

## VI. The Fergana Valley Under Stalin, 1929-1953

Kamoludin Abdullaev (Tajikistan), Ravshan Nazarov (Uzbekistan)

The so-called Stalin years were a pivotal period in the development of Soviet Central Asia in general and the Fergana Valley in particular. This was a time when the USSR gained international recognition and when, by the second half of the 1920's, the internal struggle against the basmachi in Central Asia was concluded. A small number of nationalist émigrés from Turkestan settled in Turkey in the mid-1920s, just at the time when Turkey was strengthening its relations with the USSR. Apart from running a rudimentary underground network of supporters in the Soviet Union, these Pan-Turkists did not further influence developments in Central Asia. The national delineation of internal borders in Central Asia and the opportunity to carry out creative work in the resulting national entities drew many former Jadids to the side of the Soviet government. On the whole, the government and its major opponents in Central Asia, including bellicose religious radicals and supporters of the basmachis, as well as restive idealistic reformers like the Jadids, achieved a modus vivendi.

### Soviet policy shifts from tolerance and growth to coercion and exploitation

The process of national development under Soviet rule was uneven. From the establishment of the Soviet government in 1918 down to the end of the 1920's the Bolsheviks were in no position to carry out the transformation of Central Asian society, which continued to view itself as Muslim. Throughout those years the government confined itself to neutralizing and eliminating whomever it considered to be the worst "exploiters." It accomplished this by enlisting the support of pro-Soviet Jadids and those Muslim clerics who were disposed to collaborate with any government and who thereby became the first representatives of the USSR's "official Islam." This allowed Central Asian society in the first decade of Soviet rule to adjust to the new political conditions while not betraying its own fundamental Muslim principles. The tradition of acquiescence with Russian rule reached back to tsarist times when the majority of mullahs considered Turkestan to be a kind of Muslim order or "Daru-islam."<sup>1</sup> After all, religion was not oppressed, people freely attended mosques, and kazi courts continued to implement an order based on Sharia law.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Here: "Muslim state."

<sup>2</sup> See: Komatsu Hisao, "Dār al'Islām under Russian Rule As Understood by Turkestani Muslim Intellectuals," Tomohiko Uyama, ed., *Empire, Islam and Politics in Central Eurasia*. Slavic Eurasian Studies No. 14. Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007, p 5. Complete text available at [http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14\\_ses/contents.html](http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14_ses/contents.html)

Such upper class and privileged groups as the hodjas, turas, ishans, saiids, and mirzas, adjusted to the new realities quicker than others thanks to the skills they had acquired and maintained through many centuries. Many learned Russian and worked as Soviet teachers, administrators, and accountants. Some of them even managed to keep their pieces of land. Tenant farmers or choriakkoron who worked for them gave a fourth (choriak) of their crops to their landlords down to the collectivization of land at the end of the 1920's. Members of the Muslim clergy (ulemas)<sup>3</sup> continued to be the main advisors to local communities and the intermediaries between Muslims and the new authorities. They issued resolutions on what was considered halol (allowed) or haram (forbidden), including on such matters as the wearing of modern clothing, the use of modern medicines and medical procedures, the consumption of new products and of alcoholic beverages including vodka and wine. Such ancestral and urban neighborhood groupings as the avlods<sup>4</sup> and mahallas,<sup>5</sup> remained autonomous and detached from politics. Their leaders replaced traditional robes and turbans with suits and skullcaps, successfully adjusted to the new conditions. In so doing, they assured cultural continuity and stability. Having abandoned their official powers, they managed nonetheless to retain their traditional status and authority in society.

In spite of all the Bolshevik slogans and exhortations, Central Asian settlements did not divide along the lines of class. Former feudals, officials of the Khan and tsarist administrators sent their young people to study at universities in Tashkent, Moscow, Leningrad, and Baku. Communities continued to support their traditional leaders and take pride in them. They tried to gain their patronage and protection in the event of conflicts or complicated political conditions. Indeed, these traditional leaders came to form the backbone of the new cultural, economic and bureaucratic elite of the Soviet period.

Thus, Kamil Iarmatov, a Tajik from Kanibadam, became a student at the State Cinematography Training School in Moscow in 1928. Kamil was the son of Iarmuhammad-mingbashi, a county chief of Kanibadam city, and grandchild of Muhammad Karim-kurbashi, commandant of Mahram, a fort between Khujand and Kanibadam. Kamil's grandfather, Karim-kurbashi, served the Kokand Khan Hudoiar and fought against tsarist troops in Mahram in August, 1875. His son, Iarmuhammad worked for the Russian Tsar Nicholas II. At the beginning of 1918, after the defeat of the "Kokand autonomy" Iarmuhammad handed over the administration of the county, which included the best Tajik areas of the Fergana Valley (Kanibadam, Isfara, Chorku, Qarachiqum, Besharyq and

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<sup>3</sup> Ulam (s. alim), religious experts on Islamic laws who worked as kazi (judges), teachers, etc..

<sup>4</sup> Avlod (plural form from Arabic valid child, offspring): a large family of blood relatives made up of several smaller families. Avlods could live together in the same house, or separately, but they necessarily acknowledged the supremacy of the common grandfather.

<sup>5</sup> Mahalla (from the Arabic: "place of living") : a stable community of neighbors in a city or large settlement. Usually, mahallas comprised people sharing a common profession (for instance, blacksmiths) or origins (for example, Kazakhs).

Mahram), to the local Soviet. Conjointly, Iarmuhammad also gave his own downtown urban homestead to the Soviet government.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, he saved his own life and the lives of his extended family. The Soviet government did not persecute Iarmuhammad (who died in 1925) even though he was a former tsarist official. Before becoming a famous Soviet film producer and before the revolution, his son, Kamil Iarmatov, studied at a local Russian language school for members of the indigenous population. He spent the years 1919-1924 chasing down gangsters, initially as a member of the Muslim cavalry led by Hamdam-kurbashi Qalandarov and then as a district chief of police.<sup>7</sup>

This gradual and evolutionary development of the Soviet government and its adaptation to local conditions changed radically at the end of the 1920s, when Bolshevik doctrine abandoned the goal of spreading the “world revolution” and embraced instead the idea of “socialism in one country.”

Henceforth, a total political and economic centralization reigned in Central Asia. What was called a system of “command and administrative control” prevailed everywhere, and especially in the production of cotton in the Fergana Valley. The goal was to free the USSR of all dependence of cotton from abroad, and especially from the USA. The chosen means to achieve this was to collectivize the ownership of land and to introduce extreme centralization in its management. To fight the inevitable inefficiency and abuses to which this system gave rise, the government resorted increasingly to terror and coercion.

