

Introduction

This book tells the story of the emergence of Uzbekistan in the turbulent era of the Russian revolution. In the decade and a half after the fall of Russian autocracy in 1917, traumatic upheavals—war, economic collapse, famine—transformed local society and brought new groups to positions of power and authority in Central Asia, just as the new revolutionary state began to create new institutions that redefined the nature of power in the region. Upheaval also produced hope and ambition, as local actors seized the opportunity presented by the revolution to reshape their society. The intertwined passions of nation and revolution reconfigured the imaginations of Central Asia’s intellectuals and the political landscape of the region. The energies unleashed by the revolution also made possible the golden age of modern Uzbek literature: the modern Uzbek literary language as we know it today took shape in the period. The novel appeared as did a self-consciously modern poetics and a vibrant theater. This was the period when giant literary figures—Fitrat, Qodiriy, Cho’lpon—produced their finest work.

The creation of Uzbekistan was the triumph of a national project of Central Asian Muslim intellectuals who had come to see themselves as Uzbeks. The formation of that republic was, I argue, the fulfillment in contingent Soviet conditions of a national project that long predated the Russian revolution. The intelligentsia came to have a deep fascination with the idea of revolution as modality of change, for only revolution could deliver the nation from its backwardness. The national project therefore did not defend a pristine traditional culture but sought to revolutionize it. The revolts against convention and tradition with their

iconoclastic fervor defined the new culture that emerged in this period. The decade of the 1920s was one of a cultural revolution driven by the energies and passions of the Uzbek intelligentsia. The intelligentsia found much common ground with the Soviets, but ultimately, the logics of the two projects were different, as were the requirements of state power. Ultimately, the Uzbek intelligentsia, both the prerevolutionary cohort as well as the first Soviet generation of it, perished at the hands of the Soviet state. But the Uzbekistan that had emerged in 1924 was in many ways the lasting legacy of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia. More fundamentally, it was the triumph of the idea of the nation as the most logical, if not self-evident, form of political organization, both a prerequisite for and a guarantor of modernity. This idea wreaked havoc on existing notions of loyalty and solidarity, though it did not completely erase them. It also led to the disaggregation of Central Asia's sedentary Muslim population into the distinct nations of the Uzbeks and the Tajiks. This book explores the processes through which this disaggregation took place.

Uzbek intellectuals did not have the stage to themselves, however. The Bolsheviks had their own program of remaking the world. The emergence of Uzbekistan took place at the intersection of two competing projects of modernity that nevertheless shared a great deal. Both projects launched often merciless attack on traditional society during this decade, but little of it can be understood as the straightforward imposition of the Soviet regime. The revolution of 1917 had energized groups in local society to transform their own society. They seized on the opportunities presented by the revolution and the new revolutionary regime to implement, by force if necessary, their desiderata of reform. I conceive the history of this period as a struggle between two competing visions of modernity, those of Bolshevism and of Jadidism, an indigenous movement of modernist reform.¹ The Bolsheviks were motivated by a vision, utopian and brutal at the same time, of remaking the world, overcoming "backwardness" where necessary, and dragging all peoples to the brilliant future of communism. Jadidism's vision was Muslim and nationalist. After 1917, radicalized by frustration with opposition from within local society, Jadidism became fascinated by revolution as a means for bringing about the change its proponents fervently desired. If the nation did not recognize its own good, then it had to be dragged into the modern world, kicking and screaming if necessary. For different reasons both favored a cultural revolution, which included mass education, land reform, women's liberation, and perhaps paradoxically for the Bolsheviks, the creation of national identities. Yet the logics underlying the two visions were different, and

1. Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 1998).

the relationship between them was always fraught. A central concern of the book is to trace the tension and contention between the two projects. This contention took place in institutions being created by the Soviet regime. For much of the 1920s, central control was tenuous enough to allow non-Bolsheviks the leeway necessary to make such contention possible.

The contention between these two visions of modernity coexisted with intense struggles within Central Asian society. Jadidism was radicalized as much by opposition from within its own society as by opposition from without (of which there was plenty). The Jadids' claim to leadership in 1917 was resisted by established elites in society; this resistance, and the need to defeat it, was what drove the Jadids to ever more radical positions, and it was opposition to their vision from their own society that underwrote the many revolts of the era. Exploring struggles within Central Asian society is a central concern of this book. The contest I describe is thus not between united indigenous society and a Bolshevik regime intent on transforming it, but between a number of actors, differently positioned, both indigenous and foreign, who struggled over the nature of the transformation and over the meanings to be attached to them. The consequences, both intended and unintended, of this contest shaped Central Asia in crucial ways.

A New History of Central Asia

The scholarly intervention I am most interested in is in the history of modern Central Asia. The opening of the archives and unprecedented access to the region for foreigners since the twilight years of the Soviet Union have transformed the historiography of the region. In addition, the passing of the Cold War has allowed scholars to ask new questions and to use new comparative and conceptual frameworks. We have very fine studies of the period of the revolution that have thoroughly discredited the Soviet narrative of the revolution. Instead of the March of History being marshaled by an omniscient and ubiquitous party, we see the contingency of the moment and its colonial context, not historical regularity (*zakonomernost'*). Marco Buttino and Jeff Sahadeo foreground ethnic conflict between Russian settlers and the indigenous population as the main feature of the years immediately following the collapse of the autocracy.² Vladimir Genis focuses on the foibles of various Russian figures, who with their varying degrees

2. Marco Buttino, *La Rivoluzione Capovolta: L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero Zarista e la formazione dell'URSS* (Naples, 2003); Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865–1923* (Bloomington, 2007); A. Khalid, "Turkestan v 1917–1922 godakh: bor'ba za vlast' na okraine Rossii," in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavy: natsional'nyi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo Soiuz*a (Moscow, 2005), 189–226.

of conceit are engaged in what can only be called “revolutionary adventurism.”³ Other scholars have explored the workings of Soviet nationality policy in Central Asia, and as a result we have excellent studies of the making of Turkmenistan,⁴ Kyrgyzstan,⁵ and Tajikistan,⁶ and of the national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia that created the current political boundaries in the region (see below). Yet others have fruitfully deployed insights from postcolonial studies to investigate Central Asia’s relationship to the Soviet state.⁷ We also have a number of studies of selected aspects and episodes of the history of the period, from antireligious campaigns,⁸ through film,⁹ to a major study of unveiling and new conceptions of women.¹⁰

The historiography produced in Uzbekistan itself remains, sadly, its own field with its own imperatives. The Soviet narrative has been replaced by a national one, even as methodological and institutional continuities with the Soviet past remain strong, as does the role of the state as sponsor of the work of historians. The result is often the inversion rather than the subversion or outright abandonment of Soviet categories. In Uzbekistan, the early Soviet period has come to be seen as the source of Uzbek national statehood, a period in which a national liberation movement was violently defeated by the forces of “Soviet colonialism.”¹¹ Not surprisingly, this literature tends to underplay conflict within Muslim society.¹² The Jadids play a central role in this narrative as

3. V.L. Genis, “S Bukharoi nado konchat’...”: *k istorii butaforskikh revoliutsii* (Moscow, 2001), and *Vitse-konsul Vvedenskii: Sluzhba v Persii i Bukharskom khanstve (1906–1920 gg.)*. *Rossiiskaia diplomatiia v sud’bakh* (Moscow, 2003).

4. Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, 2004).

5. Benjamin Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development, and Social Change, 1921–1932” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2008). Ali Īgmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh, 2012) provides a fine study of culture making in Kyrgyzstan, but it pays scant attention to the 1920s.

