

Zohidov Ochil – Fulbright visiting scholar 2009-2010. Tajikistan.

Construction and Deconstruction of Nations in Central Asia.

Anti-Roy.¹

The end of the XXth century for Central Asian states indicated a new page for their statehood and instigated a new wave of nationalism. The traditional view was that Russian Bolsheviks created Central Asia nations and granted titular nations their own national states, and that before the Bolsheviks' creation of nations and national states, there were no national states in Central Asia. With few exceptions, newly independent states accepted the existing boundaries and written histories offered by Russian historiography. These presumptions are stated most notably by Olivier Roy in his book². Roy's attempt to describe the political history of Central Asia through the theory of nationalism brought him to a conclusion that omitted crucial facts that shaped the political history of Central Asia. Roy's inferences are the result of (incorrect) histories established by Russian historians long before Roy began writing about the political history of Central Asia, but these inferences prove to be wildly misleading.

In our account, the national state appeared first in the form of monarchy, regardless of the ethnicity of rulers. In these monarchies, the rulers were usually invited into the power by some faction(s) involved in a struggle for power. The established monarchy unified the country and defined the boundary with other states, in other words, monarchs tried to occupy and subject the territory of small realms such as of counties and dukes. In accordance with the facts surrounding the origination of a monarchy, Smith affirms: 'At least in the case of England, and perhaps in France, Scotland, Spain and Sweden, a sense of nationhood surely existed among both the aristocracy and the upper middle classes in the sixteenth century'.³

¹ This paper was written as consequences of my participation in Scott Radnitz's class "Contemporary Central Asian Politics" at University of Washington, fall quarter 2009. I examine through a comparative analysis different political theories of nationalism and national states as applied in Central Asia. This paper comes out as a result of my grant activity which was supported by Fulbright Fellowship 2009-2010. I acknowledge the scholars who helped me during my work over this article. I wish to thank professors Jamie Mayerfeld, Ilse Cirtautas, Tony Gill and scholars for their contribution on this article Sophia Wilson, Saidmuhiddin Kholov and special gratitude to my colleagues Inomjon Mamadaliev and Kholiqi Abdukholiq for their constant disputes and argumentations. I greatly acknowledge to Heather N. Pool for her impatient work over preparation of this paper for publication. The paper was originally presented at the Central Asian Studies Seminar, University of Washington, on January 22, 2010.

² Roy, O. *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nation*. New York University Press. 2000. We aim to revise and critique Roy's understanding of nation relationships in Central Asia. I realize that it is impossible to do a total revision of Roy's position within article, but I will single out some crucial points in his view here.

³ Smith, A. *Ibid.*p.74.

The nations might have appeared in Europe in fifteenth century, but the processes of developing national state stretched from the migration of German tribes until the appearance of a centralized monarchy. When German tribes arrived and started to inhabit Europe during the fifteenth centuries, they adopted the culture and technological leftovers from the late Western Roman Empire. But German tribes that penetrated into the Apennine Peninsula fused with locals and adopted the Roman language, which later became the new Italian language.

Nation is a form of politico-economical community that includes language, culture, territory; identity which is organized horizontal as well as hierarchical form of society. Nations appeared after the dissolution of tribal relations and the union of 'nationalities'.

1. Tajik national State and Russian occupational policy

O. Roy in his book affirms that 'it was Soviet system that implemented the model of the nation-state into a region where it had previously been unknown'.⁴ Therefore 'while, - he argues, - there had always been an Armenian and Georgian sense of nation, one cannot say the same for the Tajik and the Uzbek'.⁵ Followers of a constructivist approach confidently accept this as confirmation that 'There were no state entities based on ethnicity'.⁶

Roy, describing the Bolshevik's behavior toward Tajiks, fixes such conditions. He writes: "however, in this embedding of nationalities (he means the creation of Central Asian nations and national states-Z.O.) we have a **paradoxical** (singled out by Z.O.) case: that of a group whose identity has a strong historic rooting, and which completely failed to appropriate the model of nation-state as the Soviets formalized it. This was very much a sign that Soviet nation-making worked on the basis of a deculturation. The Soviets made a determined attempt at deculturation in the case of Tajikistan-by cutting off the new country from its urban élites and its Persian past. The drama of Tajikistan is that it created without the historic Tajik cities and on the basis of a rural and mountain-dwelling population that lacked elite and also lacked a sense of nationalism".⁷

Roy refers to "Persian" instead of "Tajik" as the dominant language, but according to tradition, Persian, Dari, and Tajik language are synonym words. Iranian (which is called Persian nowadays), Dari

⁴ Roy, O. Ibid. p.IX.