Even during tsarist times the Fergana Valley had been turned into Russia’s largest cotton field. By 1913 it supplied 62 % Central Asian cotton and met 37% of the needs of Russia’s textile industry.<sup>8</sup> Following the Civil War of 1918-1920 Central Russia’s textile mills ceased functioning for want of raw materials. No longer able to afford to buy foreign cotton, the Bolsheviks imposed on the toilers of the Fergana Valley the task of “conquering the heights of cotton independence.” Farmers of the region achieved this by devoting all newly irrigated land to cotton and by reducing the area for all other crops. By 1932 investments in irrigation infrastructure constituted a quarter of all new investment in Uzbekistan, while agriculture accounted for 50% of the total.<sup>9</sup> In addition to this, the national (“Union”) budget devoted still more expenditures to the construction of cross-border irrigation infrastructure, including collectors that discharged water into the Syr-Daria River.

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<sup>6</sup> At the present time a city film theater by the name of Kamil Iarmatov is located there.

<sup>7</sup> Kamil Iarmatov (1903-1978), one of the founding fathers of cinema in Central Asia. His daughter, Gulnora Kamilovna Pulatova, was a minister of healthcare of the Tajik SSR at the end of 1980’s.

<sup>8</sup> Thurman, Michael, “The ‘Command-Administrative System’ in Cotton Framing in Uzbekistan. 1920s to Present,” Papers on Inner Asia, Bloomington, Indiana, 1999, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Ocherki istorii Ferganskoi oblasti v Sovetskii period, Tashkent, 1980, p.34.

The collectivization of land ownership was to be hastened after 1930 by an “offensive against the ‘Kulaks.’” By mid-1931 this had descended into a policy of “liquidating the ‘Kulaks’ as a class.” For the crime of using hired labor “Kulaks,” who were defined in such a way as to include all of the more or less well-off households, were charged with “violating Soviet laws.” Between late 1931 and 1932 Kulak households were expelled from Central Asia and forcefully moved to Ukraine and the North Caucasus.<sup>10</sup> Tens of thousands of peasant households were liquidated and incorporated into collective farms that operated on the principle of a “planned Socialist household.” On both the new collective and cooperative farms, virtually everything became communal property, including land, cattle used for work and offered for sale, the main agricultural machinery, tools and buildings. This said, the collective farms had no access to the modern agricultural machines that were essential if large-scale agriculture was to function even minimally. The Communist Party solved this by creating Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS) under its strict control.

Managing each collective farm, or kolkhoz, was a board headed by a chairman elected by a general meeting of members. Kolkhoz Party committees and the MTS’s exercised rigorous control over the Kolkhoz chairmen. These in turn were controlled by the Party’s District Committees (Raicoms) which reported to the Regional Committees (Obcoms) which, finally, were accountable to the Central Committee (CC) in the union republics that reported to the Central Committee headed by Stalin himself. The web of Central Committees at the republic, Obcom and Raicom levels was responsible for carrying out every task assigned by the Center. The Party also managed the entire system of Soviets or Councils, beginning in Moscow with the Supreme Soviet, then expending downward through a Supreme Soviet in each republic to district and village Soviets.

In the Fergana Valley, the aim of this entire system of Soviets instituted by the Communist Party was the complete destruction of the class of independent farmers and of private agriculture and its replacement by gigantic collective farms that would produce cotton. More than half of all cropland was devoted to this one industrial crop. Foodstuffs, including bread, were mainly imported from Siberia along the new Turkistan-Siberia railroad.<sup>11</sup> Forests that were home to rare and unique species of animals and birds were hacked down to make cotton fields.

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<sup>10</sup> Driker H.N., Formirovanie klassov sotsyalisticheskogo obschestva v Tadjikistane, Dushanbe, 1983, p. 105.

<sup>11</sup> The Turkestan-Siberian railway was built in 1926 -1931.

Collectivization in the Fergana Valley continued from 1927 up until 1933. By the end of 1932 81% of farming households in the Valley had been collectivized, and they accounted for 79% of all production.<sup>12</sup>

Amazingly, collectivization did not disrupt the traditional structure of the typical Fergana Valley village. Those who had traditionally worked as tenant farmers on feudal lands had, by the early 1930s, become collective farmers who continued to work without rights, but for the state. This was the grand result of all the attention that higher Party authorities lavished on the Fergana Valley in those years.

### Communications

The epochal drawing of internal Soviet borders after 1924 left the Fergana Valley divided among three republics, each with its own chief executive (Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Socialist Republic), council of ministers, flag, anthem, constitution, national language, national Communist Party, Academy of Sciences, opera and ballet theater, state university, film studio, and radio station---in short nearly all the domestic features of a modern nation-state. Yet none of the largest Fergana Valley cities became a republic capital. Prior to the delineation of borders, the Fergana Valley had been a self-sufficient economic region at the important junction of the Zerafshan valley, the Tashkent oasis, the Karategin, Alai, and Pamir mountains, and Chinese Kashgaria. The new borders transformed it into a geographically peripheral and economically marginal zone, whose infrastructure, though not lacking development, was relatively backward compared with the republic of which each sector was a part.

The new borders all but guaranteed that the Soviet government would ignore the transport and communications needs of the Fergana Valley. To cover the 650 km. from Osh in the Fergana to Frunze (Bishkek), the capital of Kyrgyzia one had to cross two passes at more than 3,000 meters that were closed during winter. Residents of the Kirgiz South instead reached their capital via the Uzbek city of Khanabad. A train from Osh to the new Kyrgyz capital at Frunze (now Bishkek) had to cross the borders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan several times.

The situation in Tajikistan was no less absurd. To get from the highly developed Fergana region of Tajikistan to the capital in the South meant a 350 km. trip that included crossing passes in the Turkestan and Hisar mountains that were closed half the year. The alternative, 200 km. longer, was to go via the Uzbek city of Samarkand.

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<sup>12</sup> Loc.cit., Ocherki istorii Ferganskoi oblasti v Sovetskii period, p.40.

Similarly, the trip from Khujand to Tajikistan's Badakhshan Autonomous Region on the Afghan border took at least two days of driving on a road that ran through Uzbek parts of the Fergana Valley and then via the now-Kyrgyz city of Osh. As a result, northern and southern Tajiks had only the faintest idea of their newly-defined "compatriots" in the other region. Even today there are people in Tajikistan's sector of the Fergana Valley who have never been to the country's capital of Dushanbe, not to say to more southern areas of the country or to Badakhshan.

A similar, albeit less absurd, mismatch of political, cultural, economic, and geographical boundaries can be observed in Uzbekistan. The shortest and most convenient way of reaching Tashkent by car from Andijan and Kokand was, and still is, through the city of Khujand in the Tajik sector of the Fergana Valley. An alternative road running through the narrow Altyinkan corridor and involving the 2,267 m. Kamchik pass, was very inconvenient and closed for winter as well. Similarly, the railway from the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley to Tashkent runs for 100 km. through the territory of Tajikistan.