6. Paul Bergne, *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic* (London, 2007).

7. Douglas T. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2004); Paula Michaels, *Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia* (Pittsburgh, 2003); Cassandra Cavanaugh, “Backwardness and Biology: Medicine and Power in Russian and Soviet Central Asia, 1868–1934” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2001).

8. Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport, CT, 2001).

9. Cloé Drieu, *Fictions nationales: Cinéma, empire et nation en Ouzbékistan (1919–1937)* (Paris, 2013).

10. Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle, 2007).

11. See *Turkestan v nachale XX veka: K istorii istokov natsional’noi nezavisimosti* (Tashkent, 2000), and *O’zbekistonning yangi tarixi*, 3 vols. (Tashkent, 2000–2001).

12. In addition to the works cited above, see Saidakbar Agzamkhodzhaev, *Istoriia turkestanstskoi avtonomii (Turkiston muxtoriyati)* (Tashkent, 2006) for this tendency.

the spiritual fathers of the nations and its martyrs. Their works have been put back into print in the Cyrillic script and select Uzbek scholars have been able to use party and secret police archives (usually closed to researchers) to produce a small corpus of biographies or biographical notices. Still, no comprehensive overview of Jadidism or the political history of the 1920s has yet seen the light of day.¹³

For all the new work that has appeared, large gaps still remain in our understanding of the early Soviet period in Central Asia and the making of Uzbekistan and Uzbekness. Of the Western scholars discussed here, only Marianne Kamp and Adrienne Edgar make substantial use of materials in Central Asian languages and place Central Asians at the center of their attention (as opposed to being concerned about the workings of the Soviet state or the Communist Party). Furthermore, we know very little about the “Turkestan period,” that is, the years between the revolution and the national delimitation. Most scholars have treated this period only glancingly, as background to other concerns, but there is no connected account of these crucial years.¹⁴ Bukhara in this period is still less known.¹⁵ These gaps mean that we know far less about Uzbekistan and its origins than we do about the other countries of Central Asia. This is a surprising situation, for it is fair to say that the history of Uzbekistan is in some sense the history of all of Central Asia. Uzbekistan was the key Central Asian republic, heir to the Jadids’ prerevolutionary concept of the “Turkestan Muslim” nation and home to most of the sedentary Muslims of Central Asia (and all of the region’s major cities). It was also the center of political power in the region. The other republics were all defined against Uzbekistan, none more so than Tajikistan.

This book attempts to fill these gaps by providing the first connected account of the history of the sedentary societies of Central Asia in the immediate aftermath of the Russian revolution. It combines macrolevel questions about the nature of Central Asia’s transformation with microlevel reconstruction of

13. The study of Jadidism and the Jadids was pioneered in the Gorbachev years by Begali Qosimov, Naim Karimov, and Sherali Turdiyev, all of them specialists in literature. Historians were late to arrive on the scene, and to this day philologists dominate the field. The following broader works are worth mentioning: D.A. Alimova, ed., *Jadidchilik: islohot, yangilanish, mustaqillik va taraqqiyot uchun kurash* (Tashkent, 1999); Begali Qosimov, *Milliy uygʻonish* (Tashkent, 2002); Naim Karimov, *XX asr adabiyoti manzaralari* (Tashkent, 2008).

14. The early work by Alexander J. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917–1927* (New York, 1957), was heroic in its attempt to squeeze a meaningful narrative out of the available documentation. It remains the only work explicitly devoted to that decade in Turkestan.

15. The new, post-Soviet literature has barely touched the Bukharan People’s Republic. The prearchival works of Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, *Réforme et révolution chez les Musulmans de l’empire russe*, 2nd ed. (1966; reprint Paris, 1981); and Seymour Becker, *Russia’s Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865–1924* (Cambridge, MA, 1968) still remain unsurpassed.

historical detail that has long been obfuscated or misunderstood. It traces the emergence of the idea of Uzbekness among Muslim intellectuals and the creation of Uzbekistan during the national delimitation of Central Asia in 1924. Its focus is squarely on the prerevolutionary intelligentsia of Turkestan and Bukhara and their passage through the tumultuous years of the Russian revolution and the establishment of Soviet rule. In doing so, the book offers a new explanation of the ways in which Uzbekness was imagined and Uzbekistan realized.

Nation, Progress, and Civilization in an Age of Revolution

The revolution radicalized Jadidism and broadened its horizons, but it did not create it. Rather, the project had its roots in the aspirations of a nascent intelligentsia that had emerged in the cities of Central Asia in the decades following the Russian conquest of the 1860s and 1870s. Seeking answers to their society's predicament, the Jadids, as the proponents of Jadidism are known in the literature, had been seized by a passion for progress (*taraqqiy*) and civilization (*madaniyat*) well before the revolution. The Jadids tied their advocacy of progress and civilization to a reform of Islam. An aggressively modernist interpretation of Islam allowed the Jadids to argue that "true" Islam enjoined Muslims to seek progress and that, conversely, only progress and civilization would allow Muslims to really know Islam. Political strictures ensured, however, that the reform project remained solely within the realm of culture and directed at Central Asian society itself. The thoroughgoing critique of cultural practices and the claim to leadership implicit in it created considerable opposition from established elites that did not share this diagnosis of the ills of their society, but the reformist project and its vocabulary had become a feature of urban life in Central Asia by 1917. This vision of change was rooted in Muslim discourses of modernity that animated intellectuals across the Muslim world at the turn of the twentieth century. Progress and civilization were also intimately connected to the nation. As a node of solidarity that would supersede notions of identity and belonging based on the dynasty, lineage, or locality, the nation (*millat*) was crucial to the intelligentsia's quest for modernity. It also laid the basis for new claims to leadership in society and inaugurated a new politics within it. It was this project that was energized and radicalized by the revolution. Little about the passions and enthusiasms of the Jadids is understood if we ignore the burdens of the prerevolutionary past.

For the Jadids, the Russian revolution was the chance to put their program in action; it was not synonymous with Bolshevism. For them, the locus of the

revolution was the nation, not class. Discourses of the nation had arrived in Central Asia by the turn of the twentieth century and had made the nation seem to be a prerequisite of modernity. Now, in 1917, the moment seemed to have come for the nation to take its place in the sun. The failure to seize the opportunity to act, wrote a Jadid teacher, “will be an enormous crime, a betrayal of not just ourselves, but of all Muslims.”¹⁶ However, in the open politics of 1917, they discovered that they could not convert their enthusiasm for change into political influence or votes. The nation, it turned out, did not care for their vision of change. The result was not a retreat into moderation but further radicalization. The Russian revolution and the broader geopolitical transformation of the world in its aftermath further convinced them of the futility of exhortation and gradualism as modalities of change.

