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The Other

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Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies
Working Paper Series

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Fall 2004

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Funding for this paper has been provided by the National Security Education Program (NSEP).
The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of NSEP.

*Literatura...traditsionno vosprimalas' iranskim
soznaniem kak vysshii produkt chelovecheskoi kul'tury,
poet, literator obladali pochti prorocheskim statusom.*

—Rustam Shukurov, *Tadzhikistan: Muki vospominaniia*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has played a unique and important role in the modern-day politics of Central Asia. Stuart Kaufman writes that “it is cultural rather than political figures who shape the milieu over the years or decades before the rise of power of nationalist leaders.”¹ The poetry and prose of the Tajik literary elite took part in the strengthening of national myths as well as in the building of a national consciousness in Tajikistan before and after perestroika. Many of these Tajik writers and intellectuals (who eventually became involved in politics) defined the image of the “other” in their poetry and prose.

Victor Zaslavsky, discussing the societies of the post-Soviet period, argues that the energy of ethnic mobilization may be released in three main directions: 1) against the **imperial center** and the hegemonistic nationality with the aim of organizing a proper independent nation-state; 2) against any neighboring **ethno-territorial formation** with the aim of vindicating historical grievances and redrawing borders; and 3) against **identifiable minorities** living in the midst of a majority, especially if the latter represents the titular nationality to which a particular territory has been assigned.² This paper will use Zaslavsky’s three categories of ethnic mobilization as a starting point to analyze the creation of the “other”—Russia, Uzbekistan and Khujand—in Tajik literature of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s.

The term “older brother” was used during and after the Soviet period in reference to the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation’s (RSSF) relation to other Soviet republics. For Tajikistan, however, this metaphor is a bit misleading since, unlike the other Soviet republics, Tajiks had two “older brothers”: Moscow and Tashkent. This paper will attempt to expand the kinship

metaphors in order to analyze how Tajik poetry and prose portrayed the “other.” In Tajik literature of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Russia, the “imperial center,” was seen as both a motherly figure and an evil step-mother; Uzbekistan, the “neighboring ethno-territorial formation,” was portrayed as the evil step-father; and Khujand, the “identifiable minority,” as a half-brother.

THE TWO FACES OF RUSSIA: MOTHER RUSSIA AND THE EVIL STEPMOTHER

A popular belief in the Soviet Union during the pre- and post-perestroika periods was that the intelligentsia of the Central Asian republics always believed that Moscow, the imperial center, was responsible for the economic, cultural and political problems of the Soviet republics.³ In Tajikistan, this assertion is not entirely correct since the cultural elite of this country adopted two opposite images: on one hand, Russia was seen as a beneficial and enlightening mother figure, while on the other, she was seen as a destructive evil stepmother.

The “Mother Russia” image came into existence following two important events: Tajikistan was given a political status (“birth”) and received economic and social aid (“nourishment”) from Russia. During the Soviet era, Tajiks were given a separate state with clear borderlines drawn on the map of the Soviet Union. They were also nationally identified as “Tajiks” in their Soviet passports, and they had their nationality incorporated into the name of their country, Tajikistan. By being given the status of a Soviet republic, Tajikistan received a number of political privileges, the most important of which was its relative independence from its Turkic neighbors. Tajikistan’s opinion and stance towards Russia in the following decades was influenced by Moscow’s important role in the battle for its political status.

Unlike other Central Asian republics, Tajikistan did not receive its status of a Soviet Socialist Republic after separation from the RSFSR. For five years (1924–1929) it was an autonomous republic of Uzbekistan. The idea of Tajikistan’s detachment from Uzbekistan had its own activists—mostly Tajik and Kazakh elites and their supporters in Moscow—as well as its opponents, mostly among the Uzbek elite. Each side had its own reasons for participating in this debate. Kazakhs “realized excessive strengthening of Uzbekistan.”⁴ Moscow was aiming to

weaken pan-Turkic ideas in Uzbekistan while simultaneously creating a republic bordering Afghanistan that would promote the idea of a bigger Tajikistan for Tajiks on the other side of the Panj river.⁵ The Uzbeks, meanwhile, claimed that Tajiks had always been Uzbeks who only became Tajik-Persian speakers “under the influence of Persian literature and language.”⁶ Accordingly, (the Uzbeks): “are returning them [Tajiks] to their language and nationality as uniformity (*edinoobrazie*) is the condition of progress. By “Uzbekisizing” (*uzbekizaciya*) Tajiks of Bukhara, [they] will render a service to civilization.”⁷

The most heated debates between the Tajik and Uzbek elites took place in the sphere of literature.⁸ These debates between Tajik and Uzbek elite about the existence of Tajik as a separate people were ended in 1929, when a resolute decision made by Moscow changed Tajikistan’s status to a union republic. In the eyes of the Tajik elite, Russia became a savior. The Tajik Soviet hymn with the word *Rus* (Russian) in its first verse is the best illustration of this symbol:

Russian hand helped,
To strengthen our brotherly nation ...⁹

Russian-Tajik ties were established long before the October Revolution in 1917. Jadids, early twentieth century reformists who aimed at modernizing society through reformist education, historiography, literature, press, publishing, and theater, were fascinated with Russia and with the positive changes it made in the Bukhara Emirate at the end of the 19th century. Ahmadi Donish, a Jadid poet and writer, dedicated one of his books to Russia after visiting Petersburg.