The territorial delineation left most of the plains areas of the Valley under the control of Uzbekistan. This provided justifications for Uzbekistan to consider the Fergana Valley as a core Uzbek territory. The foothills, rich in water and opening the way to the Alai and Pamir mountains, fell to Kyrgyzia. Tajikistan got a relatively small but important western part of the valley, through which passed the principal arteries connecting Tashkent with the Uzbek central and eastern parts of the valley. Thus, Uzbekistan was left in control of the bulk of the Valley's territory and population, while Kyrgyzstan controlled the rivers flowing to the Valley from the Alai, Tien-Shan, and Turkestan peaks, as well as the territory that goods from Badakhshan must cross to reach the nearest rail head, in Uzbek Andijan. As to Tajikistan, it received strategically important sections of the trans-Uzbek railway and motorway. And with the completion of the Kairakkum reservoir and hydroelectric station in the 1950s,<sup>13</sup> it gained a measure of control over the waters of the Syr Daria River. At the time, however, there were no conflicts over water and all of the three republics had direct access to the upper streams of the Syr Daria.

During the Stalin era Central Asia failed to become a unified economic region. Moscow viewed it as a source of raw materials for the more developed European areas of the USSR. Railways were designed not to promote regional development but to deliver raw materials in the most direct manner from Central Asia to industrial centers in the Russian Federation. There was minimal investment in the internal development of specific

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<sup>13</sup> The Kairakkum (Qairoqum) reservoir was created in 1956-1958 on the Syr Daria river in the western (Tajik) part of the Fergana valley to regulate water flows and provide for stable irrigation of lands covering the area of more than 300,000 hectares. The area of the reservoir is 513 km.2

republics or in trade between neighboring republics. Indeed, there was no inherent reason for Soviet policy to look favorably on the development of such inter-republican trade and communications in Central Asia or the Fergana Valley.

The priority Moscow assigned to the core Russian areas of the USSR assured that the periphery would remain backward and with a weak sense of unity. The Stalin era left Central Asia as a poorly-developed, agrarian, and subsidized region dependent on Russia for whatever economic well-being it enjoyed. This is all the more true of the Fergana Valley, as a periphery of a periphery.

### Education and Culture

It is difficult to separate “good” Soviet policies from “bad” during the Stalin years. The Bolsheviks inherited from European Social Democrats certain crucial and progressive ideas. Thus, they were certain that mass education was necessary for the industrialization and modernization of society. Their policies in this area differed markedly from those of the former tsarist government. By 1938 a network of elementary schools extended throughout all of the USSR. Cities and large villages saw the construction of seven-year schools. Overall, the schools paid special attention to mathematics and the exact sciences, as well as to languages, literature, and history. All this represented stupendous progress compared with the tsarist and Muslim schools which had taught only basic reading and arithmetic. As early as 1939 three-quarters of Soviet citizens were literate and by the death of Stalin nearly all were.

Russian colonization brought ideas of modernization to the Fergana Valley by the end of the nineteenth century. In spite of war, revolution, and civil war, these ideas spread to all social classes and to even the most remote corners of the Fergana Valley over the following decades. Even though the overall quality of life in the Fergana Valley in 1953 did not exceed that of 1928, there were many positive changes nonetheless. Fresh water from the Great Fergana Canal, dug in six weeks in 1939, replaced water from stagnant domestic wells (khauzes). The introduction of potatoes and tomatoes improved diets. Clinics and medical centers were opened in all cities and big villages. Preventive medicine made such terrible diseases as malaria, typhus, Aleppo boil, diphtheria, cholera, and trachoma things of the past. By 1953 houses across the Valley were lit by electricity; films, including locally made ones, were being shown at public recreation centers; and the radio aired hit songs by such popular local singers as Halima Nasyrova<sup>14</sup> Tamara Khanum.<sup>15</sup> Men were glad to wear European suits,

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<sup>14</sup> Nasyrova Halima (1913), an Uzbek singer hailing from Taglyk village near Kokand. She started her creative activities as a

women boldly unveiled their faces, children went to school, and Soviet police maintained order in the growing cities.

The new borders between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan seemed of little consequence. People lived in one country, the USSR, and could move from village to village or republic to republic without being stopped by a border guard or facing an armed gangster. Uzbeks in Kokand could easily marry off their daughters in Osh. Mobile and entrepreneurial Tajiks from Karategin felt comfortable living in the Uzbek quarters of Fergana Valley cities, including Tashkent, as this did not damage their ethno-confessional or cultural identity. Symbols of national identity that were specific to Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks appeared comfortably on the street, alongside Soviet symbols. Indeed, it was precisely in this period that Fergana Valley residents, who formerly identified themselves mainly in terms of their place of residence or profession, began realizing that they were also Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks.

Marxists recognized national units and acknowledged nationalism as inevitable but considered it an intermediate phase to be overcome as quickly as possible in order to reach a classless and nation-free Communist future. For this reason, Bolsheviks took the seemingly paradoxical step of laying the foundation of national states in Central Asia, at the same time making sure that both the new states and the nationalities on which they were based remained in strict subordination to the political agenda of Bolshevism.

### Islam and Gender

The Soviet government attempted to control all aspects of Muslims' social and political life. Communist ideology declared religion to be the opium of the people and subjected it to large-scale attacks. The first target of the atheistic Soviet system was the more intellectual form of Islam, with its powerful financial base and its array of educational institutions. It also sought to undermine the influence of "popular" Islam, which had always existed on the communal level and linked the culture and folklore of people in the Fergana Valley with their religious identity. The organs of state security were particularly active in the struggle against religion, destroying all influential religious figures and getting the survivors under their control. Mosques and madrassas were turned

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drama actress in 1927 and was a popular artist of the USSR from 1937 on. In 1930-1985, she performed at the Uzbek opera and ballet theater and was awarded a State Prize of the USSR in 1942 and 1951.

<sup>15</sup> Tamara Khanum, real name was Tamara Artemovna Petrosian (1906-1991), was born in Fergana and was Armenian by nationality. She was a dancer, singer, and ballet-master and participated in the establishment of the Uzbek ballet theater. She reformed the performance style of Uzbek female dances, and was a collector of song and dance folklore of various nations throughout the world. She received the State Prize of the USSR in 1941.

into warehouses and commercial buildings. Sharia courts were abolished in 1927.

Meanwhile, the Soviet government used the loyal and certified mullahs of “official Islam” to create acceptable substitutes for both the intellectual and the popular forms of the faith. The Bolsheviks’ use of coopted “red mullahs” dated back to their struggle against the basmach in the 1920’s. Official Islam, which emerged in the height of the Second World War in 1942, was under firm Communist control. Its main body was the Central Asian Clerical Administration of Muslims (SADUM) headed by a mufti. SADUM was based in Tashkent and led by an influential Uzbek clan up until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Vigilantly controlled by the state, the mufti busied himself with registering an insignificant number of mosques, appointing their imams, and even determining the content for the latter’s sermons. However, such religious figures and their institutions did not play a significant role in the lives of the Hanafi Sunni Muslims of the Fergana Valley. Among those who cared, the majority of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz preferred official Islam to popular Islam supported by unofficial mullahs and ishans at the community level. This “unofficial” or “popular” Islam lacked intellectual depth and that it was under the sights of the state security services, who feared the damage it might do to the Soviet government.