Enthusiasm alone was not enough, of course. The intense state-building undertaken by the Bolsheviks provided a channel for that enthusiasm and rendered it real. Curiously for devoted materialists, the Bolsheviks too construed backwardness in cultural as much as in economic terms. For Stalin, writing in 1919 as people’s commissar for nationalities affairs, the most important tasks of Soviet power in “the East” were “to raise the cultural level of [its] backward peoples, to build a broad system of schools and educational institutions, and to conduct . . . Soviet agitation, oral and printed, in the language that is native to and understood by the surrounding laboring population.”¹⁷ This was precisely the desire of the indigenous intelligentsia as well. This substantial overlap between the two visions of modernity produced both collaboration and contention. The new regime that the Bolsheviks began to put in place mobilized the population and created institutions that immensely increased the reach of the state into society. Indigenous intellectuals had a significant role in the process. They flocked to the new institutions being created by the Bolsheviks, who wanted interlocutors in local society who would, at the very least, conduct “Soviet agitation . . . in the language understood by the surrounding laboring population,” but also help them govern these distant peripheries of Soviet territory. Yet there was no straight path from Jadidism to Communism.¹⁸ Many Jadids joined the party in the first years of the revolution (1918–20); some never did, and others were expelled once the center asserted better control over the region. Those actors who entered public life after 1920 did so primarily through the party and often had a different generational identity, so that conflict between different “generations” of Uzbek

16. Muallim M. H., “Bukun qondoy kun?” *Kengash* (Kokand), 15.04.1917, 12.

17. I. V. Stalin, “Nashi zadachi na Vostoke,” *Pravda*, 02.03.1919.

18. I myself had suggested such a transition in earlier work (Khalid, *Politics*, 287–301). This book complicates the picture.

intellectuals was a key feature of the period studied here. Ultimately, a new cohort of self-consciously Soviet intellectuals emerged and did much to oust the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia from public life.

Between Empire and Revolution

The Russian revolution was also a postcolonial moment. Tsarist Russia was a particularist empire that took difference for granted.¹⁹ In few places was the distance between the indigenous population and the state greater than in Central Asia, the last major territorial acquisition of the empire. Bukhara and Khiva were protectorates and technically not part of the Russian Empire. Turkestan was governed under its own statute that defined the place of its inhabitants in the imperial order. Its native Muslim population were Russian subjects but retained Islamic courts for personal law and for commercial disputes not involving non-Muslims. They were not subject to military conscription, were not incorporated into the empirewide system of ranks and standings (*sosloviia i sostoiannia*), and were marked by their confessional status as Muslims. After the 1905 revolution, Turkestan was briefly granted (unequal) representation in the State Duma, but that was quickly revoked under Petr Stolypin's electoral reform of 1907. Locally, a two-tier system of administration took shape, in which the lowest level of administration continued to be staffed by local functionaries who worked in local languages. More broadly, the difference between "natives" and "Europeans" was inscribed into the habitus of everyday life and into space. The vast majority of Europeans lived in the "new" cities that emerged alongside existing urban centers or in European-only villages in the countryside. Central Asia had a dual society in which natives and Europeans lived side by side without interacting a great deal.²⁰

This colonial difference was destroyed by the February revolution. The Provisional Government declared all subjects of the Russian Empire to be free and equal citizens, regardless of sex, religion, or ethnicity, and gave all an equal right to vote. But it was the Bolsheviks, with their relentlessly universalist project of social revolution, who set out to reintegrate Central Asia into the Russian state on a new basis. Their promise of autonomy within a universalist dispensation was the greatest part of their appeal to the non-Russian peoples of the former

19. Jane Burbank, "The Rights of Difference: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire," in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe, NM, 2007), 77–111. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010), see the maintenance of difference as a key feature of empires.

20. See Khalid, *Politics*, chap. 2, for a more extended discussion of Turkestan's status in the empire.

Russian Empire. The Jadids before 1917 had hoped to overcome this difference and sought inclusion in the imperial mainstream. The promise of equality and autonomy attracted them to the new order. Yet they understood the revolution in their own way, as a modality of radical change in the service of the nation. They had little use for the language of class espoused by the Bolsheviks. The pursuit of national revolution would displace established elites and replace them with a new leadership, but it did not mean full-scale social revolution along class lines. For the Jadids, the revolution was not synonymous with Bolshevism, but rather an era of opportunity that began in February 1917. This was to lead to perpetual tension between the Jadids and the Bolsheviks, but the promise of equalization was a powerful one.

That promise was not always fulfilled. The Europeans in Central Asia, peasant settlers and urbanites alike, refused to shed their privileges and share power, resources, and jobs with the natives. Central authorities initially intervened quietly against the settlers (see chapter 3), but ultimately realized that Europeans were the main pillars of its support in Central Asia and that it could not afford to alienate them. Also, Soviet ambitions always outran resources at hand in the decades under review here. In the early 1920s, the need to reestablish state control and to institute mechanisms of revenue extraction tended to override the commitment to radical redistribution. By the end of the 1920s, this failure of the promise of equalization led to disenchantment not just among the prerevolutionary Jadids, but also among Muslim Communists, many of whom wondered out loud about “Red colonialism.”

Colonialism indeed lies at the center of debate in the post-Soviet historiography of Central Asia. Many scholars have seen the Soviet Union as little different from other modern empires. In the words of Douglas Northrop, who has made the case most eloquently, “The USSR, like its Tsarist predecessor, was a colonial empire. Power in the Soviet Union was expressed across lines of hierarchy and difference that created at least theoretically distinct centers (metropolises) and peripheries (colonies). . . . [While] it may not have been a classic overseas empire like that of the British or Dutch, the USSR did have a somewhat comparable political, economic, and military structure; a parallel cultural agenda; and similarly liminal colonial elites.”²¹ However, as I have argued elsewhere, the comparison with other colonial empires of the twentieth century does not work.

21. Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 22. For other interventions in this debate, see Laura Adams, “Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Theatrical Form in Uzbekistan,” *Slavic Review* 64 (2005): 333–354; Drieu, *Fictions nationales*; and Benjamin Loring, “‘Colonizers with Party Cards’: Soviet Internal Colonialism in Central Asia, 1917–39,” *Kritika* 15 (2014): 77–102, who makes a nuanced argument based on economic, not cultural, policy.

The Soviet Union's cultural agenda—mass education in indigenous languages, fighting illiteracy, public health, political mobilization—had more in common with those of the mobilizational states of the interwar era, while its attempts to engineer society—land reform, organization of marginal groups in society, reshaping the body social—have no parallels in the colonial empires of the era.²² And yet the gap between ambition and achievement remained wide, and indeed, as stated above, the Soviet state made its peace with the settler population. It could not completely vanquish the habitus of empire. Central Asia in the decades under review hung between empire and revolution.

At the same time, I show that Soviet policies changed much about Central Asia, as did the violence and destruction of the years of revolution and civil war. Central Asia was a very different place in 1931 than it had been in 1917. I do not disagree with recent scholarship that argues that the Soviet state in the 1930s was weak and therefore had to resort to violence,²³ but in Central Asia, that violence destroyed alternatives. Collectivization and the expansion of cotton tied Central Asia, and Uzbekistan in particular, to the Soviet economy; the closing of the borders cut Central Asia off from the rest of the world, while the silencing of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia transformed the parameters of public discourse. Uzbekistan was on its way to becoming Soviet.

Muslim Intellectuals in Their Society

My main focus in this book is on those Muslim actors in Central Asia who shared an orientation to the future and who were at home with the ideas of progress and civilization. These modernist intellectuals were not a homogenous group. The Jadids, who had championed the new (i.e., the phonetic) method of teaching the Arabic alphabet and a whole lot of other things that came with that, had legitimated their project through an aggressively modernist interpretation of Islam. They described themselves as *ziyoli* (“enlightened”), *taraqqiyparvar* (“proponents of progress”), or simply *yoshlar* (“the youth”). After the revolution, their ranks were joined by a new cohort of activists who entered public life through party or Soviet institutions with no previous involvement in Muslim cultural reform. Those who joined the party and achieved high office in it (from October

22. Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65 (2006): 231–251.

23. Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton, 1988); Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (New York, 2007).

