Did Soviet Central Asia get to have a 1960s? Historians have recently gotten interested in writing the Soviet Union into the broader, global history of the decade, examining issues such as youth politics, formal and informal exchange, and consumption.¹ So far, however, this has been a story set primarily in Eastern Europe and the European USSR.² The purpose of this paper is to consider what the 1960s meant in parts of the Soviet Union usually left out of such histories. Focusing on the Tajikistani professional elite that came of age in that decade, this paper argues that the 1960s were the decade when higher education integrated thousands of young men and women from the region into Soviet professional and cultural life, while also mobilizing them to be on the front-lines of the Soviet battle for the post-colonial world. These two features help explain how the generation that came of age in that decade responded to perestroika and the Soviet Union's 1989.

In a 1992 article, Immanuel Wallerstein, Terrence Hopkins, and Giovanni Arrighi argued that the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 were a continuation of 1968. The uprisings in Prague and Paris, they argued, were "the rebellion of the new working class- or at least of some of its components against the institutions that had brought them into existence only to stifle their further development."³ This "new working class," in turn, was the "intellectual stratum of professional technicians, administrators, and scientists more or less directly involved in production processes."⁴ Many years later, this theme was taken up by Georgi Derlugian, who extended the discussion to the Soviet periphery. In his 2005 Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus, Derlugian offered "world-system biography" of

⁴ Ibid.
the sociologist and one time militant Musa (Yuri) Shanibov. Shanibov was a war orphan from a small Kabardinian village who became a Komsomol organizer, a local district attorney (prokuror), a semi-dissident sociologist and legal scholar, and ultimately an organizer and leader in the nationalist movements that sprang up in late Perestroika. Derlugian's approach allowed him to extend the argument of Wallerstein, Hopkins, and Arrighi to consider the place of "new proletarians" in the USSR's own periphery and the role they played in 1989.

My own aim is less ambitious than Derlugian's sophisticated theoretical intervention, which seeks a synthesis between World-System theory, Charles Tilly's studies of violence and revolution, and the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. Rather, drawing on interviews, memoirs, and archival records, I will try to situate the trajectories of Tajikistani intellectuals within the larger context of social, political, and cultural transformations of the Soviet Union of the 1960s and the Soviet Union's history as a "developmental state". In particular, I am interested in the nexus between Soviet foreign policy towards the post-colonial world, its goals for building an advanced socialist society domestically, and the technical and creative intellectuals who were promoted and mobilized to carry out both. I argue that while there was no anti-systemic protest in the Soviet 1960s, certainly not in Central Asia, the generation promoted and mobilized in this period ultimately grew frustrated by limitations on their career prospects and what they increasingly saw as inequality within the Soviet Union. This sense of frustration drew many of them to begin articulating an anti-colonial critique against Moscow in the late 1980s. Yet that critique cannot be understood without an appreciation of the expectations raised by the Soviet 1960s.

**Making a Tajik Elite**

The creation of an intelligentsia was official state policy and tied to its development goals - a response to the republic's needs in industry, primary education, and the articulation of a national culture. The individuals that came of age in these decades ran the republic's newspapers, taught at its schools and universities, and debated and designed economic

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6 A developmental state is generally understood to be one where the government uses heavy interventions, regulation, and planning in the pursuit of macroeconomic goals. The term was originally used by Chalmers Johnson to describe Japan’s economic development after the second world war, but has since been used to describe socialist states as well, and this is the way Derlugian is using it. Derlugian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*, 6.
programs. The expansion of educational institutions in the 1950s opened the way for a much wider group to enter the Soviet professional classes. The Tajik State University was set up in 1948; the local branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences became its own independent institution several years later, with the writer Sadriddin Ayni installed as its first president. The 1950s saw the opening of a Polytechnic Institute and expansion of teacher’s colleges and other schools. Children of the “old” elite – those who had risen to white-collar positions in the 1920s but survived the purges - continued to pursue higher education, of course, but more and more would come from poorer peasant families, even from the more remote corners of the republic. Prior to 1948, their best chance at a higher education was to attend one of the teacher’s colleges located around the republic; a very few could then continue to a university education in Tashkent or one of the other Soviet cities. Graduate study always meant leaving the republic. The university and the academy of sciences, with its ability to supervise research and award kandidat nauk degrees, made it possible to pursue higher education and advanced study within the republic. It's first class of philologists, for example, already produced a number of graduates who went on to key roles in publishing and academia within the republic right through the post-war decades and into the independence period.