In its effort to enlist the sympathies of the “oppressed females of the Orient,” the Bolsheviks promised women complete emancipation. With this goal in mind, in 1927 they organized a hudjum (offensive, attack) on patriarchal customs, which they claimed led to the oppression of women. The focal points of this hudjum were the Uzbek and Tajik communities of the Fergana Valley. They attacked under-age marriage, the paying of a bride-price (kalym), and especially the wearing of the farandji or chador, a symbol of female oppression. Fergana valley residents, however, considered the wearing of farandji to be a necessity in their densely populated and urbanized environment. Most people in the Valley, especially males perceived the hudjum as an insult to their national and religious identities. True, some women abandoned farandji and aspired to take advantage of their newly-won opportunity to get an education and master trades. Public acceptance of the anti-religion campaign diminished at the end of the 1920s when the Soviet government began again to resort to violence in its struggle against Islam. The renewed vigor of Soviet policy intensified civil strife. In the Fergana Valley a number of reactionary clergymen fought back by killing female activists.

Notwithstanding the compulsory nature of the reforms, an increasing number of women found their way into governmental and educational institutions. By 1940 women made up almost half of all students in urban schools. By the mid-1950’s almost all Tajik, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz females in the Fergana Valley stopped wearing

veils. However, both females and males in all three republics tried to preserve the old patriarchic traditions at home. Despite all repressions and prohibitions, Islamic customs and traditional habits concerning prayers, weddings, circumcisions, funerals, eating, and hygiene were still omnipresent in the private lives of people across Central Asia. The resulting double standard enabled people in public to put on a show of living according to Soviet practices, but at home to continue adhering to traditional ways of life. These accommodations left women subject to double exploitation: after working all day they were expected to perform all the traditional household chores in the evening. And despite increases in literacy levels among Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek females, families with five or more children continued to predominate.

### Dilemmas of the “Indigenization” Policy and Problems of Leadership

The Soviet government tried to show that its policies had nothing in common with tsarist policies that oppressed the non-Russian peoples. With this goal in mind, it pursued a policy of korenizatsiia or indigenization. This was an early Soviet notion that supported members of the titular nationalities of recently formed republics and “national minorities.” Its objective was to enlist the support of non-Russian peoples and thereby to internationalize the Communist movement. Minority peoples were called upon to study Russian along with their native languages. Literary works and public documents were being issued in both local languages and Russian. Clerical correspondence in all three of the Fergana republics was conducted in at least two languages. Depending on the ethnic composition of a particular area, newspapers in cities across the Valley were issued in Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz.

A goal of the indigenization policy was to develop competent “national cadres” who were loyal to the Soviet government. It is during these years that first Soviet doctors, teachers, writers, actors and artists emerged from among the Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. All owed their professional advancement solely to the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet state. Conflict between competence and political loyalty was the major impediment to indigenization. The Soviet government eagerly promoted people from the poorest classes whose educational qualifications were far below those of both Russians other non-Russians from privileged families. The Bolsheviks treated the latter as unreliable allies and class enemies, in spite of their higher level of professional training.

The weakness of the indigenization policy began to show immediately. An outstanding figure from among the first Uzbek graduating classes in Uzbekistan that were loyal to the Soviet government was Iuldash Akhunbabaev,

a native of Djoi-Bazar village in the Margilan district in the Fergana Province.<sup>16</sup> Loyal and also prominent throughout the Soviet Union were such kolkhoz chairmen as Khamrakul Tursunkulov (1892-1965) from Vuadil village in the Fergana and thrice a Hero of Socialist Labor, and Saidhodja Urunhodjaev (1901-1967) from Shaihburhon village in the Khujand district and twice a Hero of Socialist Labor. All three came from poor Fergana farm families and were only barely literate.<sup>17</sup>

Such leaders distinguished mainly for their peasant origins, performance of duties, and allegiance to the regime, trained collective farmers in the spirit of unconditional subordination to the government. On their side, collective farmers knew that their rais (chairman) had influential connections in the state and Party hierarchies, and that the well-being of every kolkhoz member was in his hands. In the case of Tursunkulov and Urunhodjaev these connections extended to Politburo of the Central Committee. Feared and respected, the rais wielded absolute power over kolkhozniki. The entire agricultural system of the Fergana Valley and of Central Asia rested on these authoritarian and at times charismatic leaders, who suppressed all independent initiative and demanded that tasks assigned from above with no local participation be carried unquestioningly. The figure of the rais, loyal to his superiors and unrelenting toward his villagers, came to be the ideal archetype for all Party and Soviet-level leaders in the Fergana Valley and Central Asia.

Their lack of education prevented rais from rising in the industrial world. This created a fissure in the economy of the Fergana Valley, with agriculture and industry developing along parallel but non-intersecting lines. Agrarian Tajik, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz communities, organized into kolkhozes traditionally led by rais-leaders, dominated in the agricultural sector. Locally born and speaking local dialects, Rais were not familiar with Marxism-Leninism, had only the vaguest notions on how best to promote Communism, but did not interfere with internal community affairs. Industry, by contrast, was firmly in the hands of urbanized Russians and not indigenous people. The government dreamed of a merging of city and countryside and of Russian and Kyrgyz, Tajik, or Uzbek, but no such merging occurred. As in the tsarist times, villages and “old towns” populated by indigenous people lived their own lives and showed no interest in the “new towns” growing up alongside them.

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<sup>16</sup> Akhunbabaev Iu. (1885-1943), studied in elementary school (maktab) and until 1919 he was a day laborer and arbakesh (coachman). A Communist since 1921 and a chairman of Margilan “Koshchi” Union (1921-1925), in 1925-1938 he worked as the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Uzbekistan. In 1938-1943 he served as chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan.

<sup>17</sup> Tursunkulov Kh. participated in the establishment of Soviet rule in the Fergana valley in 1918-1921 and took pride in being friends with Marshall of the USSR Semen Budennyi. In 1935 he became chairman of a cotton-growing kolkhoz. Tursunkulov joined the party only in 1945. Despite lack of education, he was elected an honorary member of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Uzbekistan. Urunhodjaev Saidhodja, a Tajik from Khujand district joined the Communist party in 1929. From 1936 until the end of his life in 1967 he was chairman of a number of kolkhozes in Leninabad district of Leninabad province. Like Tursunkulov, Urunhodjaev had friendly connections with the highest ranking officials of the USSR (Marshalls Budennyi and Voroshilov). Deputies of the Supreme Soviet elected Tursunkulov and Urunhodjaev on repeated occasions.

Conversely, Russians living in the Valley's cities and villages continued to identify themselves as Russians, were oblivious to what was happening in the ethnic communities, and refused to learn local languages or embrace local culture. This ruled out any "merging of peoples" into a single, Soviet community. The little "unity" of the people that existed came from the dictatorship of the Communist Party and was maintained by the manner in which goods and services were distributed.

The Soviet government work hard to train young professionals from the local nationalities. By 1930 almost half of the 5,000 workers at cotton mills in the Uzbek sector of the Valley were local ethnics.<sup>18</sup> But considering the overwhelming predominance of local peoples in the population of the province, this was not enough. Moreover, most key leadership positions in industry were filled by Russians and other Slavs, with local workers concentrated in the most low-paying jobs.