Moscow was on the one hand slowing down the development of the economically advanced Baltic countries, while on the other hand, it was creating the necessary conditions for the modernization of the Central Asian republics (Tajikistan at that time being one of the most backward). Starting in the late 1920s, and throughout the entire Soviet period, professionals such as engineers, doctors, and teachers, inspired by the propagandistic idea of international brotherhood behind the building of the Soviet state, began to leave Russia for “sunny Tajikistan” (*solnechniy Tadjikistan*). This migration to Tajikistan and other “brotherly nations” helped elevate the living standards of Central Asians and the other republics. While the majority of

Russian villages and small towns remained little changed from the 19th century, Tajikistan quickly made a significant leap in many spheres of social and economic life thanks to these enthusiasts.

As a result of the political status obtained by Tajikistan and the social and economic aid received from “Mother Russia,” the Tajik literary elite viewed Russia favorably. This respect towards Russia can be seen in Tajik literature: as late as the 1980s, dedications to Russia continued to appear in the publications of conservative Soviet epoch poets¹⁰ and in publications of the nationalist literary elite.¹¹

In the beginning of the 1980s, a sense of unity with Russia among Tajik poets and writers was still very strong. Thus Loik takes pride in the Russian astronaut Uriy Gagarin’s outer space flight:

You were the child of land,
You became the first child of the skies,
You were the child of one mother,
You became the child of all mothers ...¹²

These dedications were written at a time when it was no longer necessary to do so, since obligatory panegyrics to Soviet/Russian symbols were no longer obligatory.

There was, however, also a very different image of Russia that one could find in Tajik literature during the Soviet period. Russia portrayed as an “evil stepmother” forbade Tajikistan to use the script of its ancestors and ethnic “brothers” (Afghanistan and Iran) by imposing Cyrillic and burning all the books written in the Arabic alphabet, and it made Tajiks fight against their ethnic brothers during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979–1989.

The reform of the alphabet was part of an anti-religious and “enlightenment” policy from Moscow. If anti-religious reforms were directed mainly against the prosperous religious elite and were supported by part of the Tajik elite (mainly Jadids who joined the Communist Party), the change in alphabet¹³ and the effects it had on literature affected every Tajik regardless of his or her social status.

An aspect of this reform was the confiscation and burning of books using the Arabic script as well as the incarceration of anyone holding on to these books in their private libraries. Soviet authorities allowed only fragments of Tajik literary heritage to be transcribed into the Cyrillic alphabet. Because of this censorship, the diversity of subjects characteristic of classical Persian-language literature was not reflected accurately. Manuscripts that survived in some private libraries became inaccessible to a new generation of Tajiks who were not acquainted with the old Arabic script. In contrast to a citizen of the pre-Soviet Bukhara khanate, who—despite not necessarily being capable of writing or reading—could recite poems by renowned Persian writers such as Firdousi, Hafiz, Saadi, Nasir-I Khosrow, and Rumi, which contained important insights on Muslim and Persian-speaking identity, new generations of Soviet Tajiks found themselves “alienated from the whole body of classical written language, from direct sources of knowledge about their own past.”¹⁴

The new literary norms found in the strict ideological canonization of Soviet art, the notion of the “Party spirit in literature” and scientifically grounded “socialist realism” disrupted (Tajik) national literary traditions. As a result, the first Tajik writers of the 1920s who laid the foundations of Soviet Tajik literature, (such as Sadriddin Aini and Abulkosym Lohuti), were still connected with the pre-revolutionary past and were strongly criticized for this. Other more nationalist writers, according to Moscow, such as Fitrat, Sadri Ziyev, and Rashid Abdullo, were seen as “enemies of the state.”

In their effort not to resemble the outmoded literary tradition (*ustarevshie tradicii*) of the “dark past,” poets and writers who grew up during the Soviet period such as Mirzo Tursunzoda and Mirsaid Mirshakar tried to prove their loyalty to the Communist State by becoming mouthpieces for the Party. Their poetry, saturated with Russian words, lost some of its traditional Persian complexity.

In the 1980s, the unpopularity of these ideological restrictions grew. When perestroika began, the Tajik elite started a large-scale campaign for the enrichment of the Tajik language by either inventing new words or borrowing them from Farsi and Dari. The Tajik literary elite’s

struggle for the status of the Tajik language in the late 1980s was aimed at regaining the richness lost as a consequence of the change in the alphabet and the adoption of the “Soviet style” of writing. As a result, Tajikistan was the first republic in the Soviet Union to pass a law adopting a language other than Russian as an official state language.

The new way of writing Tajik in Cyrillic, Soviet censorship, and the influence of Soviet ideology created a new literature. With the spread of publishing, this new script and literature offered the masses a new Tajik identity, but more importantly, it provided them with a new Soviet identity. The change from Arabic to Cyrillic also created a linguistic barrier between Tajiks and other Persian speakers such as Iranians, as well as the Tajiks’ “lost brother” in Afghanistan.