The expansion of education in the post-war era broadened the pool for this group enormously. For those without a family background in education – whether religious or secular – the university and technical schools presented a special attraction. Thus Rahmatulloev, who came from a village in Darwaz in the foothills of the Pamir mountains and near the Afghan border, contrasted life in the city with the poverty and especially closed-mindedness of his home village. In 1949, he recalled, after intensive agitation from party and komsomol officials, two girls became the first to go to Dushanbe to study. As a result, their families were ostracized. “The old, feudal-patriarchical relations interfered and the clergy labelled them unbelievers, kofir, and forbade anyone to visit their parents,” Rahmatulloev

7 Following on Wallerstein, Hopkins, and Arrighi, Georgii Derlugian calls this class the "new proletarians" because they were brought from the peasantry into state industries and institutions. He underlines, however, that they were hardly the 'hapless "human material" of Stalinist industrialization" or, indeed, of post-war education and mobilization campaigns. Indeed, they were a "highly activist and optimistic generation who advanced their individual and collective fortunes in the framework of post-Stalinist Soviet ideology…. Education and general modern acculturation seemed to them the best way of achieving confidence and higher-status positions in the new urban setting…taking the official communist ideology at its word…[they] obtained a cultural framework for their institutionalization as a class for laying claims on the ruling bureaucracy." Derlugian, Bourdieu's Secret Admireer in the Caucasus, 287.

recalled. The girls studied at the pedagogical institute, and returned to the village, presumably to assume teaching posts. “We looked at them lovingly and with jealousy, and the elders looked at them with hate. They returned as city people, their clothes, their hairstyle, their manner of speaking at such a high level, this striking beauty, all of this inspired in us the idea that it was also necessary…to go study, at any price.” ⁹ In Stalinabad, Rahmatulloev explained, a young villager was exposed to things he or she had never seen before: “hot water, electricity, a dormitory, bedding that was changed every week, a cafeteria with food three times a day, and you could live there for free and they gave you a stipend on top of that.” These conditions, in turn, further stimulated the desire to study.¹⁰ Rahmatulloev most likely exaggerated the conditions in the dormitories; it is clear that many of them still had trouble meeting these standards even in the 1970s, when resources were much greater than in the 1950s.¹¹ What is interesting, however, is how important he believed the experience to be in one's transformation. Certain kinds of dress, access to electricity, regularly changed clean bedding were all things that made one more of a "cultured" person (in the sense that the word came to be used in the Soviet Union by the 1930s) and freed one to develop his or her intellectual potential.¹² The economist Rashid Rahimov also recalled how much attention one of his Russian teachers paid to grooming when he was a teenager studying accounting at a technical college. The teacher would periodically ask the boys to put their hands on the desk, then trim their fingernails or send them out to wash up. Although such behavior seems to carry colonial overtones, it was hardly different from what modernizing elites in other countries hoped to do through their educational institutions in this period. This was not unusual for a school that was taking peasant boys and girls and preparing them to be white-collar professionals. Moreover, Karimov viewed the teacher’s attention to the length of his

⁹ Rahmatulloev interview.

¹⁰ Rahmatulloev interview.