Soon the Bolsheviks began damping down the indigenization policy out of fear that the multi-national Soviet empire might collapse if it did not have enough people sharing a single language and culture. Ukrainians and Byelorussians, for example, could fall under Polish influence, while Central Asians could link up with Muslims in India, Iran, and Turkey. Indigenization began in the mid 1920s but had faded away by the 1930's, replaced by the time-tested tsarist policy of Russification. True, indigenization did not completely die, but it limped along thereafter in a kind of half-life.

#### Russification and the Manipulation of Language Policy

Russification, the policy of imposing Russian culture on non-Russian peoples, provoked protests from most of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR. Russians were appointed to key administrative and political positions, and the Russian language became essential for business, Communist Party affairs, industry, science, and engineering. Soon bilingualism prevailed in Central Asia, not the former Turko-Tajik bilingualism of the Fergana Valley, but Russian-Kyrgyz, Russian-Tajik, and Russian-Uzbek bilingualism. But this pertained only to non-Russians, for while Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks spoke a minimum of two languages, very few Russians mastered any Turkic or Persian language. Russian soon replaced Turkic and Tajik as the common medium of communication throughout the Valley. To be sure, most people became familiar with Russian culture without being forced to do so. But within some strata of society Russification engendered Russophobia, taking the form of passive protests and a quiet withdrawal into "parallel" Islam.

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<sup>18</sup> Rahimov M., Istoriia Fergany, Tashkent, 1984, p.42.

The government's 1927-1940 policy of manipulating language had the further objective of breaking down Muslim unity and isolating Central Asia from the larger Islamic world. Starting from the IX century, the Tajiks and then other regional peoples adapted the Arabic alphabet to their languages. The resulting Islamic-Persian-Turkic synthesis formed the basis of the regional culture. Nevertheless, in 1927 the Soviet government abolished what it considered the archaic and inadequate Arabic-based scripts and decreed that the Latin alphabet be adopted instead. By this step the government separated the region from the Muslim world and bound it instead within its own orbit. Latinization broke Islam's monopoly over the publishing industry and pedagogy and compromised the status of both the Arabic and Persian languages, setting against them the younger and predominantly Turkic "popular" languages. It also foresaw the further transition to the Cyrillic alphabet, which helped put an end the region's Turko-Tajik cultural unity and cleared way for a monolithic Russian-speaking "Soviet culture" and "new Soviet man."

At the end of the 1920s, the Soviet government undertook a large-scale campaign to promote the Cyrillic alphabet and Russian language. It presented this to the outside world as a campaign to "abolish illiteracy," in other words, to introduce culture into a world of absolute illiteracy and a cultural virgin land. Russians presented themselves as the benefactors and bearers of an advanced culture, as opposed to the "backward peoples of Central Asia, who did not even have their own system of writing." This was accompanied by the comprehensive destruction of books in Persian, Arabic, and Turkic languages available in almost every home in the Fergana Valley. People had to conceal, bury and often burn their favorite books.

Simultaneously, the Soviets destroyed madrassas across the Fergana Valley and also many mosques, some dating to the Middle Ages. Thus, the little town of Kanibadam and nearby villages boasted eight madrassas in 1914, most of them built in the XVII-XIX centuries. Among their founders were great rulers and their families, including women, who left endowments (waqfs) for the preparation of teachers at schools in Bukhara and India and for student scholarships. Under the madrassas were some 105 schools for boys and girls in the district with a total of about 2,500 students.<sup>19</sup> The curriculum was not based solely on theology but included the sciences, on the basis of the Muslim that this would assist in the search for the "right path." These schools taught logic, adab (a code of conduct and the appreciation of beauty), the fundamentals of natural science, calligraphy, and Arabic. Alumni of Kanibadam madrassas were considered to be the best calligraphers in the Kokand Khanate, and in the nineteenth century were named to various missions to Kashgar in China.

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<sup>19</sup> To compare, in the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century there were 300 maktabs and 5500 students in Kokand.

By the end of the culture war launched in 1927, four of the eight madrassas had disappeared entirely and three others (namely Mirradjab Dodho, Hodja Rushnoi and Oim) were being used as a school for tractor drivers, a vocational-technical school, and a prison. Only one of them, the oldest–Mirradjab Dodho –survived in its more or less original form.<sup>20</sup>

The campaign to “abolish illiteracy” was a typical Bolshevik project of social engineering. The price paid for modernization and the introduction of Soviet mass education was the irretrievable loss of culture, subsequent cultural deprivation, and the plunging of whole populations into backwardness. Epistemologically and psychologically this policy was rooted in Islamophobia and a Russian form of “Orientalism,” i.e. in the imperial belief that the Russian people were somehow “chosen” to civilize the more “backward” peoples.

Henceforth, it was all but fatal admit to having had a “Muslim education.” Instead, people in the Fergana Valley preferred to present themselves in job interviews as the illiterate children of poor peasants. This was quite logical since the Soviet government considered an illiterate and poor villager dressed in tatter to be more reliable than a neatly dressed and educated “mullah.” The government projected this rural poverty and illiteracy onto entire peoples, declaring them backward and qualified for generous “domestication” at the price of unconditional political allegiance. To justify this policy the government resolved first to get rid of the educated class, which it did by denouncing it as the bearer of a reactionary religious ideology. The Soviet vernacular considered “mullahs” strictly in religious terms, whereas Central Asians equated the term with “educated” which, of course, meant well-grounded in religion, and hence able to read the Arabic-Persian script. Muslims considered such knowledge to be sacred but the Soviet government considered it a crime and repressed all literate “mullahs” as supporters of the basmachi.<sup>21</sup> Anyone aspiring to advance one’s career had to master Russian and, preferably, marry a Russian woman as well.

Turkey followed the USSR in outlawing the Arabic script in November, 1928 and then introducing the Latin alphabet. The leader of the Bashkir emigration, Zeki Validi Togan, correctly said that the Latin script “causes deep disgust in Afghanistan, Persia and Turkestan.”<sup>22</sup> But when the Soviets then abandoned the Latin script in favor of Cyrillic at the end of the 1930s it prevented Turkic people in the USSR and Turkey from finding a

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<sup>20</sup> See Kahhori, Abdudjabbor, Adjab Dunee, Dushanbe: Ilkhom, 2003, pp. 31-34, 61. We should add to this that today’s Tajiks and Uzbeks have little or no knowledge of calligraphy (hattoti).

<sup>21</sup> See Repressiia. 1937-1938 gody. Dokumenty i materialy, Issue 1, Tashkent, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Ishakov S.M.. Iz istorii Rossiiskoi emigratsii. Pisma A. Z. Validova i M. Chokaeva (1924-1932 gg.). Moscow, 1999, p.48.

common language. From this time on the Soviet rulers did everything possible to individualize Central Asian languages and deprive them of their common features. As a result, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Fergana Valley could no longer understand each other's written language, while Tajiks could no longer understand Persian and Afghan texts. Some regional elites, while remaining Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek in culture, came to prefer the Russian language. This conformed to the policy of replacing Arabic, Persian, and Turkic as the languages of science, culture, and education with Russian. Within a decade Russian was established as a symbol of dominance, while all indigenous languages were downgraded and Islam stripped of its scientific, literary, and educational base. But it was not destroyed, as the Bolsheviks wished. Instead it went underground and continued as "popular" Islam sustained by uneducated mullahs and charismatic community leaders. Within families, the women instilled their children with respect for the faith.