The Soviet identity of Tajiks confronted their Persian linguistic identity in the 1970s when Tajiks fulfilled their “international duty” (*internacionalniy dolg*) by participating in Soviet military actions in Afghanistan. However, unlike members of other Soviet nationalities, Tajiks had to fight people who spoke their language, listened to their music and recited the same poetry.¹⁵ Hundreds of translators, advisors and soldiers witnessed and participated in this fratricidal war. This experience left traces of doubt among the Tajik elite about their Persian identity as well as their nationality in the Soviet/Russian context.

The Tajiks’ kindred ties with Afghans were reflected in a number of real and fictitious narratives about the Afghan war. One of these stories was told to Gulrukhsor Safieva, a poetess and activist of the opposition movement in the 1980s, by a Tajik soldier, who took part in many “cleansings” (*chistki*) during his two years in the army. The story took place in an Afghan village where the only people left were women, children, and elders. When the Tajik soldier entered a house with other Soviet soldiers, he encountered an old Afghan man who recognized the soldier as Tajik. The old man told him in Dari: “Don’t take this sin upon your soul. You are Tajik. Let them kill me.”¹⁶ The story illustrated the ties between Afghans and Tajiks which had been destroyed by the “evil stepmother” Russia.

In poems by Tajik writers about the Afghan war, the notion of “us”—that is, Tajiks in the

Soviet Union and Afghanistan—became very clear by the end of the 1980s. Since Tajik poets and writers could not sympathize with Afghanistan politically, they focused on Afghan cultural figures such as poets and singers. Farzona, a poetess who in the late 1980s joined the opposition movement, writes in one of her poems, “To the Nation that Gave Birth to Ahmad Zohir”:¹⁷

O Afghan nightingale of Vatan,¹⁸ Motherland doesn't die,
Your singing restores life of her essence,
Still the song is coming from your bleeding throat
You are in me, until the end of times, until the end of times, until
the end of times ...¹⁹

And in another poem:
Fostered by one melody,
We are not silent and we don't cry,
The voice of Zohir has to remain in the heart,
For the blood to rise warm and seethe ...
It is the spring of life ...
... Which will wake us up.²⁰

During the glasnost period, Bozor Sobir, a famous Tajik poet and politician, gave a speech in parliament on penitence, arguing that it is shameful to wear medals won from killing your brothers. However, overtly anti-Soviet/Russian poetry did not appear until February 1990, when Soviet troops were deployed in Tajikistan to stop “anti-Armenian” demonstrations, which resulted in death and injury to many Tajiks demonstrating against Kahar Makhkamov, the first secretary of the Tajik SSR. Bozor Sobir later wrote a poem called “Kneads the paste with blood,” dedicated to a Tajik youth killed during the February 1990 event in which two anti-Russian—not only anti-Soviet—sentiments were clear:

Her friendship
Is the friendship of a wolf-killer with a sheep ...
Her treachery should be exterminated, exterminated!
I remember her words about brotherhood,
These words were about captivity ...
... In today's world,
Russia means
Blood of Armenians, blood of Georgians,
Blood of Moldavians, blood of Lithuanian
Blood of Azerbaijanis, blood of Tajiks ...

... Red communist tails crawl following her Duma ...
... Russia as a government,
As a state
As a policy
Russians sacrificed
More than any other peoples,
More than any other nation,
Creating an ocean
From the blood of Russian children
From the tears of Russian mothers,
Creating an ocean ...
... While Russia was writing the red Leninist history,
A Russian was left without his past ... ²¹

This poem, which is quoted here only in part, illustrates a tendency to equate “Russian” with “Soviet.” Sobir does not make clear which of the two “Russias” he means until the end of the poem where he accuses “*Russia as a government, as a state, as a policy*” which violated the rights of not only peoples of the USSR, but of Russians themselves. However, one can assume that the first part of this poem could have been used as an anti-Russian slogan, which drove the Russian speaking population out of Tajikistan.

UZBEKISTAN AS “EVIL STEPFATHER”

The mythological image of the “other” in the case of Uzbeks and their ancestors was constructed by the Tajik literary and academic elite in the 1970s and 1980s, and was derived from the history of tensions between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over the course of the 20th century. Uzbekistan as the “evil stepfather” was portrayed trying to prevent the “birth” of Tajikistan and deny its existence as a nation—in other words, depriving Tajiks of what Yael Tamir has called the “promise of immortality.”²² In addition, the “evil stepfather” kept the two cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, which Tajiks considered theirs when the two Soviet republics were established in the 1920s.

After long debates about the controversial status of cities where both Tajik and Uzbek speakers lived, Uzbekistan sacrificed Khujand in order to keep Samarqand and Bukhara. With Tajik independence, the focus shifted from unresolved political issues between the two republics to cultural questions related to national myths. Extending Kaufman’s analogy of the nation as “a

jealous god—to whom one pays homage, venerating its temples (monuments), relics (battle flags) ... theology (including a mythical history),”²³ poets and writers became the priests of both republics whose prayers (nationalistic literature) enticed its believers to a national “jihad.”