¹¹ Consider this report on a dormitory constructed for students of the preparatory division in 1977: "The dormitory is designed for 660 people, has six floors, and was approved for use in February 1977. At the moment the entire fourth floor is undergoing repairs. Common rooms, the Red corner, and the kitchen are all occupied by residents from the fourth floor. The trash chute and elevator are out of order…order and cleanliness are not maintained, the showers are broken and out of order, and there is no lighting in the corridors, toilets and showers. The cafeteria is designed for 40 seats and works from 2 in the afternoon to 11 at night. The students have no opportunity to eat in the morning." Ф. 9606 оп 1 д 8234 Акт инспекции под отдел ТПИ

fingernails or the cleanliness of his hands as particularly important in helping restore normal civilian life after the war.13

Rahmatulloev is not typical, being from a family of activists, and still a communist when I interviewed him in 2013. However, similar stories came from others with quite different backgrounds. Thus Munovarov, from Gharm, also pointed to the difference between the closed-mindedness of his village, where, in his words, even wearing your hair slightly longer than normal could make you an outcast, with the opportunities offered by study in the capital. By the time I interviewed him in 2012 and 2013 Munovarov had grown very critical of the Soviet Union, including the enforced atheism and the corruption he says he saw from the late 1970s. But he nevertheless spoke of studying in Dushanbe as a transformational experience. It was at the university that he met his wife, the daughter of a Tajik soldier who had been wounded at the front and the Ukrainian-catholic nurse who cared for him. Both became historians.14 He taught at the university for many years, eventually going on to do graduate work at the Academy of Sciences. Perhaps under the influence of the time, Munovarov chose as his dissertation topic the industrialization of Tajikistan.15

Whether entering the humanities and social sciences or more practical fields like engineering or architecture, the young men and women who went to study felt that studying gave them a chance to be part of something bigger, namely to provide a larger service to their republic. The point of literary research, the writer Sadriddin Ayni explained to his student Rasul Hodizoda, is “to serve Tajik science and Culture.” In other words, it was a way to contribute to the articulation of Tajik national identity and spread that idea. The students who chose technical studies were attracted by taking part in another big project, namely the industrialization of the republic. For Latipov, studying in the construction faculty at the new polytechnic was exciting and “prestigious.”16 Olimjon Hasanov, who had gone to school in Leninabad, decided to focus on industrial refrigeration. To him, studying this seemingly unglamorous topic pointed to the possibility of participating in the transformation of his city. “We had a canning factory, and food industry was being developed, but there were no

13 Rahimov, O proshlom, so gordostiu, 8-9.
14 Munovarov interview.
16 Latipov interview
refrigerators, the big kind, and we wanted to be specialists in this sphere… it was new.” Even seemingly mundane specialisms provided an opportunity to take part in the most exciting projects of the day, whether the transformation of the republic through industrialization or the preservation and development of Tajik culture through research.

University life was not just about education and opportunity – it was a crucial step in socialization, especially for those students who did not come from elite families. Student groups within the universities and colleges and the growing range of arts and entertainment outside the institutions filled in the hours between classes and studying. Jura Latipov, accepted into the first class of the newly formed polytechnic institute, recalled the influence of the institute’s rector, Muhammed Osimi, a decorated war veteran who had studied in Tashkent. According to Latipov, Osimi encouraged the institute to develop a lively cultural life, including amateur theatre, sports, and literary events. Osimi used to also personally take groups of students to the opera theatre. Usmonov, who studied journalism at the state university in the mid-late 1960s, also recalled the vibrant social life available to students in the city, including gatherings at dance floors. “Young people, at the end of the working day, it did not matter whether or not you were a student, would go to the dance floors to relax,” Usmanov said. Like Latipov, he saw visits to the theatre as particularly important, “people were taught to go to the theatre, watch a play, and then there would be discussions, including students…I was also one of the active commentators, I took part in critiquing the actors, I couldn’t do anything myself but I could critique others.” Later, when he himself became a teacher, he also made a point of taking his students to the theatre. Usmanov, from a poorer family than Latipov (his father sold dried fruit at the bazar, and his elder brother was a miner) emphasized the extent to which the cultural life of the city was important for his own transformation into a “cultured person” and the importance of teachers in effecting that change.

