study of a range of subjects, from seismology to the shared cultural heritage (Makhamov, 1986:4; Rizjba, 1987:4; Karimova, 1982:7; Usmonov, 1986). [Tajikistan also sends Afghanistan books, newspapers, magazines, films, exhibits, cultural delegations, and troupes of entertainers; it brings in Afghans to see how things are done in Tajikistan (Najmonov, 1984:131, 133; “Kontserthot,” 1985; Karimova, 1982:7–8; Shodiev, 1985; “Salar,” 1985; “Dustiro,” 1986; “Dusti,” 1986; “Mehmoni,” 1987; “Kitob,” 1987)] The authorities even use Tajikistan to impress foreign Muslims with the status of Islam in the Soviet Union (“Vizit,” 1986; Sharirov, 1985:77). In a very different sense, the cultural similarities between Tajiks and kindred peoples in Afghanistan have not prevented the Red Army from sending Tajiks to fight there. Contrary to rumors that soldiers from the Central Asian republics were not used in Afghanistan after the initial wave of invasion because their loyalty was suspect, Tajiks continued to be assigned to military postings in Afghanistan until the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1988 (Kirumov, 1987; J. Yusufi, 1987; Yuldoshev, 1988).

The attitudes discussed thus far can only be ascribed with reasonable certainty to members of the Tajik elite, which comprises only a small minority of that nationality. Most Tajiks live in what is nearly a different world and may well perceive their identity in other ways. For this very reason, outside observers cannot know directly how ordinary Tajiks define their group affinities. However, certain things which are known about the conditions under which they live make it probable that smaller-scale kinds of loyalties, well established under pre-modern conditions, such as to neighbors in one’s locality, extended families, or patrons, remain at least as strong among them as loyalties to a national or supra-national community defined in either national or religious terms. What a villager means when he describes himself as a Tajik (or a Muslim) is not necessarily what a member of the elite has in mind when he uses the same terms.

The fact that many a Tajik villager is said to know some of the poetry of Firdawsi and other great medieval Persian poets by heart (Procyk, 1973:128–30) does not prove the existence of a modern type of national consciousness, whether called Persian or Tajik, among such villagers. A similar familiarity with classics of Persian high culture is traditional among Persian-speaking villagers in Iran as well. Although that may indicate an orientation of cultural identity along certain lines, it does not demonstrate the existence of a national consciousness, in a modern political sense, among Persian speakers, who for centuries lived in states, some large, some small, but all defined by such criteria as dynasty, tribe, religion, or social protest, but not by the criterion of the nation-state. Indeed, Iranian nationalism, in contrast to appreciation of the Persian cultural heritage, is a recent historical development, arising from a number of sources, some of which have little direct connection with traditional culture (among them, the ambition of rulers, opposition to major powers’ involvement in Iranian affairs, and the intellectual and material consequences of modernization).

Several aspects of modernization which have played such an important role in much of the world in supplanting traditional, localized loyalties with broader ones have had comparatively little effect in Tajikistan. Of course decades of Soviet rule have wrought many changes, including the establishment of mass education and the mass media, urbanization, some industrialization, the collectivization of agriculture, a military draft, and an extensive network for political mobilization, indoctrination, and control. Yet Soviet-style modernization has changed Tajikistan, especially its villages, where most Tajiks live, far less than many other parts of the Soviet Union.

The very fact that a majority of Tajiks live in rural rather than urban areas reflects how much more of the traditional way of life has survived in Tajikistan. That republic is the least urbanized of all the Soviet republics. Although the population of the USSR as a whole was only 38 percent rural, according to the 1979 census, the figure for Tajikistan was 65 percent (Tsentrnoe, 1984:9). In
fact, the republic has become more, rather than less, rural since 1970. Moreover, the settlement pattern of Tajiks is even more rural than that of the republican population as a whole; 72 percent of the Tajiks live in the countryside; Tajiks account for only 42 percent of the total urban population (Sotsial'noe, 1986:38, 39, 44, n. 34).