### The Formation of Identity

When evaluating Soviet policies in the Fergana Valley it is worth enquiring into the price the population paid for so sweeping a transformation. The greatest loss was in social capital. For centuries Valley residents had maintained a complex irrigation system, collected funds for waqfs (religious foundations), built madrassas, maintained schools, and built roads and infrastructure. They prayed in the same way, gave their children similar names, worshiped at common shrines, had a common system of Sharia law and, down to the mid-1920s, were ruled by the same government. Fergana Valley residents were also bound together by historical memories of resistance to external enemies. Thus, people remembered the united Kyrgyz-Tajik-Uzbek armed units that charismatic military commanders and supranational religious leaders led against tsarist forces in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Did residents of the Fergana Valley have their own particular mindset and common political culture, and do they still? The question does not allow certainty but is worth asking nonetheless. A good place to begin is their attitude towards the government, on which Fergana residents of all ethnicities differed markedly from their nearest neighbors, the nomadic Turkic peoples and the mountain Tajiks. Fergana folk recognized government as such to be legitimate and able to play a positive role in their lives. No Valley residents conceived the possibility of a free existence with no governmental control. Unlike their nomadic or mountain-bound neighbors, Fergana Valley communities were used to a settled existence and expected to obey laws, pay taxes, and reckon with the authorities. Their citizens equated authority with justice, and considered a government that defended them from external threats, helped the community to function, and supported religion to be just. Beyond this, as

highly urbanized dwellers of irrigated oases they were used to a hierarchical rather than egalitarian political culture. They were also much more literate and learned than either their mountain or nomadic neighbors. Indeed, the nomads of Central Asia looked on Tajiks and Uzbeks from the oasis cities as their pirs or mentors.

Many observers distinguished the diverse inhabitants of the Fergana Valley's cities and agrarian oases, whom Russian colonial officials called Sarts, from other Central Asians. The Sarts were noted for their peacefulness, solidarity, tolerance, and ability to strike a compromise. Rarely did they raise violent campaigns against the government. Theirs was a highly structured society enriched by professional groups of craftsmen, traders, teachers, mullahs, writers, scientists, bakers, musicians, etc. The urban quarters in which they lived had retained the same appearance over many centuries. Everyone knew each other, had a stable place in society, and practiced professional skills that were handed down through the generations.

People knew, for example, that anyone named Bakhadurkhan-tura came from the tura class, the highest level of officials of the Khan, and that he was to be greeted first among any group. Conversely, someone named Irgash-kuknori was assumed to be a reveler and kuknori or opium-smoker. The social hierarchy was considered normal. Poor men, called omi, (from the word omma, or society) knew their birth excluded them from politics and made no effort to change this condition. In fact, most Fergana residents accepted the established order and made no effort to change it or to assert their rights. In this respect they differed markedly from the more egalitarian herding communities, whose members practiced a kind of "nomadic democracy" and strongly preferred their semi-independence to any state control.

The population density of cities in the Fergana Valley was the highest in Central Asia. Cities were surrounded by villages or kishlaks and served as points of exchange for goods, services, information, and cultural values. Fergana cities dominated the agrarian periphery, but without causing antagonism. This may be because the layout of houses and the ways of life of city and village dwellers did not differ sharply. Most organized neighborhoods (mahallas) were based on territory rather than kinship or ethno-confessional heritage, and life within them was relatively free of state interference.

With little arable land and few jobs it was imperative for Fergana Valley residents to acquire knowledge and skills. Neither the nomadic populations nor the mountaineers lived under this compulsion to diligence. In so densely-populated and ethnically diverse a region as the Fergana Valley, people also understood that the key to survival was maslihat or consensus. Most conflicts were resolved through traditional techniques. Of course,

there were conflicts between and within communities, but ethnic hostility was not among their causes. A poor Kyrgyz could work in the home of a rich Uzbek but he would still be included within the family circle; the head of the Uzbek family would have felt obligated to take care of the youth as his own son, provide for his education, train him for a profession, and marry him off.

These and other circumstances led to the creation of a distinct Fergana identity that coexisted with an underlying Muslim identity and a weak sense of nationality. A pronounced conservatism lay at the heart of this Fergana identity. Beginning in the late 1920s, residents of the Fergana Valley, or farghonachi, no longer felt themselves to be a single socio-economic and cultural-religious whole. In fact, the term fargonachi fell out of use.<sup>23</sup> The delineation of borders in 1924-1936 encouraged the residents to view one another through the glass of nationalism. Hastily drawn borders turned peaceful neighbors into competitors who were ready to fight over their “national interests.” At the same time, Fergana Valley dwellers were reduced to the status of sub-national groups within the three new Central Asian republics among which their region had been divided. Uzbeks from Namangan, Andijan, and Fergana City now competed with Uzbeks from Tashkent, Samarkand-Jizakh, and Khorezm. Tajiks from the Khujand oasis strove to assert their dominance in the fight against southern elites in the capital city of Stalinabad (Dushanbe). Kyrgyz of the Fergana Valley, meanwhile, now found themselves in competition with Kyrgyz in the North. All three sectors of the Valley were subordinated to distant republic capitals.

People of the Fergana Valley embraced the Soviet identity and separate nationalities that were imposed on them, but these did not replace their old loyalties to family, class and territory. Their Fergana valley identity preserved its major features but shrank to a very local community based on family clans and a jointly preserved history. When Fergana Valley residents moved to the capitals their devotion to family, clan, and their territorial community actually intensified. Even in Tashkent, Frunze or Stalinabad, Fergana natives retained their mentality and did not rush to become integrated into their nationalities. Soviet urban culture proved impotent against the more enduring, natural, and emotionally rich indigenous attachments.

Meanwhile, Tashkent continued as the cosmopolitan capital of the entire region, but with a separate “old town” populated by Tashkent Uzbeks. The Tajik capital of Stalinabad in 1929-1953 was a large construction site

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<sup>23</sup> To be more precise, the term continued to be used only by the Uzbek and Tajik-speaking emigrants (muhajirs), who escaped from the Fergana valley to Afghanistan at the turn of the 1920's and 1930's. They called themselves “fargonachi” up until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The fargonachi preferred to effect a marriage among themselves rather than their kin Uzbeks and Tajiks from Afghanistan See: Shalinsky, Audrey, Long Years of Exile: Central Asian Refugees in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Lanham, 1994.

populated by Russians and Tajiks from various regions. Frunze, situated in Kyrgyzia's north, was a Russian-Soviet city par excellence, markedly different from the ancient city of Osh, the southern capital. Migration to these capitals did not turn them into melting pots but instead the scene of struggles for dominance among the sub-national groups who had moved there.