Samarqand and Bukhara became an essential theme in Tajik literary mourning over the glorious past of the nation’s lost cultural centers. The Uzbek elite, meanwhile, attempted to prove their right to the two cities. Debates over these themes were accompanied by acrimonious arguments about the national (Uzbek or Tajik) origin of famous historical figures such as Avicenna.

Four years before perestroika Bozor Sobir wrote a poem called “Mother Tongue” that mourned the lost national values of the Tajiks.

Everything he [the Tajik] had in this world he gave away
The lands of Balkh and Bukhara he had, he gave away
Honorable customs and collections of poems he had, he gave away,
Throne of Samanids he had, he gave away.
His enemy—beggarly in knowledge, “Donish” of Sino took away,
His enemy—devoid of [his own] traditions, divan²⁴ of Mavlonov took away,
His enemy—art dealer, the art of Behzod took away,
His homeless enemy took his place in his house.²⁵

The enumeration of losses—not only the territorial demarcation that gave Bukhara to Uzbekistan and Balkh to Afghanistan, but also the fall of the Samanid state in the 10th century²⁶—reinforces the misery of the Tajiks. Their lands and cultural heritage (“Donish” of Avicenna, the mystical poetry of Djalolidin Rumi, and the art of Behzod)²⁷ were misappropriated by the “other,” while “his homeless enemy took his place in his house.” Sobir then uses the heroic warriors of Iranian epic, Rustam and Suhrob (from Abulkhosim Firdousi’s *Shahname*, written at the end of 9th and beginning of 10th century), to remind contemporary Tajiks about the unbreakable links with their famous predecessors whose “club” they had let out of their hands:

He let the club of Rustam and Suhrob out of his hands
Useless barbarians he made strong,
His own name as the grave of Rudaki was forgotten,
He glorified his assassins in the whole world,

Low height of Mangit
Rose above the minaret of Khorasan,
Low steppes of Kipchak,
Became higher than the mountains of Badakhshan.

... In the eyes of those whose eyes are narrow,
Years of oppression he saw
At times in flames,
At times in water,
Layer by layer with the burned [ruins] of Sogdian minaret he burned, burned,
With collapsed walls of the Afrosiyab ²⁸ gates he collapsed.²⁹

In addition to the increasingly pejorative image of the oppressed Tajik who “forgot his name,” burned with the Sogdian minaret, and collapsed with the gates of Afrosiyab, the image of the Uzbek seen as a “Mangit,” an “assassin,” and a “useless barbarian” emerges.

The last dynasty of Uzbek emirs, the Mangit Dynasty (1753–1920) was, according to Tajik historians in the Soviet period, a “center of religious obscurantism and political reaction.”³⁰ Thus, Bozor Sobir primordializes the conflict, claiming that Tajiks had been oppressed by Uzbeks for at least two centuries. The idea of continuous conflict with Uzbek oppressors was explored in many literary works of this period, encouraging Tajiks to “wake up” and pick up the “club of Rostam and Suhrob” against the oppressor.

Elaboration of this mythical “other”³¹ can be found in the short story, “A Song of Someone, Who Has a Noose Around his Neck,”³² by Bahmanyor, one of the most famous writers of the 1980s and 1990s who was a member of political club Darafshi Kovien (“The Banner of Kova’s Sons”³³) as well as the national patriotic movement Rastokhez. The story is of Abdulkadir, a musician and narrator of Tajik folk tales, who stands against the great conqueror Timur (“the iron lame man”), the Uzbek national symbol of might and glory. It is a perfect illustration of the “evil stepfather” myth. The story takes place on one of Samarqand’s squares where the execution of Abdulkadir and the poet Kuhistani³⁴ is about to take place. Timur, who sentenced them to death, comes to watch the execution but is irritated by the large number of people gathered on the squares of Samarqand. He interprets this as a sign of sympathy for two condemned, “as if these charlatans are brothers to all Samarqandies.”³⁵ Abdulkadir plays his last

song, reviving Timur's memories of peace and happiness as a child. He asks Abdulkadir what the name of the song is and the singer replies that it is a song of someone who has a noose around his neck:

The emir did not think some despicable street singer would dare to answer him in such a disrespectful way ... him ... Timur the Unconquerable. But he already perceived one truth: no matter how many people of this tribe he killed, how many pyramids he built out of their bodies, how many cities and villages he razed to the ground sowing with barley, these people would revive like steppe grass comes to life in the spring ... He was about to order the release of the prisoners, but came to his senses and made a hand gesture to hang them!³⁶

Thus Bahmanyor confirms and maintains the myth of the "cultured, peace loving and poor" Persian-speaking Tajiks, who are opposed to the "barbarian, aggressive, and rich" Turks. Like Bozor Sobir, Bahmayor uses a historical event to show the long history of the conflict. The author recognizes Timur as a great warrior, but then suggests that it is only when faced with great conquerors that Tajiks give in. And of course, in the end Tajiks regain their strength "like steppe grass comes to life in the spring." As was typical of Tajik authors of this period, Bahmanyor also stresses discrimination against Tajik culture in Samarqand: "People throng from all over the place, as if he [Abdulkadir] intended to distribute bread among hungry men and not sing."³⁷ Bread, one of the sacred symbols, is equated with the Tajik music that Samarqandies are "hungry" for.