Rural life in Tajikistan is comparatively isolated and inward focused. More than 80 percent of the villagers still live in the place where they were born. The rural population is dispersed among more than three thousand villages. Since Tajikistan is 93 percent mountainous, the countryside is divided into a host of separate areas, which are linked by roads which are often poor and in many cases are seasonably impassable (Tsentr'al'noe, 1984:362; "San'ati," 1983; Ismatov ed. Klenov, 1983:26). Many villages are inhabited by members of a single nationality. Even where they are officially classed as multiethnic, in practice they may be subdivided into separate, ethnically homogeneous hamlets (Saidov, 1984:122; Ismatov, 1986). Tajiks are highly endogamous, villagers even more than city dwellers. On the rare occasions when they marry exogamously, they are most likely to marry Uzbeks rather than Russians or others of nonlocal origins (Vinnikov, 1980:36; Sotsial'noe, 1986:133, table 19, p. 167, table 27). However, conclusions about endogamy and exogamy or the ethnic composition of villages should be tempered with caution, given the imprecision of "Uzbek" and "Tajik" as nationality designations.

Avenues of communications which could help spread the influence of the cities, whether of the political establishment or of any proponents of a consciousness broader than traditional kinds, are weak. Deficiencies of the transportation system make travel itself difficult (Karimov, 1985; Saitullayev, 1985). Rural cultural and entertainment facilities, including libraries, clubs, and movie theaters, are woefully inadequate (Mahkamov, 1986:4; Kuznetsov, 1986; "Kitobkhonai ommavi," 1986; "Ma'qul," 1987). Tajikistan ranks last among the Soviet republics in book reading and among the lowest in subscriptions to newspapers and magazines (Nasrillo, 1987). Education in the countryside is inferior to what is available in the cities (Rosen, 1973:63; Abdulloev, 1984; "Islohoti maktab," 1984; Shokmatullayev, 1984; "Marhalai nav," 1984:14; Rasulzoda, 1985; "Bo rohi," 1987:17). Even though the republic's population is two-thirds rural, only one-third of the communist party membership is rural.

Communist Party members live in the countryside, and the party leadership has voiced concern over the quality of rural Communists ("Nomoi baland," 1987).

In many countries, the widespread adoption of a standardized language has been conducive to the victory of national or other broad foci of loyalty over traditional, narrower ones. In Tajikistan, no standardized language as yet plays that role, despite the fact that roughly 90 percent of the Tajiks in the republic claimed fluency in Tajik in the 1979 census (Tsentr'al'noe, 1984:32-33). Although many members of the elite know literary Tajik (and Russian), ordinary people speak various dialects, broadly divided between north and south, with several further subdivisions (Oranskii, 1985:29-30; Monogerova, 1980:130). Even though public education is universal in Tajikistan, a significant number of Tajiks remain most at home in a dialect of their native tongue and cannot use standard written Tajik. The problem begins in the elementary grades and continues through higher education. As one middle school teacher lamented, "It is a secret to no one that after receiving a primary education students go on to upper grades who not only do not know one excerpt of poetry by heart but also cannot read a book correctly" (Abdaloev, 1987:3).

The problem persists even among people who get a higher education, especially in areas outside the humanities, and who then teach in local schools and perpetuate the use of nonstandard Tajik. The competence of Tajik language and literature teachers has also been called into question ("Mavzu," 1983; Ibroimov, 1985; Abdulloev, 1984, idem, 1987:3; Samadov, 1985; Abdulhaev and Uzbebekov, 1985; "Tahili," 1985; Saitov, Aminov, and Namboov, 1984). "Thus, in school everyone teaches physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, etc. in his own local dialect" (Lutfullayev and Qalandarov, 1986).