Overall, Soviet-style modernization did not attain its goal. Soviet rules did not supersede existing norms. Economic development did not lead to the emergence of national economies. At best, as with the emancipation of women, there was a synthesis of the local and the superimposed. In the Fergana Valley, traditions of harmonious coexistence among ethnic group faded, while Soviet "nation building" disrupted historical memory and social continuities. Yet indigenous identity, grounded on a common culture, mentality, and emotional ties, somehow survived across the Valley.

### Repression

After adopting the so-called "Stalin constitution" in 1936, the Soviet government redrafted all the Republic constitutions to accord with it. The extensive nominal rights specified in this constitution are well known. It also elevated the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region of the Russian Republic to the status of a full republic. At the republic level, the constitution provided for elections to Soviets or Councils at every level down to the village, and these in turn elected their own executive committees (ispolcoms). Such was the formal structure of government in the three republics of the Fergana Valley on the eve of the WWII.

The 1936 constitution was more a sham political act than a legal document. It declared the "victory of socialism" in the USSR and led the next year to millions of "builders of socialism" being sent to prison camps for betraying the Stalinist policy line. No measure since 1917 did more than "Stalin's constitution" to cause citizens to distrust the government and disregard its laws.

The period 1929-1953 marks a tragedy in the history of Central Asia. Under the totalitarian system that crystallized at that time, all power rested with the Communist Party and all non-governmental entities and informal assemblies, including mosques, madrassas, maktabas, and gaps (male interest-forums) were violently suppressed. Tea-houses (chaikhanas) were turned into Communist propaganda centers. Religion was criminalized and believers persecuted.

During these years all parts of the Fergana Valley experienced state terror and the merciless destruction of whole classes of people. The Party, fearing external enemies, violently suppressed the slightest manifestation of

dissent within the country. Such fears were of course exaggerated, but they led to a condition in which only a suicidal person would dare say anything critical of the government.

Bolsheviks instituted their “Red Terror” immediately after they seized power in 1917, with the first concentration camps being instituted by Lenin in order to “reeducate” dissenters. With the onset of collectivization, terror became an essential tool of economic transformation. By the years 1936-8 when the system of total terror reached its zenith, everyone from Politburo heads down was liable to be sent to the prison camps set up by the Central Administration of Prison Camps (GULAG).<sup>24</sup>

In the Fergana Valley, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, many tolerated and even supported these acts of repression. Local leaders tried to save themselves by showing vigilance in hounding down “enemies of the people.” Citizens informed on neighbors or colleagues in order to save their families. Nonetheless, all sections of the population were subject to repression. Party and Soviet leaders and anyone else suspected of ties with such obvious “public enemies” as bais, khans, emirs, basmachis, bourgeois nationalists, and pan-Turkists suffered particularly. The central government determined the numbers to be arrested down to the district level and later empowered local officials to draw up their own lists, beyond the quotas. The eagerness they demonstrated did not save the latter, however.

In the autumn of 1937 the secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b), Andrey Andreev, personally “purged” Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Even though most Uzbek and Tajik Party leaders were already in jail, the government now organized local “troikas” consisting of a prosecutor, the head of the secret police and the local chief of police, to consider tens of, if not hundreds of, cases a day. In 1937-1939 such “troikas” in Uzbekistan tried 37,000 people and sentenced 6,920 of them to death.<sup>25</sup>

The fall of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, Akmal Ikramov, and other senior Uzbek officials was marked by public trials and massive propaganda campaigns against them.

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<sup>24</sup> The national security service agency in 1917-1922 was named the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission on Fight Against Counter-revolution and Sabotage (Cheka). In 1922 the Cheka was abolished and its functions transferred to the newly created State Political Directorate (GPU) under the NKVD of the RSFSR. In 1923 the GPU was reformed into the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) under SNK of the USSR. In 1934 the OGPU was incorporated into the newly formed NKVD and received a name of Main Directorate for State Security of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (GUGB of NKVD). In 1941 the NKVD of the USSR was divided into two independent bodies: the NKVD of the USSR and People's Commissariat for State National Security of the USSR.

<sup>25</sup> Loc.cit., Repressia. 1937-1938 gody. Dokumenty i materialy, p. 8.

In Kyrgyzia a group of the most senior officials<sup>26</sup> including Torekul Aitmatov, father of the famous writer Chingiz Aitmatov, were executed in November, 1938. On 31 October, 1937, the former chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Tajik Republic, Nusratulla Maksum, received a death sentence, to be followed a year later by the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan. Urunboi Ashurov.<sup>27</sup> A large number of other high officials in Tajikistan also fell victims of Stalin's purges in 1937-8.

The purges left residents of the Fergana Valley fearful of state and distrustful of the government. Many perceived that Stalinist society was based on lies and intimidation. But in assessing the Stalin period it is important not to whitewash the situation. Stalin's paranoia was not solely responsible for totalitarianism. National and Party leaders were also involved, as was the public at large. Without all their support the Stalinist regime could never have taken root.

### World War II: on whose side?

On 22 June 1941 Germany attacked on an unprepared USSR. Within four months Hitler's forces had siezed 40% of the Soviet population and 70% of its economy. The remaining 1,500 industries were evacuated to the East, including a hundred to Uzbekistan, thirty to Kyrgyzia and twenty to Tajikistan. A million refugees from the war zone were relocated to Kyrgyzia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The evacuation strengthened the command economy, with people working thirteen hour days, six days a week.

How did the people of the Fergana Valley respond to the war? To this day Central Asians hold two contrary views on this period. The first is strictly positive, and dwells on the great construction projects and other achievements that transformed the USSR into a world power. Those who share this view believe that Stalin and the USSR deserve the commendation of all progressive people for winning the "Great Patriotic War" and that the victory proved the superiority of socialism and of Stalin's personal leadership. Many people in the region, including non-Communists and the young, still hold this view, which meshes with the popularity of authoritarian

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<sup>26</sup> Chairman of Kyrgyzstan government Iusup Abdrahmanov was arrested in fall of 1937, allegedly as a participant of the bourgeoisie-nationalist Alash-Ordyn organization. The Supreme Court charged him with being a member of the anti-Soviet "Social-Turan" party that contemplated an overthrow of the Soviet government and the secession of Kirgizia from the USSR. Apart from that, Abdrahmanov was considered one of the leaders of the fictional Pan-Turkic center and a spy of the "English imperialists."

<sup>27</sup> Ashurov Urunboi (1903-1938), a Tajik and native of Skobelev city (Fergana). He worked in various Soviet and party capacities in Skobelev and Margilan. From 1925 onwards he worked as a secretary of the Fergana city committee of the Communist Party (b) of Uzbekistan, and as a secretary of the Andijan Party's district committee in 1927. From 1927 to 1936 he studied and continued holding party positions in Moscow. He became an executive instructor of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) in 1936. From January 1937 he served as a first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Tajikistan. Ashurov managed to work in this capacity for only 9 months.

forms of rule in today's Central Asia.