Besides mourning the loss of their cities, the Tajiks of Samarqand and Bukhara are portrayed as having lost their national identity. In the following poem by Loik Sherali ("Where the grave of Donish is?"³⁸) the Tajiks of Bukhara are questioned about the grave of their famous Tajik predecessor:

In Bukhara, where sons of high ranking officials
Are born by those who lost their path,
Are born by those who have stopped existing,
Some are still deprived of their mother tongue,
To what extent are they deprived of their memory?

In Bukhara, where the Tajik lost his kinsmen,
How much of memory of Donish is left?³⁹

A similar theme is expanded in Bozor Sobir's poem "Bukhara":
Bukhara, with bitterness and regret I see,
That places of many of those who are dear to you,
As the place of Sino are empty in your arms.⁴⁰

Language use for Samarqand and Bukhara's mixed population was a determining factor for one's nationality. To continue speaking one's "mother tongue" under the rule of the "evil stepfather" meant keeping one's national memory alive, according to Loik Sherali. By forgetting about Donish, one of the first pro-Russian enlightening thinkers, the poet accuses the citizens of Bukhara of forgetting who they are (They have "lost their path") and what they represent. After being "Uzbekised," in Loik Sherali's terms, they "stop existing" (line 3)—that is, they have died as Tajiks.

In the process of reinforcing national identity based on historical accomplishments, elites of both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan debated the redistribution of not only their cities, but also of their mutual cultural heritage. Heated arguments around Avicenna's (Abuali Ibn Sino) nationality, for example, took place during the celebration of his thousand-year anniversary in Bukhara in 1980. The idea that Sitora, the mother of the famous scientist and poet, was Uzbek was reflected in the poetry and then the historiography of Uzbekistan. Tajiks responded in kind, as exemplified by Bozor Sobir's poem "Sino's Scalpel":

This one and that claims Sino is theirs
In order to lean a ladder against the roof of fame
But Sino has raised this roof so high,
That neither this nor that is able to lean his ladder against it ...
The time, [when] Sejukid was riding his horse hard towards Kofien,
Was riding his horse with an arrow and a deadly knife on his belt,
The Tajik people Sino's life-saving scalpel took in their hands,
Life-saving knife the whole world took [in its hand].⁴¹

Loik Sherali's poem echoed the same theme:
All lay claim "He belongs to our nations
S- an- so mother in such-and-such year gave him birth,

Another nation to the world of civilization
Did not give someone as omniscient as Sino ... ”

What are all these claims and cries for?
What are all these evidences and arguments for?
Neither Arab, nor Uzbek he was,
But an all-knowing person he was.

Bukhara was the capital of Tajiks,

Buali [Sino] was born there.
Dari was his language, but he learned,
Languages of all times and all peoples.⁴²

Both poets begin with a humanistic reasoning that portrays Sino as an “all-knowing” individual who belongs to the whole world. They both mock those who try to “nationalize” him. However, Bozor Sobir in the second quatrain and Loik Sherali in the third quatrain formulate their views on the national origin of Sino quite clearly. Sobir opposes Tajiks as life saviors and followers of Sino to the nomadic Seldjukids with their “deadly knives” (line 6), while Loik Sherali states that Sino was born in “Bukhara, capital of Tajiks” and that his first language was Dari.

This construction of the “other” in the Tajik literature—the “evil stepfather” Uzbekistan—was reinforced in the late 1980s during the rise of the ethno-nationalism movement promoting the recognition of Tajiks in Uzbekistan. A public service cultural association of Tajiks and Tajik-speaking people, named “Samarqand,” emerged in 1989 in Uzbekistan as a group devoted to the preservation of the Tajik language and advocacy of “elementary equal rights not only for Tajiks but for everyone in the area.”⁴³ They claimed that Uzbek authorities deprived Tajik Samarqandies the right to have the nationality “Tajik” as opposed to “Uzbek” designated in their passports. As a result of a five-day hunger-strike by Hayot Nemat, a poet and co-chairman of the organization, local authorities made an exception and allowed Tajik-speakers to change their nationality in their passports to Tajik. Two deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR supported “Samarqand,” two of whom were the Tajik poets Loik Sherali and Gulrukhsor Safieva. Their proposal, “On Appointing a Parliament Investigation Commission to Study the Situation of

Tajiks and Tajik-speaking Peoples of the Uzbek SSR” was never discussed by the Congress of People’s Deputies. By that time, the rise of nationalism and ethnic conflicts around the USSR had convinced Gorbachev that “nationalism and ethnic violence were products of elite manipulation rather than manifestation of genuine popular grievances or fears.”⁴⁴ “On the edge of an abyss”⁴⁵ military force had become the main device of control.