Theatre, film, and dance were not the only extracurricular activities available to students. The academic and semi-academic kruzhki (circles) were arguably equally important. Such groups were supposed to be led by particularly eager students, with faculty mentors guiding their studies and work. Students in the natural sciences got a taste of doing advanced

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17 Olimjon Hasanov interview, Leninabad, June 2013
18 Latipov interview
19 Usmonov interview
research work; those working in the humanities could participate in research on local history and culture. By the early 1970s there were 233 such groups in the republic, spread around its various institutes and two universities. Students in archaeology kruzki were particularly active as participants in expeditions (valued in part, no doubt, for the free labor they provided.) Students in the natural sciences, too, were encouraged to present papers at internal faculty conferences that were held annually.

Literary evenings were also a big part of social life, at least for some students, both at the National University and especially at the Polytechnic. According to Abdurashid Samadov, who studied literature at the university, at the Polytechnic in the 1960s one discovered the key Russian poets of the thaw, including Evtushenko and Voznesenskii, as well as more controversial poets who were coming back into vogue like Marina Tsvetaeva and Sergey Esenin. It was in these literary gatherings in the late 1960s and early 1970s that some of the biggest names of post-war Tajik literature also made their appearance – poets like Loiq Sherali, Bozor Sobir, and Ubajd Rajab. Such events helped socialize students into a certain kind of intellectual life, and encouraged their self-identification as a cultural leadership connected to other Soviet elites but with its own local mission.

These extracurricular activities also introduced young people into anti-colonial politics. Tajikistan, after all, had a special role to play in the fight against imperialism and the liberation of the (post) colonial world, and this was reflected in student life. The local branches of the Committee for Solidarity with Countries of Asia and Africa, or the Committee on Women, mobilized university students for rallies, where the poet Mirzo Turson-Zade was often a speaker. Dignitaries like Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also came through the city. Young men and women were encouraged to engage with the "awakening East," and this in turn lessened the hold of Moscow on their imagination or sense of where the "center" might be. Of course, these were not mutually exclusive. Munira Shahidi, for example, was working as a Komsomol translator, helping guide tourists around Tajikistan, when she got the opportunity to travel to India as the translator for a delegation

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20 Ф 9606 оп 1 д 5667
О научно исследовательской работе и подготовке научных и научно педагогических кадров в высших учебных заведениях за 1973 год

21 Ibid

22 Samadov interview
that included the India specialist Chelyshev. The visit inspired her to devote her life to the study of the East. With Chelyshev's encouragement, she came to Moscow and enrolled as a graduate student at the Institute of Oriental Studies, although Gafurov persuaded her to focus on Tajik literature rather than Indian philology. For others, however, this "East", whether real or imaginary, became a repository of cultural values and traditions they worried were being lost in Tajikistan itself. This is a topic we will return to later.

Central Asian Expertise and the Presentation of Modernity

In the 1960s, the idea of a Central Asian model of development as something that could be studied and reproduced was briefly floated but fell away almost as quickly as it was conceived, for reasons we will not delve into here. This did not mean that certain skills and techniques perfected in Central Asia – dam building, irrigation, the production of certain kinds of crops, could not be exported. More importantly, the idea of a Central Asia that could be held up as an inspiration was not only accepted but deepened and became a crucial part of Soviet relations with the Third World, with important consequences for the Central Asians themselves. Central Asian expertise became a big part of Soviet projects abroad, particularly in Afghanistan in India. This was the result of several parallel developments: first, the growth of a technical intelligentsia within Central Asia starting from the late 1950s, and second, the demand for such expertise abroad stimulated by the various commitments made by the USSR to its allies in the developing world.

India and Afghanistan had a particularly important place in Tajikistan’s international outreach efforts. Both were neutral countries that were nevertheless sympathetic to the USSR, and were seen as part of a broader cultural sphere that emerged from a shared Persian and even pre-Islamic heritage. This idea was promoted in the works of Babajan Ghafurov, the academician and one time first secretary of the republic, and through various joint research projects and seminars, such as the 1968 conference on the Kushan epoch hosted in Dushanbe, with guests from Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan. Indeed, oriental studies, broadly understood as scholarship of languages, literature, culture, and history of “eastern” countries was broadly conceived as being a useful tool in the broader anti-imperial struggle waged by the USSR, particularly when it could be shown to come from within the Soviet Union’s own east. As the Afghanistan specialist Iurii Gankovskii noted with satisfaction in 1972, “one could cite many examples that prove that the flowering of Oriental science (vostokovednaia