There are, however, supporters of a contrary approach, who claim that Stalin was a criminal and his policies a chain of monstrous crimes against the people. They believe that the achievements of socialism are a myth, that Soviet policies destroyed the peasantry, ruined manufacturing, engendered servility and belief in the omnipotence of the state, and inflicted irreversible cultural losses. Indeed, the sufferings of World War II would not have been so huge had Stalin not been in power. Central Asian émigrés cultivated these views in the West during the "Cold War" and they appeared in the USSR particularly during Gorbachev's "perestroika."

Nowadays, many equate the "two totalitarian ideologies," Nazism and Communism, and increasingly use the term "genocide" with respect to Soviet policy in Central Asia. There is underway an explicit rehabilitation of the basmachi of the Fergana Valley,<sup>28</sup> as well as of anti-Soviet émigré leaders who collaborated with Nazis during the war, specifically the figures of a Kazakh, Mustafa Chokaev, and an Uzbek, Baimirza Hait. Thus, it is argued that those who fought in the Wehrmacht's Turkestan Legion "did not wage war against their native land, but against the Soviet system."<sup>30</sup>

During the first months of the war expatriate pro-basmachi political circles in Afghanistan received funds from Germany to prepare an attack against Soviet Tajikistan. The very distance from the German front and the presence of Allied troops in Iran dimmed prospects for this plan.<sup>31</sup> Its more limited goal was probably to destabilize what had become an important Soviet rear supply base in Central Asia. In October, 1941, the USSR and Britain demanded that the Afghans deport all German and Japanese citizens from their soil; the Afghans, fearing a possible attack by those countries from Iran, complied and then declared its neutrality.

Even before Stalingrad, fascist Germany had shelved its Asian projects. By 1943 the USSR and Britain forced Afghanistan to make mass arrests of Central Asian immigrants who were working for the Germans, including the notorious Fergana-based kurbashi, Kurshemat, or Sher Muhammad. Meanwhile, back in the Fergana Valley hundreds of thousands of citizens were conscripted beginning in September, 1939. Some 120,000 soldiers from Uzbekistan, more than 42,000 from Kyrgyzstan and about 50,000 from Tajikistan were to receive

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<sup>28</sup> See: Turkestan v nachale XX veka: k istorii istokov natsyonalnoi nezavisimosti, Tashkent, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> See Bahyt Sydykova, "Istoria Turkestanskogo legiona v dokumentah," [http://www.continent.kz/library/turk...ns/content.htm\[/font\]](http://www.continent.kz/library/turk...ns/content.htm[/font])

<sup>31</sup> The USSR and England introduced their troops into Iran on August 25, 1941. The USSR justified its actions in terms of the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1921. According to this agreement, Iran committed itself to prevent the use of its territory as a base for military offensives against the RSFSR, granting the Soviet Government a right to introduce its forces in Iran should this provision be violated.

medals for bravery. 209 ethnic Central Asians became Heroes of the Soviet Union,<sup>32</sup> with more than 100 of them being natives of the Fergana Valley.<sup>33</sup> Many industries and peoples were evacuated to the Valley during the war, and at war's end thousands of Tatars, Chechens, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians and other peoples of the Caucasus and Crimea whom the Soviet government suspected of collaborating with the German occupiers of their lands, were resettled there.

The so-called "Turkistan Legion" in the Germany army had been formed in December, 1941, from natives of the Crimea, the Caucasus, Volga river basin, and Central Asia who had been captured or had voluntarily crossed the lines. By early 1942 they had established a training camp in Legionovo, Poland, with other bases elsewhere. When Hitler's forces occupied parts of the Northern Caucasus and Crimea in the fall of 1942, they had fighters of the Caucasus-Muslim legion in their ranks. The Wehrmacht issued various periodicals for the Central Asian volunteers serving in its ranks, whose numbers are estimated as being from 70,000<sup>34</sup> to 265,000.<sup>35</sup> Veli Kaiumkhan from Tashkent, Baimirza Hait from Namangan and others worked on these projects. The Third Reich also counted on such people to be colonial administrators in their Central Asian territories.

In hindsight, it is clear that the decision by many from the region to fight against the U.S.S.R. was a response to the terror, brutality, and injustice of the Stalinist regime. In addition, the defeats the Red Army suffered during the first year of war left their mark on the consciousness of many Soviet servicemen. But whereas the emigrants from the U.S.S.R. adopted new homelands, the prisoners of war resolved to take up arms against their homeland and their fellow soldiers, to whom they had sworn allegiance. Such actions arouse heated debate to this day, and will doubtless continue to do so in the future.<sup>36</sup>

### Post-War developments

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<sup>32</sup> See Karakeev K.K., Vklad trudiaschihsia Srednei Azii v pobedu. Sovetskii tyl v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine, Moscow, 1974, bk. 2, pp.300-301.

<sup>33</sup> Berezniak N.G., Geroii Sovetskogo Soiuzu – uzbekistantsy, Tashkent, 1984.

<sup>34</sup> Waffen-SS im Einsatz Hitler's Soviet Muslim Legions  
<http://stosstruppen39-45.tripod.com/id10.html>

<sup>35</sup> Mendikulova G., Kazahskaia diaspora: istoriia i sovremennost, Almaty, 2006, p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Aged leader of the so-called "Turkestan National Society," one of the organizers of the "Turkestan Legion," a former Grupshturmfiurer Vaffen SS Baimirza Hait visited Tashkent and his native town Djarkurgan (Namangan) in 1992. He was given the cold shoulder and immediately left Uzbekistan. Hait died in Munich on 31 October, 2006 at the age of 88. More radical views of B. Hait, particularly on the Basmachi movement and repressive features of the Soviet government, became widespread in Uzbek historiography in the 1990's. See, for instance, Khidoiatov G.A.. "Sto let borby narodov Tsentralnoi Azii za svobodu i nezavisimost." Nezavisimost i istoriia: novye podhody k izucheniui istorii Uzbekistana. Tashkent,, 1997.

Victory in World War II came at a high cost, for the USSR had exhausted nearly all its material and human resources. No less serious, the government attributed the victory to Stalinism which, it argued, had proven to be the only correct system and certainly in need of no reforms.

Hence the economy continued to drag and Central Asia remained mainly a source of raw materials for industries located in Russia. Leaders of the republics had no influence on decision-making, especially in the cotton sector, and depended completely on Moscow. Peasants made a bare thousand a year, with 80% of their income being paid in kind.

If this was not bad enough, 1948 saw the start of a fresh purge in Central Asia. In January of that year the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decreed that any “saboteur” deliberately shirking work on irrigation systems, planting or harvesting, etc. was to be sent to Siberia. Soon hundreds of thousands of Central Asians and residents of the Fergana Valley found themselves in correctional labor camps, prisons and penal colonies. Such heavy-handed measures gradually restored production and allowed the government to abolish rationing, but agriculture had been plundered and living standards in the Fergana Valley remained low.

During the years discussed in this chapter, 1929-1953, residents of the Fergana valley endured three periods of starvation: in 1932-33 caused by collectivization; the wartime famine of 1941-1945; and post-war famine of 1946-1947. Not only did the horrors of collectivization and Stalin’s “Great Terror” claimed tens of thousands of lives, but the repressions continued unabated down to the mid-1950’s.