1921 on, the Communist Party of Turkestan was headed by Central Asians) had a different trajectory and a different sensibility toward the project of transforming society. A later cohort of a self-consciously Soviet intelligentsia that appeared in the middle years of the 1920s was more radical still and deeply critical of their elders. Factional struggles and intergenerational conflicts were a defining feature of the period under review here and figure large in the narrative below. Nevertheless, all cohorts shared a distance from traditionalist conservatives in their society who anchored their own authority in the past and its traditions, whose inheritors they claimed to be. In the contentious cultural politics of the period, the intelligentsia and the conservatives squared off time and time again.

In focusing on modern intellectuals, I go against recent trends in the study of the Muslim communities of the Russian Empire. Muslim intellectuals have been in bad odor with Western scholars of the Russian Empire and the USSR. The historiographical return of the Tsarist Empire has put the focus on how the empire operated rather than how it collapsed. As a result, historians of Russia have become suspicious of narratives, spun by intellectuals, of the empire's oppressiveness, and begun to look for non-elite perspectives. For Robert Crews, insight into Muslim life in the Russian Empire comes from the petitions "ordinary Muslims" wrote to the state and the correspondence between the Muslim spiritual assembly and state authorities.²⁴ From a different position on the scholarly map, specialists in Islamic studies also join in the suspicion of modernist intellectuals, although for them the "real" insight into Muslim society is to be gained from documents produced by Muslim jurists and ulama in a Muslim space allowed by the Tsarist and (briefly) the Soviet regimes. For one of them, concern with modernist intellectuals is "*jadidophilia*," a "perennial bane of contemporary studies of Islam in Central Asia." The Jadids were "a tiny minority in their societies, shaped . . . by the impact of Russian rule," who used "new media afforded them by the colonial power."²⁵ For another, insight into Muslim society and its dynamics can be gleaned only from authentically Islamic sources, such as *waqf* documents, records of *qazi* courts, and legal disputations among the ulama—elite discourses, but properly authentic ones.²⁶ Modernist intellectuals are creatures of colonialism and (therefore?) unworthy of scholarly inquiry.

24. Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2006). Dealing with the Soviet period, Douglas Northrop (*Veiled Empire*, *passim*) dismisses "a relative handful" of intellectuals (as well as Communists and women activists) from his account of the *hujum*, the campaign against the veil, to present a picture of a conflict that pitted "Uzbeks" against "foreign Bolsheviks."

25. Devin DeWeese, review of *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, by Adeeb Khalid, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19 (2008): 137–138.

26. See the manifesto-like piece by Paolo Sartori, "Towards a History of the Muslims' Soviet Union: A View from Central Asia," *Die Welt des Islams* 50 (2010): 315–334.

This refusal to accord attention to modernist intellectuals renders Central Asian society synonymous with its “tradition” and flattens its contours. It deprives us of any understanding of debate or contention within that society and makes it easier to see (in the case of the Soviet period) the history of the region as a straightforward encounter between two clearly defined, distinct, and homogeneous entities, “Central Asia” and the “Soviet regime.” Moreover, to dismiss modernist intellectuals because they treacherously used “new media afforded them by the colonial power” is also to refuse all comprehension of how culture is produced and reproduced under colonialism, how, indeed, newness comes into this world. At root in all these critiques, ultimately, is a hankering for authenticity. Modernist urban intellectuals are dismissed from consideration because they were not just numerically unrepresentative but also because they adopted inauthentic cultural positions. In this book, I argue for the impossibility of authenticity. Rather, I see cultures as historically contingent, contested, and constantly emergent. It is precisely through the appropriation of new media and new technologies of culture that traditions are contested and reshaped. Nor, for that matter, can we take conservatives who argue in terms of “tradition” at face value, for they too were as much products of history as those who rejected “tradition.”²⁷ The established elites of Turkestan and the emir of Bukhara were created by the Russian conquest. The modernist intelligentsia, for its part, was less directly influenced by imperial models than its counterparts in other colonial situations. Its cultural moorings were in discourses of Muslim modernism that captured the imaginations of intellectuals across the Muslim world at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of its models of change came from the Ottoman Empire or from other Muslim communities of the Russian Empire, most notably the Tatars, where contentious debates over culture and identity raged in the decades before 1917. But more important, a disinclination to take modernist intellectuals seriously prevents any serious understanding of internal dynamics of Muslim societies.

I do not claim that the modernists that I study were the embodiment or the sole voice of their society. Rather, I bring to the center of our attention the enormous amount of contention within Central Asian society in this period, which in turn forces us to abandon the dichotomy of “Muslim society” and “foreign Bolsheviks.” War, famine, and insurgency ripped society apart, widening cracks that had already existed before 1917. We simply cannot speak of a single “Uzbek Muslim society” that responded to outside pressures. Rather, we need to locate

27. My sense of cultural change is rooted in a Bourdieusien sociology of knowledge and culture that destabilizes “rules” and focuses instead on strategies. As in much of my work, I am influenced here by Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA, 1990), and *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

different actors and examine how they mobilized resources, both symbolic and material, to achieve their goals.

Nation Making and National Projects in the Soviet Union

Few episodes in Central Asian history have been more prone to mythmaking than the so-called national-territorial delimitation of 1924 that led to the creation of ethno-territorial republics in place of the old entities of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khiva. It is all too easy to see the process as a classic case of divide and conquer. Indeed, this judgment remains unshakably in place in Western accounts of the region and has proved immune to all evidence to the contrary.²⁸ This is in complete contrast to current historiography in Central Asia itself, which takes the existence of nations as axiomatic and sees in early Soviet policies a historically “normal” process of nationalization.²⁹ Central Asian scholars who criticize the process do so for the “mistakes,” deliberate or otherwise, that gave lands belonging to one nation to another, but do not see it as a fraudulent enterprise.³⁰ Indeed, archivally grounded research has clearly shown that the delimitation was part of a pan-Soviet process of creating ethnically homogeneous territorial entities; that local cadres played a central role in the debates over the delimitation; and that the Soviets saw the main problem in Central Asia to be its political fragmentation, rather than some overwhelming unity that

28. The divide-and-conquer argument is grist for the mill of general writing on Central Asia, but it persists even in the specialized literature. The generalizations are depressing. “The potential for political solidarity among Soviet Muslims was attacked by a deliberate policy of divide and rule,” writes Malise Ruthven. “Central Asian states of today owe their territorial existence to Stalin. He responded to the threat of pan-Turkish [*sic!*] and pan-Islamic nationalism by parceling out the territories of Russian Turkestan into the five republics” (Ruthven, *Historical Atlas of Islam* [Cambridge, MA, 2004], 103). Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven, 2002), 88, opines that Stalin drew “arbitrary boundary divisions” and “created republics that had little geographic or ethnic rationale.” Philip Shishkin one-ups Rashid when he writes, “Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin . . . drew borders that sliced up ethnic groups and made it harder for them to mount any coherent challenge to Soviet rule. If you look at a map of the Ferghana Valley, . . . the feverish lines dividing states zigzag wildly, resembling a cardiogram of a rapidly racing heart!” Shishkin, *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New Haven, 2013), 238.