ON THE CROSSROADS OF SOVIET NATIONAL IDENTITIES: KHUJAND OR THE “HALF-BROTHER”

Among the regions of Tajikistan, the city of Khujand (formerly known as Leninabad) and the Khujandis were considered yet another “other” for two reasons. First, they were the ethnic kin to the Uzbek “evil stepfather,” and as a result the “half-brother” Khujand had been able to monopolize political power in Tajikistan during almost all of the Soviet period. The people of other regions saw Khujand, which was not committed to full independence from Uzbekistan, as incapable of representing the interests of “real” Tajiks. Political dissatisfaction with the rule of this “half-brother” among elites of other regions (Zarafshan, Karategin, Khatlon, Badakhshan) was reinforced by the fact that Tajikistan was the poorest and weakest of the fifteen Union republics of the USSR. Second, during his rule, the “half-brother” had influenced cultural preferences by “Uzbekizing” Tajikistan, even going so far as to impose an “Uzbek” dialect, as well as music, on the rest of the republic.

Thus Khujand, sacrificed by Uzbekistan in order to keep Samarqand and Bukhara, remained at the crossroads of national identities by legally being part of Tajikistan but at the same time closely related culturally to Uzbekistan.⁴⁶ Throughout the Soviet period, representatives of the region occupied key political positions in Dushanbe. However, at the same time, it constructed a pyramid of power in which “each ethno-regional group had its own economic, social, and political niche.”⁴⁷ At the top of this pyramid was Khujand. In the 1970s, disruptions in the Soviet education system and economy, as well as a flourishing of corruption in Tajikistan, made

it almost impossible for representatives of other regions to affect the way the republic, and even their region, was ruled.

The first region that reacted against this system was the Khatlon (Kulyab) region, one of the poorest in the republic. In the beginning of the 1970s, Kasimov, a Khujandi, was appointed first secretary of the regional Party committee of Khatlon. A few days after his arrival in Kulyab, the capital of the region, his body was found hanging on a rope in one of the city's hotels. As a result, the next first secretary appointed to Khatlon was of Kulyab origin. In the 1970s and 1980s, economic problems in most of the regions of Tajikistan, including parts of the mountainous Leninabad region, were increasing. Dissatisfaction with the government was transformed into a strong opposition, which by the end of the 1980s formed a variety of political movements. The political movements Oshkoro⁴⁸ (established at the beginning of 1989 in Kulyab) and Bokhtar⁴⁹ (Khovalin, 1989) wanted to unite the other regions of Tajikistan against the “half-brother” Khujand who “asserted the interest of one region and prejudices against the others.”⁵⁰ Bokhtar and Oshkoro characterized the Khujandis as “half-Uzbeks” who were not able to represent the interests of the majority of “real” Tajiks. “If justice will not be rendered in other words, if Party and governmental leadership will not be changed in favor of the majority of Tajiks’ collisions, which ample evidence show are already taking place will increase.”⁵¹

The same processes were underway in the academic world. Over the course of glasnost, when some archives became accessible to the public, the process of revising and rewriting modern Tajik history began. Much of what was written during this time was based on archival documents that described the roles the “heroes” and “antiheroes” of the Tajik nation had played during the delimitation of the borders during 1920s. These new historical interpretations⁵² were contrary to the “official” “half-brother” version. At the time, some of the Khujand elite (A. Rakhimbaev, F. Khodjaeva, A. Fitrat) were partisans of the “Great Turkestan” idea, while the representatives of other regions and cities (N. Makhsum from Karategin, Ch. Imamov from Zarafshan, Sh. Shotermurov from Badakhshan, and A. Mukhiddinov from Bukhara) wanted independence for Tajikistan. The culmination of this rediscovery of the past was a book by

Rahim Masov, *History of the Crude Division*,⁵³ which revealed an anti-Khujand view of the events in the 1920s and which became an instant best-seller in Tajikistan.

In close relation to politics, the cultural life of Tajikistan before perestroika was strongly affected by the preferences of the “half brother.” Khujand music and dancing, traditionally similar to Uzbek, were prevalent on Tajik radio and television and were a source of cultural frustration for Tajiks of other regions. Most officials spoke a Khujand dialect of Tajik which was grammatically and lexically affected by Uzbek. After perestroika, public speeches by Khujand officials in the republic’s capital were continuously criticized and mocked in the opposition press. A journalist Safar Abdullo, for instance, claimed that

it is an open secret that there is a category of local party governmental officials who do not know their own language at all, and even when they do, their vocabulary is limited to a few expressions from their home lexicon. Oh, how many false Tajiks have I seen who read our literature in Russian translations! They consider themselves cultured and hurl reproaches and false accusation at others.⁵⁴

The former prime minister of Tajikistan, Djamshed Karimov, did not speak any Tajik, while the first secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, Khakhar Makhkamov, was mocked by the press for the use of Uzbek words in his Tajik. During plenary sessions of the Supreme Soviet broadcast on Tajik television, the first secretary repeatedly used the Uzbek word *kim* (who) instead of the Tajik *ki* in his question, “who is for and who is against?”