Nor does Russian serve as a lingua franca for the indigenous inhabitants. More than one-third of the Tajiks surveyed in the 1979 census claimed they had a working knowledge of Russian (Tsentr'al'noe, 1984:71). However, the repeated alarms in Tajikistan about the scant knowledge of Russian among the indigenous population and the poor quality of Russian-language instruction (Mahkamov, 1985:3; "Kadrho," 1987:32; Sultonov, 1987:72-73; "Islohoti maktab," 1986:2; "Mas'uliyat bosing ma'bozad," 1989:1) undermine the credibility of the census data, which here, as in
the other republics, are tainted by the self-reporting of language competence and the tendency to make the data fit the regime’s goals.

A similar problem exists with ordinary Tajiks’ knowledge of their own history. In many countries, the elite’s reinterpretation of history along culturally nationalist lines, to prove that their nationality has a distinct identity, a proud heritage, and, in some cases, legitimate grievances against other nationalities, has played a key role in building a national consciousness. The Tajik elite has tried to reinterpret Tajik history in a similar fashion, to the extent permitted by the central authority, but with little effect among the majority of the population. Only a small fraction of Tajikistan’s professional historians deal with the history of the Tajiks before 1917. The majority deal with post-1917 topics or other, quite different, subjects, like the history of the Communist Party. Their publications on Tajik history have been few and there is no good textbook on the subject in the Tajik language [Miroboev, 1987]. Tajik history is taught poorly as a rule in Tajikistan and is not even treated as a separate subject in its own right except at the advanced, specialized level. As a result, “students know the history of Greece and Egypt and Rome and China better than the history of Tajikistan” (ibid., 1987; see also Bobojonov, Botirov, and Mavlaviyev, 1989). Many Tajiks have little interest in or knowledge of their own history [Kerimova and Khan, 1985:29; “Boroi,” 1987:3; Osimi, 1988:4; Rashidov, 1987:2; “Muzokir,” 1989:1].

Given the linkage between religious and national identity in Central Asia one may question whether it is Islam which provides the alternative to local loyalties. A definitive answer may be unobtainable, given that so much information about the status of Islam in the Soviet Union is mediated through partisan sources. There are grounds at least for skepticism that Islam exerts its considerable influence in particular as a countervailing force against localism. As an abstraction, the unity of the community of believers has been a deeply held principle among Muslims. In practice, it has been unable for fourteen centuries to prevent wars and uprisings in which fellow believers have shed each other’s blood. The spiritual unity of Islam has been riven by worldly rivalries in Central Asia as elsewhere. In the nineteenth century, regional leaders did not forgo their rivalries to cooperate in opposing the Russian conquest, and the antagonisms which divided them did not disappear after the conquest. For example, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were numerous uprisings in what had formerly been the khanate of Kokand but was then part of the Russian governor-generalship of Turkestan. Many of these uprisings were called holy wars but were directed primarily against indigenous inhabitants of the region, who were fellow Muslims, rather than against the Russians [Manz, 1987:265]. The fight of the Basmachi [1918–1925] to prevent the Red Army’s conquest of Central Asia was marked by a lack of coordinated efforts and acrimony among coreligionists [Wheeler, 1964:107–11; Pipes, 1964:178, 257].

As the established Soviet constraints on unauthorized mass activity eroded in the Gorbachev era, bitter, sometimes violent clashes erupted between rural Tajiks and neighboring Muslim peoples. This set Tajiks at odds with both the Kirghiz and Uzbeks; there was also a spillover of anti-Meskhetian violence from Uzbekistan. The immediate cause of the strife appears to have been concern over economic interests, including access to land and water [TadzhikTA, 1989a; ibid., 1989b; Kozlov, 1989; Bobojonov, et al., 1989; Popov, 1989]. To date, there is insufficient information to indicate the weight of national or other considerations in the participants’ attitudes.