⁵ Roy, O. Ibid.p.62.

⁶ Jonson, Lena. Tajikistan in the New Central Asia.LNY.2006.p.108.

⁷ Roy, O. Ibid.p.121.

(spread in Afghanistan) and Tajik language are historically called Persian (Farsi). Gradually, geographical location and gaps created differences in these branches of the Farsi language, differences which do not prevent these people from communicating, even today. Tajik language was a language of culture, although it was not the same as Latin was for Europeans. It was not a *lingue franca*. Tajik language was language of local people and even Arabic language was disregarded by locals.

There is another historical fact that can not be explained by modernists' theory. Why were rulers in many monarchies aliens to locals? For instance, Russian rulers were non-Russian, Japanese Emperors were not Japanese, the final Chinese Emperors were non-Chinese, Iranian Shah also was non-Iranian: and yet no one considers these states non-national. It was similar with the Mangit dynasty: it was a centralized state that, prior to the Russian invasion, was one of the largest states in Central Asia. Even the Kokand Khanate was under its protectorate. The key point is that even if the rulers were from the Mangit dynasty, the state itself was Tajik.

Returning to Roy's paradox, it is important that the deculturation of Tajiks took place immediately after the Russian invasion of Central Asia: the Bolsheviks only completed the previous Russian colonial policy. When Russian conquered Central Asia and established a colonial regime, the annexation of the territory of the Bukhara Emirate and dissolution of the Kokand Khanate followed shortly thereafter. Russian colonial policy also attempted to replace Tajik identity⁸ with another one and for that purpose they used different tools. Russian colonial policy included inventing a new identity and implanting it among the population.

The new identity was named "Sart" for settled population while the term "Turk" was used for nomads. By the beginning of the XX-th century, the Russian had already succeeded in their policy of converting Tajik identity: a significant number of those living in Tashkent, Kokand and the Fergana region started to identify themselves as 'Sart'.

The policy of the Russian colonial regime to replace Tajik identity with Sart accounts for why, in Russia on the eve of the October revolution census the number of Sarts were around two million, which included all of Samarkand, Khujand, Fergana Kokand and Tashkent. The Russians partly succeeded in their effort to create a new identity category in Turkistan, but they failed in Bukhara Emirate. The 1916

⁸ It is interesting to note that the same colonial policy was used by the English in India. There too Tajik language was the language of the state and culture. England replaced Persian language because Tajik was like Latin for European and this act bred an Indian nationalism, but what is important that implanting new ideology England fastened India to itself.

census shows that the population of Bukhara Emirate consisted of 2.1 million Tajiks and 750,000 Uzbeks. The total population was about three million.⁹

‘There is a curiosity of Kuznetzov’s observation, - writes Abashin S, - that ‘implanters of Sart language were translators who were usually from Tatars and Bashkirs: “Before Russians arrival the official language of natives in the area was Persian \diamondNot knowing mostly this language Translators have demanded and now are demanding not just (!!!-S.A.) Sarts, but also Tajiks that they should lead an official correspondence with authority on Sart language. In this way, Sart language gradually became the official language for indigenes and now mirso (penman) -Tajiks very diligently write in Sart language even those documents which did not come to Russian consular”¹⁰. Russian invaders, for political purposes, attempted to remove Tajik language from its official level and instead introduced Tatar language which comes out from Tatars naming it as “Sart”.

Therefore, not including nomads, there are many people in former Turkistan whose identity was changed to Uzbek by the Russian-Tatar tandem, but these “Uzbeks” look and sound very similar to Tajiks. Such Uzbek identity is dubious and dualistic because many Uzbeks realize that they share similarities with Tajiks and that “Uzbek identity” is somewhat artificial: however, they are unable to undo the previous colonial national policy. Uzbeks are trapped by the political legacy of colonialism and show themselves as unconscious heirs and signs of colonial regime.

This was not the only form of Turkization. Russian colonial administration also implemented so-called “neo-methodic school” where pupils were taught in Russian and Tatar language. It was Russian policy to support pan-Turkic movements and rely on Tatars like Gasprinsky who was raising a new pan-Turkist generation, including Behbudy and many other young zealous legatees. For example, Roy writes “when a “Jadid” (reform) school was authorized by Emir of Bukhara in 1908, the pupils were taught in Persian language”.¹¹ Saying about introduction of the modern school in Bukhara Roy mustn’t forget that when Tatars offered to open up the same type of school in Bukhara, Emir Said Olim khan allowed them to locate this school in the new part of Bukhara among the Russians. This act itself indicates that Emir Said Olim khan did not want to allow the pan-Turkic school within Tajik population. Roy writes: ‘Emir of Bukhara required Tatar schools to be moved out of the Muslim neighborhoods to the Russian part of

⁹ Masov, R. Tajiks: The History of National Tragedy. Dushanbe. 2008. P.142.