29. To be sure, there are differences between the historiographies of the different countries today. Kyrgyz historians see the delimitation as the moment of the birth of the statehood of their nation. There is likewise no animus against the process among historians in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

30. See, for example, Arslan Koichiev, *Natsional'no-territorial'noe razmezhevanie v Ferganskoi doline (1924–1927 gg.)* (Bishkek, 2001). Tajik scholars express grievances about the manner in which the delimitation robbed “the Tajik people” of their historic territory, but their animus is directed against “pan-Turkists” rather than against the Soviet state. I discuss this matter in chapter 9.

needed to be broken.³¹ More generally, our understanding of Soviet nationalities policy—the assumptions behind it and the forms of its implementation—has been transformed over the last two decades. We now know that the Soviets took nations to be ontological givens and considered it a political imperative to accord administrative and national boundaries.³² More sophisticated accounts of Central Asia’s delimitation have emphasized the importance of classificatory projects of ethnographers and the Soviet state.³³ No account of the delimitation, however, has paid adequate attention to the role of Central Asia’s indigenous elites in the process or placed the delimitation in context of the rise of national movements in the region. As a result, even the new work on Soviet nationalities policy has little to say about the motivation of indigenous elites. Its heroes are Soviet policymakers and ethnographers who implement a pan-Soviet policy in Central Asia. As implementers of a policy of scientific categorization, they appear in a more positive light than Stalin simply drawing lines on the map, yet they still overshadow indigenous elites, who remain largely invisible in the new literature.³⁴ In this book, I suggest a different genealogy of the emergence of the nations of Central Asia.

“Chaghatayism” and the Making of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan emerged during the process of the national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia in 1924, yet it was not a product of the party or the Soviet state. Rather, as I show in chapter 8, it was the victory, in Soviet conditions, of a

31. The most notable work is by Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (London, 2003); see also the excellent account of the creation of Turkmenistan in Edgar, *Tribal Nation*, chap. 2; and the thoughtful appraisal of the process in Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca, 2014), chap. 2.

32. The major landmarks in the literature on nation making in the USSR are Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993); Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 414–452; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 2001); and Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2005).

33. Juliette Cadiot, *Le laboratoire impérial: Russie-URSS 1860–1940* (Paris, 2007); S. N. Abashin, *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii: v poiskakh identichnosti* (St. Petersburg, 2007); Svetlana Gorshenina, *Asie centrale: L’invention des frontières et l’héritage russo-soviétique* (Paris, 2012); and Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

34. The one exception is Adrienne Edgar who in her fine book, *Tribal Nation*, sees Turkmen Communists as real actors in the making of their republic. Nevertheless, to the extent that there was no pre-revolutionary intelligentsia among the Turkmens, the scope of the ambitions of the Turkmen national Communists was more strictly defined by the experience of Soviet rule than was the case in Uzbekistan.

national project of the Muslim intelligentsia of Central Asia. Muslim intellectuals, not Soviet ethnographers or party functionaries, were the true authors of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek nation.

The idea of the nation had arrived in Central Asia well before the revolution, but it was the revolution, with its boundless promise of opportunity, that planted the nation firmly at the center of the intelligentsia's passions. The revolution also reshaped the way the nation was imagined. As I have shown elsewhere in detail, before 1917 the Jadids generally saw the nation as encompassing "the Muslims of Turkestan," a territorially limited confessional nation.³⁵ The revolution saw a rapid ethnicization of the Jadids' political imagination, as they came to be fascinated by the idea of Turkism. A Turkestan-centered Turkism (quite distinct from "pan-Turkism" that was a constant bugbear of Soviet and Western historiography) saw the entire sedentary population of Central Asia as Uzbek. They claimed the entire tradition of Islamicate statehood and high culture in Central Asia on behalf of the Uzbek nation. The rule of the Timurids was the golden age of this nation, when a high culture flourished in the eastern Turkic Chaghatay language. I use the term *Chaghatayism* to describe this vision of the Uzbek nation.³⁶ The Jadids reimagined the "Muslims of Turkestan" as Uzbek, and Chaghatay language, modernized and purified of foreign words, as the Uzbek language. The Uzbek nation thus imagined has rather little to do with the Uzbek nomads under Shaybani Khan who ousted the Timurids from Transoxiana, because it claimed the mantle of the Timurids themselves.

The era of the revolution provided a number of opportunities—all eventually aborted—for realizing a Central Asian national project, from the autonomous government of Turkestan proclaimed at Kokand in November 1917 (chapter 2 below), through the renaming of Turkestan as the Turkic Soviet Republic in January 1920 (chapter 3), to the attempt at creating a national republic in Bukhara (chapter 4). The Chaghatayist idea lurked behind all those projects, but it was the national delimitation of 1924 that provided the clearest opportunity of uniting the sedentary Muslim population of Turkestan into a single political entity. The book traces this process of reimagination and the unexpected realization of this project in 1924.

The success of the Chaghatayist project also defined the way in which the Tajiks were imagined. As I show in chapter 9, most Persian-speaking intellectuals in Central Asia were also invested in the Chaghatayist project, even as the denial of the Persianate heritage of Central Asia was foundational to it. In the absence of any mobilization on behalf of a Tajik nation, the Chaghatayist project prevailed

35. Khalid, *Politics*, chap. 6.

36. The term was used in the 1920s in a pejorative sense by critics of the idea. Despite this baggage, I find the term quite apt for describing the fundamental claims of the Uzbek national idea as developed by the Jadids.

during the national delimitation. “Tajik” came to be defined as a residual category comprising the most rural, isolated, and unassimilable population of eastern Bukhara. It was only after the creation of Tajikistan that some Tajik-speaking intellectuals began to defect from the Chaghatayist project and a new Tajik intelligentsia began pressing for Tajik language rights and a larger national republic. The delimitation froze the identity politics of the early 1920s in time. The current shape of Tajikistan can only be understood in the context of the triumph of the Chaghatayist project in 1924.

Clearly, Central Asia of the 1920s has much to tell us about nations and nation making in general. In discussing these issues, I eschew the term *nationalism*, which I find too broad and laden with too many pejorative connotations to be of much analytical use. For the Bolsheviks and their political police, “nationalism” was a negative force that worked in the interests of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie. Accusations of nationalism were fatal to many of the figures encountered in this book. Much of that suspicion has remained and nationalism carries the connotations of chauvinism in the languages of the post-Soviet space. I prefer to make finer distinctions within the phenomenon of nationalism. I am interested in the national project of Central Asian intellectuals that emerged from their fascination with the nation and in their struggles for its realization. Those struggles took place within the putative nation as much as externally. The national project aimed to “awaken” the nation to consciousness, to make it think of itself as a nation—in short, to nationalize it. To this end, the national project also sought to reshape the putative nation, to educate it, to make it healthy, to rearrange family life. All national movements, it is safe to say, operate within a matrix of authenticity and modernity. The nation has to change to become modern, to acquire the tools of progress that would lead to self-strengthening and lead the nation to claim its place in the world. At the same time, that change is justified as the reclamation of a past greatness that overcomes the corruption of the present. In this book, I trace the ways in which the nation was articulated by the intelligentsia.³⁷ The story I tell is one of striving for the nation, not of its full realization (if such a thing is ever possible). There is no doubt that in the period covered by this book, the putative nation remained largely indifferent to the national project, or rather, beyond its reach, but that fact does not render the project of creating the nation any the less relevant or worthy of study.

If, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, the national movement has to declare the sovereignty of nationalism in native society before engaging the colonial state in a political struggle for independence, then that struggle had not been resolved in

37. I find particularly pertinent the work gathered in Ronald Grigor Suny and Michael D. Kennedy, eds., *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999).