23 ACPT document
nauka) in Tajikistan is attracting the sympathy of the foreign progressive intelligentsia in Iran, in Afghanistan, in India, in Pakistan, as well as in Arab countries, in Bangladesh, [arousing sympathy] towards those social, cultural, economic and political conditions that make such research possible [in the Soviet republics of Central Asia]."24 In other words, the development of Oriental studies, even in its most classical forms of historical and philological analysis, was already proving to be a victory in public diplomacy for the USSR, even without engaging within more “immediate” problems of economics and politics.25

These cultural links were not an end in themselves, but formed a base for broader cooperation and especially development aid, which is arguably what Afghan and Indian elites were particularly interested in. Tajik-Afghan scientific exchanges began in a significant way from the early 1960s. Aside from the usual propaganda programme – showing off Tajik universities, schools, laboratories, and factories – the visits also served to establish direct links and cooperation projects. These included joint projects to investigate flora and fauna on both sides of the border, seismic conditions, and natural resources. Afghan planners, economists, and public health officials were brought to Tajikistan to witness Tajik success in “gastroenterology, infectious diseases, neurology, the development of mountain pastures, in the battle against diseases affecting cotton plants, irrigation, etc.”26 Teachers from the universities and institutes were also dispatched to Kabul to teach courses at Kabul University and the Technical College built by the Soviet Union.27

Soviet aid to Afghanistan increased after Mohammad Daud overthrew his cousin King Zahir Shah and proclaimed a republic in 1973. Tajikistan and Central Asia’s role in aiding Afghan development increased as well. In 1974 the Tajik Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Water, and the Ministry of Agriculture were all tasked with helping conduct research on and implement the irrigation of new lands, as well as establishing “government control over the national economy.” Tajik seismologists were also involved in researching seismic conditions and designing buildings and dams that could withstand even the most serious disturbances.28

26 M. Ibrohimov, Gorizonty nauki Tadzhikistana, (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2007), 112-113.
27 In 1968, for example: доценты, кандидаты физико-математических наук тт Шокиров О., Ташбаев В. и Хакимов Ф.Х.; доценты, кандидаты фил наук тт Джураев и Додыхудоев Р., которые в указанной стране пробудут до 1970 года. ГАРФ Ф 9606 оп 1 д 3456
28 Ibrohimov, Gorizonty nauki Tadzhikistana, 158-163.
A number of Soviet aid projects were carried out by agencies based in Central Asia. Thus, the same organization that had helped design the Nurek Dam also worked on the hydroelectric station at Pul-i-Khumri, while the Uzbek Ministry of Water Resources provided supplies for irrigation projects. Tajik specialists built electric lines in Afghan cities and across its countryside. Soviet Central Asian aid to Afghanistan also included the development of broadcast radio, musical recording technology, and even theatrical expertise. Indeed, the Soviets were exporting not just technology or techniques, but a broader conception of development. Just as the path to modernity within the USSR included not just industries and dams but theaters and even opera, Soviet aid abroad carried the tools that could help create new men and women along with the technologies that would help them live in prosperity.

In all of these cases, Central Asians were stepping into the role of “elder brother” for the developing-world previously played for them by the Russians. These exchanges were usually presented as arising from technical similarities: similar seismic conditions, similar climate, soil, development needs, and so on. Clearly, however, the propaganda value of having Central Asians act as development workers was just as important. Promoting the Soviet Union as a modernizing state that preserved cultural heritage was an integral part of Soviet aid. This was the idea behind Rashidov’s request that a madrasa be constructed in modern Tashkent in place of the existing one in ancient Bukhara – to show how Soviet modernity co-existed with the religious traditions of its people. Similarly, Gafurov’s call to invest in Central Asian studies paid off because it allowed Soviet representatives to claim that the study of cultural heritage was blossoming within Soviet borders. For example, H.K. Rahimzoda, the deputy head of the Persian language department at Tajik State University, was sent to represent the USSR at an exhibition of Tajikistan’s achievements in education presented in Kabul in 1965. His job included fielding questions from visitors, and when he was asked whether the Arabic script had really been forbidden, he explained the advantage of shifting away from that script for the purposes of achieving universal literacy, then showed him “a textbook for 5-6 grades, through which our students study the Arabic script,” and added that “in the faculties of humanities studying the Arabic script was mandatory. Therefore in our republic there are hundred times more people than there were in the pre-