For the most part, however, poets and writers opposed to the government did not openly identify the “inner enemy” until the early 1990s. The poetry of the pre- and early perestroika periods was not anti-Khujand but rather pro-regional. Thus the Badakhshani poet Lidush refers to Badakhshan in this way:

I believe the time will come when my homeland turns into a flower garden
I believe the time will come when my Badakhshan becomes a garden of hope ...⁵⁵

Similarly, Gulrukhsor Safieva wrote about a little village, Yakhch, where she had spent her childhood:

In the end you will fall in love
With Yakhch and its mountains,
With the streams of its waterfalls,
With secrets of its springs.⁵⁶

Poets who were elected as deputies to the parliament in Moscow such as Loik Sherali, Mumin Kanoat, and Gulrukhsor Safieva, or who worked in the republican parliament of Tajikistan, like Bozor Sobir, were opposed to the government. Their attempts to solve a variety of problems in their regions by means of reforms brought them into direct conflict with the Khujand majority and communist conservatives. The conflict led one of the most radical representatives of the opposition, Bozor Sobir, to give away his deputy's mandate, which prompted him to write a scandalous poem that exposed Khujand as the "other":

I read "marsia"⁵⁷ for Samarqand and Bukhara,
For "kibla"⁵⁸ of Zoroaster and cradle of Sino,
From khoji Kamoliddin and his city Khujand,
Khujandism is left to us and the owners ...

Though the light of [electricity] sparks from the summit of Nurek,
The life of Tajik in this light did not become worthy.
Ever since, another light is gleaming from Ragun,
He is told: "Get out of your hovel ... !"⁵⁹

Depicting the loss of Zoroastrian values as a consequence of the Arab conquest and of Islamization, as well as the losses of more recent times (Samarqand and Bukhara, debates about Avicenna's origin), the poet concludes with the theme of the "inner enemy." He writes that the legacy left for contemporary Tajiks by Kamoliddin Khujandi—one of the famous poets born in Khujand—is "Khujandism," the ideology behind the rule of Khujandis in Tajikistan. In the second quatrain, Sobir elaborates upon this subject with concrete examples of the consequences of Khujand rule. The poet mentions the flooding of villages in Ragun, a seismically dangerous zone, to build a hydraulic station which was the cause of dispute between the Tajik government and its opposition.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have analyzed three types of “the other” that appear in Tajik literature in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Russia was seen as both a motherly figure and an evil step-mother. Russia had established Tajikistan as a state and nourished it socially and economically, but at the same time it had deformed its identity. Uzbekistan was portrayed as the evil step-father because of the demarcation during the 1920’s and the “loss” of Samarqand and Bukhara. Khujand was seen as a half-brother because it monopolized political power in Tajikistan and imposed its half-Uzbek, half-Tajik culture upon other regions of Tajikistan. These images of “the other” were constructed by Tajik poets and writers who borrowed images from stereotypes, popular beliefs, and myths about Russian, Uzbekistan, and Khujand. They used them to advance their own nationalist dream of an independent Tajikistan. Nationalist mobilization spurred by the literary elite would take on a dynamic of its own during the vicious civil war that broke out in 1992, civil war that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Tajiks, the departure of hundreds of thousands of Tajik, Uzbek and Russian speakers from the country, and the change of power in the capital of the new state.

Negative images of Russia and Khujand in the post-war Tajikistan lost their topicality and slowly disappeared from the Tajik literature. In the process of Tajik nation building, construction of the “other” image is mainly concentrated on Uzbekistan due to continuous political tensions between the two countries.

NOTES

¹ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 206.

² Victor Zaslavsky, "Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies," in *Daedalus* 121:2 (Spring 1992): 107.

³ See S. Lounev and G. Shirokov, "Central Asia as a New Region of World Politics," in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change* (Maryland: The Eisenhower Institute, 1995), p. 304.

⁴ Sharif Shukurov and Rustam Shukurov, *Centralnaya Aziya. Opit istorii dukha* (Moskva: CSP Orengburskoi oblasti, 2001), p. 114.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶ See Gesu Jahangiri, "The premises for the construction of a Tajik National Identity, 1920–1930" in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, ed. Mohammad Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare, and Shirin Akiner (Great Britain: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 14–41.

⁷ M. Mukhiddinov, "Mardumi shahr va atrofi Bukhoro Tojikand yo Uzbekand?" in *Rohbari Donish* 8-9 (August-September 1928): 2.

⁸ See, for instance, Iosif Braginskiy, "Tadjikskaya literature," in *Literaturi Srendeni Azii* (Moskva: Nauka, 1960), pp. 21–85.

⁹ See <http://cccp.narod.ru/gerb.html>.

¹⁰ Such as Kutbi Kirom's "Siberian Man," "To Russian Poet Victor Bokov," "To Sergey Esenin"; and Mumin Kanoat's "The Waves of Dnepr," "The Song of Stalingrad," translated by Maksim Rilskiy.

¹¹ Such as Bozor Sobir's "To Stanislav Kunyayev," Gulrukhsor Safieva's "Easter Poem," "Epistle to Svetlana Aleksievich"; and Timur Zulfikarov's "Andrey Rublev," "Mamai," "Churches Swans," "Christmas"; and "Dmitriy Donskoy's Prayer on the Kulikov Field."

¹² Loik Sherali, *Varaki Sang* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1980), p. 66.