Central Asia by 1917.³⁸ Indeed, most national movements have to battle on two fronts, against the external foe (the colonizer) and against opposition in their own society, where the idea of the primacy of the nation has to triumph. Often the struggle against forces in their own society is more crucial. This was certainly the case in Central Asia. In 1917, the Jadids sought—and failed—to convince their society of the need to organize along national lines and to cede the leadership to them. In fact, the revolution appeared so attractive to the Jadids as a modality of change precisely because of their weakness in their own society. They found it difficult, however, to put Soviet institutions to their own use. Whether it was on the question of schooling or the position of women, on the place of Islam in society or the direction of the new literature, the Bolsheviks and Muslim intellectuals had different visions. For much of the first decade of Soviet rule, the party remained unable to control the personnel in its own ranks and in the institutions it built. Once it was more confident of its hold over the region, by 1926, it opened a so-called “ideological front” with the goal of stamping its authority on its institutions and assuring the ideological purity of their mission. The prerevolutionary intelligentsia began to be squeezed out. The first purge of the national intelligentsia in 1929–30, I argue, was a landmark in the exclusion of the intelligentsia from the political process, and the end of an era. The intelligentsia never became a state elite capable of nationalizing society in a way that, say, Atatürk or Reza Shah or any number of Central European regimes of the interwar period did. This peculiar location of the national intelligentsia was a specifically Soviet aspect of the Uzbek national project.

At the same time, we see the significance of the political arena in gaining recognition for a nation. Just who constitutes a nation and who remains a mere group is always a matter of recognition. An Uzbek nation emerged because there was a movement for it that pursued the project in the politically relevant venues (here, the various organs of the Soviet state). Similarly, Kyrgyz and Qaraqalpaq autonomous republics emerged because of advocacy by dedicated cadres. The Tajik case was different. Conversely, had there been a national movement on behalf of a Sart or a Qipchaq nation, the map of Central Asia would look different today. In the Soviet context—but not only in the Soviet context—gaining recognition for the existence of a nation was more important than the creation of a broad-based popular national movement; it preceded the creation of a national consciousness among members of the nation. Once a nation has been recognized and territorialized, then it could begin to blossom. It acquired state structures, a newly codified and formalized “national” language, a host of national symbols, a national historiography, all sorts of common practices of being national—all built in accordance with Soviet nationalities policies and with the resources of the Soviet state.

38. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton, 1992).

And yet, the role of the Soviet state is easy to exaggerate. Scholars have rightly pointed to Soviet policies of cultural development that fought illiteracy, spread schooling in indigenous languages, and helped create new institutions for the production of culture as fundamental features of the cultural landscape that emerged in the young Soviet state.³⁹ This scholarship is a necessary corrective to older views that focused only on Soviet repression of non-Russian nationalities and saw the nationalities policy as a thin veil for Russification. A number of very fine works have traced the emergence of national identities in the early Soviet period as a result of Soviet nationalities policies.⁴⁰ But since much of this new scholarship focuses primarily on policy as it was debated and formulated at the center, it runs the risk of exaggerating the role of the Soviet state and rendering it more benevolent than it perhaps was. I examine Soviet nationalities policy from the vantage point of its ostensible beneficiaries. The new culture was not a creation of the Soviet state, let alone its gift to benighted peoples (as Soviet historiography asserted and contemporary Russian scholarship continues to insist). It emerged through a complex interplay between the new revolutionary state and indigenous cultural elites, which had their own understanding of what revolution and Soviet power were about. Indigenous elites were often disappointed in what they could achieve in practice, while bringing them in line (or eliminating them from the public sphere) was a basic preoccupation of the Soviet regime and its organs of political control. Soviet cultural policies were productive and destructive at the same time. The massacre of the indigenous intelligentsia with which this book closes cannot be separated from the achievements of Soviet nation and culture building.

Cultural Revolution

The idea of the nation lay at the heart of a cultural radicalism that swept the Central Asian intelligentsia in the era of the Russian revolution. The cause of the nation led the Jadids to ever more radical stances in the years after 1917. The nation had to be enlightened and modernized and internal reaction defeated. What was required was nothing short of a revolution of the mind, of instilling

39. The most thorough account of these policies is in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

40. See, for instance, Edgar, *Tribal Nation*; Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas* (Princeton, 1995); İğmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent*; George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923–1934* (Cambridge, 1992); Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan”; Brigid O’Keeffe, *New Soviet Gypsies: Nationality, Performance, and Selfhood in the Early Soviet Union* (Toronto, 2013); Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994); David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930* (Cambridge, 2004); Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Bloomington, 2006).

among the population new ways of thinking and of seeing the world. A new culture had to rise from the ashes of the old. The cultural life of the decade after the revolution was marked by a series of revolts—against the authority of established elites in society, against the epistemological order that underpinned it, against rules of social behavior, against the conventions of the Turko-Persian literary tradition, and against Islam itself. This cultural radicalism of the period is seldom appreciated, for its evidence lies not in archival documents but in the cultural production of the period.

That production, for all its significance to modern Uzbek culture, has not received the attention it deserves. In Uzbekistan itself, its study has always been hamstrung by political considerations. The main figures of the period were all discovered to be enemies of the people and opponents of Soviet power by 1937. Although most were “rehabilitated” politically (the criminal charges against them dismissed), few were returned to their rightful place in the literary history of the republic until the very last years of the Soviet period. Most Soviet-era literary history continued to tiptoe around the complexities of the 1920s and to ignore the central place of the giants of the decade. Since the demise of the USSR, there has been a tendency to go to the other extreme, to turn the literary figures of the 1920s into national heroes, the moral and cultural leaders of the Uzbek nation. Such a posture also evades serious reckoning of their revolts against convention and of their mutual conflicts. For their part, Western scholars have all too often seen this literature only as a vehicle for political protest against Soviet rule and read it only as Aesopian fables of criticism and resistance.⁴¹ They have been so busy reading between the lines for coded political messages that they have often missed what the lines in fact say. Often literary scholars do not appreciate the highly charged atmosphere of the era and the intense conflicts that existed within Central Asian society and mistake criticisms of Central Asian society (a fundamental trait of Jadidism since the moment of its emergence) for criticisms of the Soviet order. This insistence on reading critique directed solely outward at the “colonizer” is unwarranted when one is dealing with a time of immense internal turmoil. Indeed, the focus on decoding alleged political messages has even precluded the study of the technical aspects of the literature of the period, of its formal and morphological novelties.⁴²

41. Edward Allworth, *Uzbek Literary Politics* (The Hague, 1964), and *Evading Reality: The Devices of Abdalrauf Fitrat, Modern Central Asian Reformist* (Leiden, 2002).

42. There are exceptions, of course, but they prove the rule by their paucity; see Christopher Murphy, “The Relationship of Abdulla Qodiriy’s Historical Novels to the Earlier Uzbek Literary Traditions (A Comparison of Narrative Structures)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1980); and Sigrid Kleinmichel, *Aufbruch aus orientalischen Dichtungstraditionen: Studien zur usbekischen Dramatik und Prosa zwischen 1910 und 1934* (Wiesbaden, 1993).

All of which is a shame, because the decade of the 1920s is when modern Uzbek literature took off. It was the decade when the novel made its first appearance, drama flourished, and new styles of poetry transformed the conventions hallowed by the ages. It is not too much to say that the 1920s saw a true cultural revolution in Central Asia, which forms the basis for modern Central Asian culture to this day. This cultural revolution is a central concern of this book.