Muslim religious figures in contemporary Central Asia lack a broad-based organization which could increase the cohesion of the Islamic community there. The one network which does encompass the entire region is state controlled—the Muslim Spiritual Administration of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, one of four such geographically defined bodies established in 1940 and subject to the central government. The mullahs who operate under the aegis of all four Spiritual Administrations are few in number, about two thousand for the entire Muslim population of the Soviet Union, far too few to serve the needs of most Muslims in Central Asia or the rest of the country. The same is true of the legally recognized mosques [Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quequejay, 1979:151]. Many more mullahs and other religious figures operate without official sanction. No evidence has yet surfaced to indicate that any of them have established extensive networks over a large geographical area. For example, the most radical Islamic preacher in Central Asia to come to public note in recent years is a Tajik, Abdullo
Saidov, who had been active for years but was finally arrested in the summer of 1986, after calling for the establishment of Islamic rule in Tajikistan. He did not set his sights beyond the frontiers of the republic and advocate the union of all Central Asia under the banner of Islam. His strongest supporters, who demonstrated briefly for his release and thus became known to the authorities, are any indication, his horizons may have been far narrower even than this. Fewer than a dozen people, some of them Saidov's relatives, have been identified by name as having demonstrated against his arrest outside the Ministry of Internal Affairs offices in the provincial [oblast'] capital of Qurghonteppa. With a single exception, all, like Saidov himself, lived in this southwestern oblast'; the lone exception lived just north of the oblast' border. The press account describes Saidov as having had the use of an automobile, which could have given him the mobility to reach further afield, but he is known to have traveled only within Qurghonteppa oblast' to preach (Rabiev, 1987a; idem, 1987b).

The ways mullahs and ordinary believers receive their instruction in Islam is conducive to a localized orientation. Officially recognized mullahs have been trained at two madrasas, one in Buchara, the other in Tashkent. For decades these were the only ones legally empowered to provide such training in the Soviet Union. Both institutions graduate a total of about sixty men a year (Bin- yon, 1985:250). Additional madrasas have just recently been opened. Men who study to become "unofficial" mullahs or Sufi adepts do so in many different villages and cities (I. Yusufov, 1986; Vohid, 1987; "Durdona," 1987:2). Thus the situation contrasts sharply with that in the central Islamic lands, where renowned, centuries-old madrasas in major cities have established normative curricula for the education of students drawn from far beyond the immediate environs. Even under those conditions, the practice of Islam in rural areas has included local variations which differed from the kind of Islam taught at the urban centers of Islamic scholarship. Soviet policy has, no doubt inadvertently, encouraged this divergence further by weakening the urban Islamic leadership, which it can control more readily than the religious figures dispersed throughout the countryside. The religious education of ordinary believers in Central Asia is similarly localized. Since Soviet law bars religious proselytizing among children, most of them learn about their faith from whoever is available in the village to reach them. Foremost among the teachers are the parents themselves and other family members; others include public school teachers who give religious instruction as a sideline, "unofficial" mullas, and anyone else who can claim some knowledge of Islam [Dadabaeva, 1985:257; Davlatov, 1986; Komilov, 1982:12; Rahmatov, 1986; Sattorov, 1987:47; Smirnov, 1988:116, 123]. It in no way disparages the religious convictions of Tajiks who learn about Islam in this way to say that the very circumstances of their instruction are far better suited to pass on from generation to generation the local varieties of Islamic practice as these have developed as a living faith among ordinary people rather than the formal, scholarly tradition of the madrasas.

Tajikistan’s Muslims have contacts with the wider Islamic world through radio broadcasts, videotapes, and publications produced abroad and transmitted to Central Asia. That does not, by itself ensure the strengthening of supranational religious ties in any practical sense. These religious messages come from a number of countries, among them Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, which differ in their interpretations of Islam and in some cases are adversaries in the political and religious sphere. Moreover, the fact that Central Asians receive such messages does not reveal how they respond to them. Even those who receive a particular message favorably may respond by feeling encouraged in the beliefs they already hold rather than by transforming those beliefs.