¹³ In April 1928, the Decree on Romanization was adopted and published; it worked until 1940, when Cyrillic letters replaced the Latin alphabet. See, for instance, Gesu Jahangiri, "The premises for the construction of a Tajik National Identity," pp.14–41 and M. Bazarov, "Sovetskaya religioznaya politika v Sredney Azii 1918-1930gg.," in *Etnicheskie i regionalnie konflikti v Evrazii* (Moskva: Ves Mir, 1997), pp. 46–72.

¹⁴ Sharif Shukurov and Rustam Shukurov, *Centralnaya Aziya: Opit istorii dukha* (Moskva: CSP Orengburskoi oblasti, 2001), pp. 125–129.

¹⁵ The percentage of Tajiks living in Afghanistan significantly increased after the establishment of Soviet ruling in Tajikistan during the 1920s and in the winter of 1992 after the outbreak of civil war.

¹⁶ Interview with Gulrukhsor Safieva dated October 24, 1999.

¹⁷ An Afghan singer famous in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, who died in a car accident in 1979.

¹⁸ *Vatan* means "homeland" in Tajik and Dari.

¹⁹ Farzona, *Shabokhuni Bark* (Dushanbe: Adib, 1989), p. 16.

- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 17.
- ²¹ Bozor Sobir, *Charogi Ruz* 5 (February 1992): 3.
- ²² Tamir Yael, “The Enigma of Nationalism,” in *World Politics* XLVII (April 1995), p. 437, as quoted by Ronald Grigor Suny, “Why We Hate You: The Passions of National Identity and Ethnic Violence,” (Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, Spring 2004), p. 10.
- ²³ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, p. 25.
- ²⁴ *Divan* is Persian for “collection of poems.”
- ²⁵ Bozor Sobir, *Oftobnihol* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1982), p. 15.
- ²⁶ In the post-Soviet era, Ismail Somoni became the symbol of Tajik historical glory.
- ²⁷ A famous miniaturist from Hitar (15th–16th century).
- ²⁸ Architectural monument in Samarqand.
- ²⁹ Bozor Sobir, *Mijgoni Shab* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1981), p. 34.
- ³⁰ Y. S. Ashurov et al, *Bukhara* (Moskva: Nauka, 1968), p. 17.
- ³¹ The same motif can be found in another short story by Bahmanyor, “The Price of Life.” See Bahmanyor, *Pesn idushego v petlu* (Dushanbe: Adib, 1991), p. 12.
- ³² Ibid., pp. 5–11.
- ³³ Legendary hero of Firodusi’s *Shahname*.
- ³⁴ Both Abdulkandi and Kuhistani are historical figures who lived during Timur’s ruling.
- ³⁵ Bahmanyor, *Pesn*, p. 8.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 5.
- ³⁸ Ahmadi Donish, a Tajik pro-Russian enlightening thinker of the 19th century.
- ³⁹ Loik Sherali, *Faryodi befaryodras* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1997), p. 21.
- ⁴⁰ Bozor Sobir, *Mijgoni Shab* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1981), p. 33.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 24–25.
- ⁴² Loik Sherali, *Varaki Sang* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1980), p. 99.
- ⁴³ *Obrashenie OKO “Samarqand” k Prezidiumu II sezda narodnikh deputatov SSSR* (12.1989).
- ⁴⁴ Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Break up of the Soviet Union* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Public Policy Press, 2003), p. 67.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 67.
- ⁴⁶ During the post-Soviet period, in response to accusations of political and economic corruption, the cultural elite of Khujand were constantly discussing the idea of annexation to Uzbekistan.
- ⁴⁷ M. Olimov, *Mejtadjikskiy konflikt: put k mir* (Moskva: Rossiyskaya akademiya Nauk, Institut etnologii I antropologii im. Miklukhi Maklaya, 1998), p. 36. Also see A Niezi, “Tajikistan: regionalnie aspekti

konflikta (1990-ie godi),” in *Centralnaya Azia I Kavkaz*. (Shveciya: Centr socialnikh i politicheskikh issledovaniy, 1997), p. 62.

⁴⁸ The word *oshkoro* is a literal translation of perestroika’s glasnost slogan.

⁴⁹ “Bokhtar” Bactria corresponds to the pre-Islamic state, whose territory included lands of the present Khatlon region.

⁵⁰ U. G. Kulchik and others, “Program of ‘Bokhtar,’” in *Grajdanskije dvijeniya v Tadjikistane* (Moskva: CIMO, 1990), pp. 62–66.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵² See, for example, M. Shukurov, “Durustiho asosi oshnoist,” in *Sadoi Shark*, no. 2, (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), p. 109.

⁵³ Rahim Masov, *Istoriya topornogo razdeleniya* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1991).

⁵⁴ N. Abdullo, “Niholi dushmani barkan,” in *Sadoi Shark*, no. 2 (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), p. 90.

⁵⁵ Habib Lidush, *Daryota tizd* (Khorug: Khorug, 1991), p. 33.

⁵⁶ Gurlrukhsor, *Ruhi Bokhtar* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1987), p. 79.

⁵⁷ Traditional poetry, read at funerals.

⁵⁸ In this context, *kibla* refers to the Zoroastrian sacred “fire.”

⁵⁹ Bozor Sobir, *Chashmi Safedor* (Dushanbe: Adolat, 1991), pp. 9–10.