It should be clear that I use the term *cultural revolution* in quite a different meaning than the English language historiography of the USSR, which following the usage coined by Sheila Fitzpatrick, uses the term for a very specific campaign by the party to seize control of cultural and scientific institutions between 1929 and 1932.⁴³ What I have in mind was not a “revolution from above,” but a bout of creativity from below that resulted from the enthusiasms unleashed by the revolution. The new cultural field created by the Soviets was a mixed blessing. It created institutions (a relatively stable press, a publishing industry, institutions that supported historical or ethnographic research) that could support cultural production as a professional (and remunerative) enterprise, but it also brought new obligations and new means of control. In fact, as we shall see, Soviet cultural institutions barely existed before 1924 and much cultural production took place outside of or parallel with Soviet institutions. Chig’atoy Gurungi (Chaghatay Conversation), the literary circle that organized the first conference on language and orthographic reform in 1921, had no formal connection to the state, nor did the benevolent societies that sent students abroad in 1922 and 1923, or the Friends of New Life (see chapter 6). All of these organizations were shut down by the state.

The cultural production of 1920s provides an excellent window into the radicalism of the period. I introduce a number of texts not studied before. I place them in the longer term trajectories of various currents of modernism that crisscrossed the Muslim world in the decades preceding the revolution. Until 1917, Russian models were largely irrelevant to Central Asian literary production; it was only in the mid-1920s that Russian literary and cultural influences became significant in Central Asian cultural life. I take seriously what the texts themselves say. I insist on reading their criticisms of local society, its customs and traditions, and of the conservative opponents of reform literally as criticisms, rather than as coded protest against the Russians or the Soviet order. In my translations, I err on the side of literalness in an effort to convey the sense of the text. Likewise,

43. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Cultural Revolution in Russia 1928–32,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 (1974): 33–52, and “Cultural Revolution as Class War,” in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, 1978), 8–40.

I make no claims of having produced poetic translations of the poetry that I quote. In many cases, where the poetic structure is completely lost in translation, I have provided the original text as well.

This radicalism extended to Islam itself. While we have a good sense of the Soviet campaigns against Islam,⁴⁴ we know much less about debates over Islam among Muslims in the era of the revolution. Yet Jadidism was from the beginning a movement for the reform of Islam, and Islam was under contention throughout this period. The revolution had produced, among other things, considerable religious ferment, which I discuss in chapter 7. The line between reform and revolution, I argue, could be porous indeed when it came to the critique of customary practices. Here, as in many other aspects, the Jadids and the Bolsheviks could share a great deal without seeing eye to eye on everything.

The Soviet Union from the Edge

In this book I also offer a history of the Soviet Union, but with a vantage point firmly anchored on the periphery. This reversal of the gaze presents the Soviet Union in an unaccustomed light. We see the actual implementation of policies devised at the center under local conditions that were often quite different from those of the capitals. Students of Soviet history will see how the Soviet Union appeared from Tashkent or Bukhara, and if they might find it a little unfamiliar, I will consider my job well done.

The involvement of indigenous elites with their own understandings of what the revolution was about and their own hopes shaped Soviet rule in crucial ways. Moreover, local events shaped the evolution of Soviet rule much more than pan-Soviet developments, to the point where the usual periodization of early Soviet history is of little use in understanding Central Asian developments. The transition from “war Communism” to the New Economic Policy (NEP) gutted the already tiny budgets of local institutions as central subventions disappeared, but otherwise made rather little difference. Far more important was the consolidation of Soviet rule in the region, which involved bringing the countryside under control by defeating the Basmachi and rebuilding the ruined infrastructure of the region. It was only by 1923 that Soviet authorities were confident of their control and could think of enforcing Soviet legislation and implementing pan-Soviet policies. The national delimitation was one such move, which was widely seen

44. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*; for an overview, see also Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, 2007), chap. 3.

as a second revolution in Central Asia, one that would secure the foundations of Soviet rule. The establishment of national republics was followed in 1926 by the opening of the “ideological front,” which aimed at asserting ideological purity in cultural production and supplanting the Jadids, who now came to be labeled the “old intellectuals” (*eski ziyolilar*), from their position of prominence in the cultural field. Both the timing and main concerns of the campaign owed much more to local concerns (the party’s newfound sense of political strength in the region) than to any central initiative. Likewise, the purge of Uzbekistan’s Narkompros in 1929 cannot be seen as connected to the cultural revolution as defined by Fitzpatrick. Not only was the term never used, but the main concern of the purge was to “cleanse” the commissariat of nationalism, not to proletarianize it.

Nationality, in a perverse way, became all important to the Soviet state in Central Asia. Soviet nationality policy clearly was instrumental in creating national republics, but it never trumped the significance of class. The Soviets were therefore suspicious of the Jadids for their propensity to think primarily in terms of the nation. By the late 1920s, the obsession with fighting “nationalism” had led the Soviets to putting nationality at the center of their attention. The gravest political crimes with which Central Asian elites were charged in those years were those of “nationalism,” of the “distortion of nationalities policy,” and not those of right or left deviation or anything directly to do with class. By 1937–38, charges of nationalism spelled the demise of the Uzbek intelligentsia.

The Global and the Local

Much of what I describe about the national project in Central Asia will sound familiar to students of national phenomena around the world. In insisting that nations are not natural givens but are imagined and articulated in particular historical circumstances, I seek to put the study of Central Asia in a broad comparative perspective. My hope is to deexoticize the region and its historiography and to move discussion of Central Asian history away from a single-minded focus on its specificities and uniqueness, or of Soviet wickedness. At the same time, I recount the local to point to the many contingencies and local specificities that made Central Asia what it was. I seek to balance the local and the global in the themes that I examine.

I place developments in Central Asia against two different backdrops. The first is provided by the Soviet Union. The February revolution of 1917 set in motion numerous national movements that sought various kinds of autonomy and the creation of national cultures. The outburst of cultural creativity, the experimentation with new forms of cultural production, and the embrace of modernity by the Uzbek intelligentsia has parallels in many other parts of the

USSR.⁴⁵ In response, the Bolsheviks evolved a nationalities policy that sought to preempt nationalism by co-opting certain key cultural demands to “Soviet construction” and creating a system of national autonomy within Soviet bounds. This created the institutional landscape in which national intelligentsias could strive to implement their agendas for cultural transformation. In the chapters that follow, I draw attention to parallels in other Soviet republics, but I cannot do so in every case simply for reasons of space.

The other backdrop against which I examine Central Asian developments is provided by the broader Muslim world of the time, in particular Turkey, but also the lands directly bordering Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran. These states also saw the implementation of national projects (of different levels of intensity), new cultural forms, and a challenge to the place of Islam and the ulama. The state was very differently positioned vis-à-vis reform in these instances, but nevertheless, the similarities are striking. Turkey in particular had long been seen as a model for emulation by Uzbek intellectuals, but the Soviet state also kept an eye on developments in these countries as it implemented its own policies in Central Asia. Central Asian developments—the insistent nationalization of elite discourse, the cultural radicalism, the new notions of the place of women in society, the displacement of Islam from public life—remain a little known part of the modern history of the Muslim world, even if they share much in common with developments elsewhere. I hope to incorporate Central Asia into that history.

At the broadest level, I wish to contribute to a more dispassionate view of the twentieth century. As the century recedes into the past, there is a tendency to see it simply as the triumph of liberalism and the free market, and to disown the passions aroused by ideas of revolution and radical change. It is important therefore to recall how many people such passions moved and the often unexpected turns their pursuit took.