¹⁰ Abashin S. Ibid.p.143.

¹¹ Roy, O. Ibid.p.4. We cannot always point out to constructivist’s conception of Roy, who confuses Persian language with Tajik based on his theoretical stance. His over-reliance on theory leads him to ignore many facts: even if he knows them, he often provides a false interpretation because he allows the logic of the theory to over-ride facts.

towns'.¹² These two facts, taken out of Roy's work, indicate two different kinds of national policy: a Tajik national policy defended by Emir Said Olim khan (even if he belonged to Mangit Dynasty) and an opposing pan-Turkic national policy orchestrated by Russian colonizers.

It is worth noting that in accordance with a permit of Emir Said Olim khan the newspaper 'Bukhoroi Sharif' was edited in Bukhara in Tajik language. The second issue of this newspaper was published with an editorial. Mirzo Jalol Yusufzoda, the main editor of newspaper, confessed that he was visited by "several sirs who insisted to him 'Here the common language is Tajik and it will be better if the newspaper is edited in Tajik language'".¹³ The evidence of Yusufzoda proves that the level of Tajik national consciousness in Bukhara was high. Furthermore, this demonstrates that it was *not* merely a regional consciousness, as every constructivist asserts.

The tendency to purify and simplify Tajik language can be seen even before Bolshevik invasion into Bukhara Emirate. If we compare texts of the middle XIX century with texts of the beginning XX century, for example, Ahmadi Donish's works with Abdurauf Fitrat's, it is clear that there was an increasing move to cull Arabic words from Tajik language after 1924. Roy noted differences between Persian and Tajik, including that Tajik language does not attain subjunctive prefix 'be-' in some Tajik dialects. This statement shows that Roy absolutely does not know Tajik language and history and development of Tajik language. The differentiation between Tajik and Persian, if by "Persian" Roy meant Iranian dialect, is clear that there is no subjunctive prefix 'be-' in Tajik language of Bukhara, Samarkand and Khujand region. The differences between Tajik and Iranian dialect occurred well before the Russian invasion and it must be known to Roy that Bukhara was the center of Tajik language and its dialects spread out among Tajiks of Fergana, Zarafshon, Surkhandaryo, Kashkadaryo and Hisor valleys. It was not done by Russians. It is equally false, as Roy states, that Russian linguists were required to invent a modern literary Tajik language.¹⁴ In Roy's view Tajiks—who have centuries of written history, literature and poetry—needed Russian linguists. Does he think that Tajiks are so savage and illiterate that they needed outsiders' help? If he had known the history of post-Bolshevik invasion, it should have been clear to him that S. Aini and many other writers and scientists worked to adapt to the 'requirements' of the new Soviet authority. But the 'new' literary Tajik language was formed before Bolshevik invasion. Here, we can see that Roy's devotion to his theory made him ignore pertinent facts.

¹² Roy, O. Ibid.p.54.

¹³ Language and National Self-awareness. Collection of articles.// ed.Gulmurodzoda.Dushanbe.2007.p.24.

¹⁴ Roy, O. Ibid.p.75-76.

The result of this is that even if Roy follows a constructivist's viewpoint, he did not correctly understand it.

If we instead consider Bukhara Emirate as Tajik national state, it is clear that Bolsheviks aimed to destroy it, and then replace it with an artificial Uzbekistan to forward their colonial agenda. Bolsheviks pursued the colonial policy of 'ruling barbarians by barbarians'. It also sheds light on the meaning of Roy's paradox of Tajik's deculturation. Soviets' determined attempt at deculturation in the case of Tajikistan - by cutting off the new country from its urban élites and its Persian past - was a sign in Russian geopolitics due to the logic of Great Game.

There are three aspects of the Bolshevik plan to create Uzbekistan. First, they sent loyal subjects to Bukhara. For example, A. Rahimboev was sent in 1923 to Bukhara as a secretary of Central committee of Communist party of Bukhara. The Russian ambassador in Bukhara A.Znamensky admitted in his letter (September 1924) addressed to O.Karklin that A.Rahimboev did satisfy Bolsheviks with one of his skills to be an expression of unity of party in Uzbek affairs'.¹⁵ Of course here A.Znamensky wrote about Bolshevik's plan to create Uzbekistan and A.Rahimboev was an important part of that plan.