The aspects of identity discussed here by no means exhaust the range of possibilities available to Tajiks. For example, there are some signs that Tajik veterans of the war in Afghanistan at times feel closer bonds to other veterans (or at least other Tajik veterans) than they do to Tajiks who did not serve. Tajik men and women, those who are highly educated and those who are not, those who live in the cities and in the villages are all divided on whether the extremely high birth rate among Tajiks should be reduced through family planning. Other concerns produce yet other realignments within what appears to be simply a single people. Collective identities matter because people live in society and must deal with other people in a host of ways. Therefore, the range of possible identities is potentially as broad as the range of a person’s social interactions. The setting of the particular interactions determines which affiliations meet a person’s needs in that situation or are
pushed to the fore in reaction to the behavior of others. Many forms of group identity, whether of long-standing or transient significance, do not have well-established names to distinguish them from such familiar categories as “nationality” and “religion.” Thus, terms like “Tajik” and “Muslim” tend to subsume, and at times conceal, a complex assortment of other loyalties that also exist among the members of those broadly defined communities.

Notes

1. According to the 1979 Soviet census, 22.8 percent of the Tajiks lived outside Tajikistan; almost all of them [594,627] lived in Uzbekistan. Tajiks accounted for 2,237,948 of Tajikistan’s 3,801,357 inhabitants. A large number of other regional peoples (as well as nonindigenous peoples) also lived in Tajikistan. Foremost among these was the large Uzbek minority [873,199] (Jamalov, 1984:66–67; Tsentral’noe, 1984:7, 132). Early reports from the 1984 census indicate that the republic’s population has risen to 5,112,000 (“Darborai,” 1989). A passing remark by Q. M. Makhkamov, First Secretary of the republic’s Communist Party, indicates that the Uzbek now comprise roughly a quarter of Tajikistan’s population (Koskurov and Bobonov, 1989). The current size of Uzbekistan’s Tajik population is hotly disputed. Uzbekists contend that the Tajiks number 700,000 out of a total republican population of twenty million. Tajiks contend that there are at least 800,000 Tajiks in Uzbekistan, and that the republic’s authorities have for decades misidentified many Tajiks as Uzbeks.

2. One long-term reflection of this may be the odd fact that, according to the 1979 census, 7,396 Uzbeks living in Tajikistan described themselves as speaking Tajik as their native language, while 5.7 percent of the Tajiks living in Uzbekistan said their native language was Uzbek (Tsentral’noe, 1984, pp. 132–33; Sotsial’noe, 1986, p. 310).

3. These include speakers of other Iranian languages, such as the Yaghnobis (descended from the Sogdians of antiquity) and several peoples classed as “Pamiris” (all of whom live in the remote heights of the Pamir Mountains in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast’ in southeastern Tajikistan) as well as small numbers of others who moved to Tajikistan from points further south in earlier centuries (Vinnykov, 1980:32; Oranskii, 1983; Monongarova, 1980; Tsentral’noe, 1984, pp. 132–33).

4. In 1989, as many Soviet nationalities became more assertive in voicing their grievances, stories spread of a few incidents in which young Tajiks berated members of other nationalities living in the republic for not learning Tajik [Istal, 1989].

5. The Turkestan ASSR, which encompassed the territory of what had formerly been the tsarist governor-generalship of Turkistan, existed briefly as the Communists took control of the region during the civil war. Beginning in 1921, Moscow began to redivide Central Asia into nationality-based ASSRs and later SSRs, so that by 1924 the Turkestan ASSR ceased to exist.

6. Although Toijkon was published under Gafurov’s name alone, it was in fact the work of a number of scholars, not all of whom were Tajik [Turkunov, 1984].

7. Gafurov used several names interchangeably for this “race”: Mawramahr (the land between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya), Ferghana-Pamir, and “European.”

8. “Dari” in this context refers to literary Persian, not to the Kabul dialect of Persian.

9. Through the 1950s, a large population of the people engaged in such work were non-Tajiks, mainly Russians and some Jews. Since then, many Tajiks have entered these fields, although they have not acquired a monopoly in them.

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