A Note on Sources

I have sought in this book to use Russian and Central Asian sources contrapuntally. Uzbek and Tajik sources—the local periodical press, the new prose literature, pedagogical materials—portray the hopes and aspirations (and the concrete

45. Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, 2004); Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 2009); Irena Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz, eds., *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation* (Toronto, 2010); Irena Makaryk, *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn: Les Kurbas, Ukrainian Modernism, and Early Soviet Cultural Politics* (Toronto, 2004); Oleh S. Ilnytskyj, *Ukrainian Futurism, 1914–1930: A Historical and Critical Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1997); Myroslav Shkandrij, *Modernists, Marxists and the Nation: The Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s* (Edmonton, 1992).

actions) of the Central Asian intelligentsia, many of whom entered, as noted, the Soviet apparatus. They also allow us to see how the regime wished to present itself to the indigenous population. The vast bulk of this material is in Uzbek, although important works were penned in Persian (or Tajik, as the language came to be known). The periodical press flourished after the revolution. The year 1917 saw the emergence of a prolific independent press in Central Asia. While that independence was rapidly curtailed in 1918, the “red press” that emerged the following year was a direct successor, an arena of vernacular debate about society, its present and its future, often carried out in a hybrid political language that reflected very well the ambiguities of the period. I make systematic use of the press of that time.

I juxtapose my reading of vernacular sources to documentation from official archives.⁴⁶ The archives do not contain “the truth,” but they allow us to speak at a level of detail that was inconceivable before the opening of the Soviet archives around 1990. The most useful (and least problematic) are the records of the various government agencies whose work was relevant to the issues discussed in this book. Here, in the mundane records of government decisions, petitions, budget requests, and other paperwork, we see our protagonists as actors. But policy was decided by the Communist Party, which had proclaimed for itself a monopoly on political decision making in the new revolutionary state. Its archives provide candid records of how policy was debated, decreed, and implemented. The archives are much richer in minutes (*protokoly*) of meetings than in verbatim accounts (*otchet*); the former tend to be quite laconic, seldom indicating the degree of discord and or the level of rancor in the meeting. (The difference is glaringly obvious on the few occasions when one encounters both the verbatim account of a meeting and the minutes.) Nevertheless, party documents provide indispensable insight into the making of policy and the assumptions and worldviews that underpinned it.

The most problematic source used for this book is the immense mountain of paper generated by the political police, known successively in the years under review as the Cheka, the GPU, the OGPU, and the NKVD. The archives of the political police itself remain closed to scholars both in Russia and in Central Asia,⁴⁷ but duplicates of some of its documentation can be found in party and state archives, and a fair bit of it has been published since the Gorbachev years.

46. For a more extended examination of the issues raised in the following paragraphs, see my “Searching for Muslim Voices in Post-Soviet Archives,” *Ab Imperio* 2008, no. 4: 302–312.

47. Access to the records of the ChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD is possible under certain conditions in Russia. In Uzbekistan, the political police archives have been opened up to local researchers under highly restrictive conditions, primarily to enable a national project of commemorating national martyrs and “victims of repression.” Scholars can publish quotations from the records but do not seem to be able to provide actual citations.

This material is of several kinds: digests (*svodki*) of reports from the field prepared for the eyes of policymakers; denunciations and testimonies provided by various individuals; and the indictments and “confessions” of its victims. The *svodki* in particular have been widely used by historians of Central Asia as transparent vehicles of rare information. Yet it is clear that there are a number of problems with treating them as forthright representations of reality. The neatly typed documents that greet researchers in the archives contain many layers of literary production and many kinds of translations. They are based on reports from the field gathered, presumably, by “native” informants who commanded local languages. They were then translated into Russian by professional translators, before being excerpted, abstracted, and classified in the course of the production of the digest in a way that was worthy of the eyes of the exalted readers. This is a complex production process about which we know very little, yet each of its stages takes us farther and farther from any access to “reality” the spy reports might have afforded in the first place. The translation involved is not just linguistic (from Uzbek or Kazakh or Tajik into Russian) but also conceptual. The *svodki* often have Central Asians often using a vocabulary that sounds very strange indeed—it is most likely the result of translators translating the reports from a “Muslim” political language into “Bolshevik,” partly as a reflex and partly as a way of ensuring intelligibility for the anticipated readership.⁴⁸ Ultimately, the *svodki* are most useful as catalogues of the fears and anxieties of the regime and of the way it discerned reality. We need also to remember that the political police was *parti pris* in the politics of the era. Its members sat in on the deliberations of organs of political power, it provided advice to party authorities, and actively sought to shape official policy. Its documentary production is scarcely neutral.

The testimonies (*pokazaniia*), often detailed accounts written by those accused of serious political crimes, are even more complex texts that contain elements of self-fashioning, self-exculpation, self-explanation as well as (attempted) negotiation with the captors. As with denunciations, they have to be read as strategic texts. The confessions often published triumphantly by the regime itself (the best known example of this was the verbatim account of the final show trial of the “Trotskyite” opposition in 1938, in which the accused confessed to ludicrous charges brought against them by the NKVD, yet which were immediately published in several foreign languages) are useful only as records of the “legal” (procedural?) ploys used by the organs to frame their victims. Several of these documents have been published, and yet they provide singularly little enlightenment into the complexities of the era.

48. I have not found any spy reports from the field in the archives, but in many other cases, where Russian and vernacular versions of the same document are to be found in Soviet-era files, it is not at all uncommon to find wide divergences between the two.

The most significant function of this sort of documentation in my argument is, however, to indicate the position of the ChK-GPU-OGPU-NKVD on given issues. Historians have no choice but to use these documents, but they have to be read with due skepticism and at some distance.

The one thing we lack are ego documents that might give us insight into the private worlds of our protagonists. Many of them did gather private archives and wrote diaries and carried on copious correspondence with their peers. Very little of that material has survived the assault of the political police on the intelligentsia. Arrests were followed by the confiscation of private papers. What happened to those papers, whether they were destroyed or might still lie in some vault in Tashkent or Moscow, remains unknown. As a result, we know rather less about our protagonists as human beings than we would like. For all their relative chronological proximity to us, Central Asian intellectuals of the early Soviet period remain very distant. We can study their work but their lives remain only dimly visible. For this reason, I have resisted the temptation to psychologize the individuals I discuss. Nevertheless, I hope that they appear as complicated figures, whose desire to define and to lead the nation was both a responsibility and an opportunity, whose political and generational revolts were connected, and whose love for the nation and disdain for its current state were intertwined.

The chapters that follow chapter 1 fall into three groups. Chapters 2–5 trace the turbulent politics of the period up until 1924. Each chapter deals with a different political project: an autonomous Turkestan in the framework of the February revolution, an autonomous Turkestan within the Soviet order, the pursuit of a Muslim modernist republic in Bukhara, and finally, the Soviet state's project of building a Soviet Central Asia. Chapters 6–9 discuss the cultural revolution of the era. They highlight the cultural radicalism of the decade by introducing key texts and describing key debates, include those on the place of Islam in society. More than anything else, they document the triumph of the idea of the nation in Central Asia and explain the creation of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as two distinct national republics. Chapters 10–12 document the political and cultural transformations of the period after 1926, when the party opened the “ideological front” and began asserting its monopoly over cultural policy. The main narrative extends to the purge of Narkompros and the campaign against alleged nationalist secret societies between 1929 and 1931, but of course chapter 12 extends to the final obliteration of the Uzbek intelligentsia in 1938. I have hoped to produce a connected account in a single interpretative framework of the transformation of Central Asia during the early Soviet period. The book introduces historians to cultural debates of Central Asia that have seldom been noted. It provides an account of the origins of modern nations in Central Asia, and it serves, finally, as an elegy for two lost generations of the Central Asian intelligentsia.