The second dimension of policy of Bolsheviks was to liquidate Tajik élites and intelligentsia. A. Rahnamo located an important historical document – the Report of KGB USSR – dated by 1929 regarding the condition of Islamic Ulems in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁶ Due to this report during 20-th eight thousand from Tajikistan and fourteen thousand Islamic clergy and intelligentsia from Uzbekistan were exiled or shot down. The author conclude that a majority of these Ulems were Tajiks because the main cities in Central Asia like Bukhara, Samarkand, Khujand, Kokand were inhabited by Tajiks and all elites mostly dwelled there.

The third aspect was a fake and rigged census conducted in 1926. Bolsheviks wanted to make it clear that there was an Uzbek majority. That is an odd procedure: to create a majority Uzbek population *after* creating Uzbekistan. For example, Faizullo Khojaev was zealous in Bolshevik's attempt to Uzbekize the population of the city of Samarkand. In the days before the census of 1926, Faizullo went into the main mosque of Samarkand shot three times in air, and shouted to those praying that 'if anybody insists in his belonging to Tajik nation he will personally shoot him in the forehead'.¹⁷

Before creating Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the Bolsheviks prepared another project. Under the guidance of People Commissar of Foreign Affairs G.V.Chicherin, the Tajik republic was to be formed in

¹⁵ Cit. Masov, R. Ibid. p.55.

¹⁶ Rahnamo, A. Islamic Ulems in Tajikistan. Dushanbe. 2009. (in Tajik).

¹⁷ personal interview with academician Negmatov Numon.

1924 and Uzbekistan to be an autonomic republic within it. But an opposite decision was taken. The materials concerning this project have been kept hidden as 'Top secret' and as R. Masov acknowledged, he could not take them out and study them.¹⁸

The history of 'basmachi' movement makes clear that it was a national Tajik fight for independence during 1920-1930, even if some of its representatives were non-Tajik. For example, when Enver-pasha joined the 'basmachi' movement he was under the leadership of Davladmandbi – Tajik, or by some other sources Tajikaized Turk. There was also Ibrahimbek – a leader of Laqais, who headed Uzbek tribes. The fact that Tajiks were in the majority among insurgents is highlighted in a recent publication devoted to Central Asian migration during the 1920-1926 War for Independence. This work makes it clear that the relationship between Tajiks and Uzbeks was not smooth and provoked a clash between Tajiks and Uzbeks which led to the decline of the 'basmachi' movement.¹⁹

In 1924 when Abdullo Rahimboev and Faizullo Khajaev returned from Kokand, sixty thousand people from Konibodom and Isfara gathered and met them on Konibodom railway station. They were demanding that these leaders should take their territory out of the Kakand region and include it into the Khujand region. The Khujand region was already declared as a Tajik national region at the same time when Tajikistan was founded as autonomy republic.²⁰ That Tajiks from Khujand possessed strong Tajik nationalism was so evident that even Abdulla Rahimboev couldn't convince them to be Uzbek. Of course, the fact that Abdulla Rahimbaev had a meeting with inhabitants of Khuajnd and what was a result of this meeting Roy does not know. Rahimbaev was simply beaten in this meeting. It was outrage for all pan-Turkists that within Uzbekistan, and in addition to Tajik autonomous republic, there was also Khujand Tajik national region. On the base of the Khujandian fight for Tajik identity in 1924 it sounds very strange when Roy writes that Khujand is more Russified and more Uzbekised.²¹ Roy has probably heard about it from pan-Turkist.

In conclusion, Tajiks were the only nation in Central Asia that had a written history, national consciousness and national state. It was the colonial policy of Russian invaders - whether White or Red - to destroy Tajik national state and Tajik nation. 'The Soviets, - Roy writes, - did everything they could

¹⁸ Masov R. *ibid.* p.219

¹⁹ Abdullaev K. *From Xingjian to Khurasan. From the History of the 20th Century Central Asian Emigration.* Dushanbe: Irfon, 2009. p.223.

²⁰ Masov, R. *Ibid.* p.151-152.

²¹ Roy.*ibid.*p.113.

to prevent the crystallization of Tajik national sentiment'.²² But the point was not to prevent the *crystallization* of Tajik national sentiment, but instead to hinder the *restoration* of Tajik national state. What was actually left within the territory of Tajikistan was part of a much larger original state. It should be clear that the only nation that fought for their statehood in Central Asia was Tajiks and that the Tajik Civil War was a continuation of this fight.

²² Roy, O. *ibid.*p.122.