29 Tursunov, “Pomosh sovetskikh sredneaziatskikh respublik Afganistanu,” Narody Azii i Afriki, no.4, 1971, p.127; Robinson, Aiding Afghanistan, 80
revolutionary period and many more than there are in Afghanistan today.” 32 Even better if this exposition of Soviet cultural politics could be combined with a demonstration of Soviet technical capabilities. The archives contain the record of an exchange that took place between Afghan officials and an irrigation engineer from Soviet Central Asia working on the Jalalabad irrigation canal:

Abdul Hakim Khan (chairman of the construction of the canal): In 1967 I was in the Soviet Union and saw with my own eyes how they work there. In a short time the Hungry Steppe was transformed. Instead of ancient medieval cities modern cities have appeared in Uzbekistan.

Shah Vali Khan (uncle of the King, Marshall in the Afghan armed forces): Have the historical buildings constructed in Samarkand at the time of Tamurlane been preserved?

Mukhitdinov: In the Soviet Union a lot of attention is paid to the preservation of historical monuments. They have been restored everywhere and they are being restored now. These monuments act as a historical museum showcasing the ancient culture of the peoples of the USSR.

Abdul Hakim Khan: I was in Samarkand and I saw these buildings. It’s true that they are being maintained in exemplary condition.” 33

From the 1950s, Central Asians also began to fill important diplomatic posts. The same logic that brought Bobojon Gafurov to Moscow and Nuritdin Mukhiddinov into the Politburo also sent Jabbor Rasulov as ambassador to Togo. Mukhiddinov himself would spend a decade as Moscow’s ambassador in Syria. Dozens of Central Asians would take up such posts in the Cold War era, primarily in the Third World. Though they were never more than a tiny minority of the professional diplomatic corps, which drew heavily on the children of the Moscow elite, Central Asians nevertheless played a highly visible role in diplomacy. Nor were they mere figureheads – while Togo may not have been a foreign policy priority for the Soviet Union, others represented Moscow in the capitals of crucial allies. Muhitdinov, for example, served in Syria from the time of that country’s 1967 defeat to Israeli forces, a major blow to Soviet interests in the region.

32 Rahimov’s report, December 1965, RGANI F 5 op 35 d 225, 7.

33 Информация о посещении Королем Афганистана группы советских специалистов работающих на строительстве Джалалабадской ирригационной системе. RGAE ф 365 оп 9 д 185
The career of Mirzo Rahmatov provides a good example. Born in Garm in 1914, he joined the komsomol in 1933, rose through its ranks, and eventually joined the party in his home region. After the war he was transferred to the central committee in Stalinabad, where he must have performed well because by 1948 he was sent for further training to the Higher Party School in Moscow, after which he held a series of positions including Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR, Minister of Culture, and member of the all-union party’s revizionnaia komissia. Along with Muhitdinov and Aleksei Kosygin, Rahmatov accompanied Nasser on his tour of the Soviet Union in 1958.34 Rahmatov’s actual diplomatic career began relatively late in life, however, when, at the age of 52, he was appointed ambassador to Yemen, then in the midst of Civil War.35

Rahmatov published a memoir about his diplomatic service in 1991. Despite being written at the apex of perestroika, it is remarkably doctrinaire in its views on Soviet foreign policy (whose great strength, according to Rahmatov, is its Marxist-Leninist foundation) and its anti-American and generally anti-western tone. Nevertheless, what stands out for a student of Soviet foreign policy is how Rahmatov used his particular experience and background. Rahmatov was well aware that he was not in Yemen simply to cut ribbons on Soviet aid projects or negotiate the details of Moscow’s relations with Sana. He was there as living proof that the Soviet Union was a genuinely anti-colonial power, committed to the defeat of imperialism and the progress of formerly oppressed people.

According to Rahmatov, he frequently had to defend the Soviet Union against the charge that it oppressed Muslims, exploited by western powers like the United States. Once, he explains, he brought wonder to the face of an interlocutor by bringing up Lenin’s address to the Laboring Muslims of Russia and the East. The interlocutor, presumably a Yemeni, could not believe that Lenin actually called on Muslims to kick out Russians. Rahmatov explained that Lenin was calling on Muslims to kick out all colonizers, meaning “those who came not as friends and helpers, but rather those who wanted to use their lands in their own selfish goals, interfered in their social and cultural development, mock faith, customs, and traditions, and treated people only as cheap labor.” Did that really mean that one could live “as Allah willed?” the Yemeni asked. “If they wanted, they could live according to the sharia,” Rahmatov explained “but progress destroys insularity, and even purely economic

motives require the broad interaction between different nations and people, and this in turn changes much in people’s preconceptions and habits, in their psychology…”

As ambassador, Rahmatov also helped oversee Soviet aid in the country, including the work of engineers who were trying to irrigate new lands, some of which would be used to grow cotton. "I often remembered the spaces of the Vaksh valley and Hungry Steppe, Dalverzin and other native places reborn and transformed thanks to artificial irrigation. Now - I would think with pride - we transfer our experience of others, we bring water, and that means new life into the barren deserts of Arabia, wishing with all of our hearts that this part of the earth will become a land of plenty and true happiness." Here, too, Rahmatov says, he had to face the scepticism and derision of western diplomats and experts who claimed that growing cotton in the Wadi-Surdud was impossible. Rahmatov again relied on his own background, reminding these westerners that their countrymen had said the same thing about Soviet irrigation and cotton-growing plans in Tajikistan.

That Moscow saw propaganda value of Soviet Muslims serving as diplomats and purveyors is obvious. Equally interesting, however, is the effect of being presented as the avante-guar of the world revolution, anti-imperialism, and development on the Central Asians themselves. The tours of Central Asia organized for visitors from developing countries had the hallmarks of Catherine the Great touring the “Potemkin Villages” – facades of model villages created for the Empress to behold as she toured her empire. Yet as Michael David-Fox points out in Showcasing the Great Experiment, his wide-ranging book on the Soviet presentation of its cultural and economic achievements, “Potemkin villages,” in the sense that the term is popularly understood – hastily constructed temporary facades erected to create an illusion – simply did not exist. Foreigners were steered towards the best of what the USSR had to offer, but the achievements were very much real. More importantly for our case is David Fox’s insight that what was demonstrated to outsiders was meant for domestic as well as external consumption. Thus, David Fox explains “there was hardly a single model shown to outsiders that did not have its own important role for insiders. It was as if Potemkin’s decorated villages had been designated not for diplomatic elites but instead had been promulgated on a mass scale to inspire Russian peasants throughout the land.”

In similar ways, one can ask to what extent these presentations of Central Asian achievements –

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38 Ibid.
39 David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 7-8, 20-21.
40 David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 141.
through exhibits and exchanges – were actually intended for Soviet Central Asians themselves.

It is difficult to measure how effective “foreign aid” was for domestic nation-building. However, we can see it as a component of the larger effort taken at Soviet nation-building undertaken through the writing and promotion of “national” histories written within the republic, which, particularly in the Tajik case always included an emphasis on Tajikistan’s central role in Persian and Indo-Persian history and culture. The writings of Mirso Tursunzade, who served as head of the writer’s union and chaired the Soviet Committee of Solidarity with Asian and African Countries, his endless public appearances and reports of his travels to India and other newly decolonized countries, the rallies of the Solidarity Committee and the Committee of Peace organized in Dushanbe, Tashkent, and other Central Asian cities, drew locals, particularly university age komsomol members, into the romance of revolution. The idea that they stood at the vanguard of this revolutionary world flattered them. Those who went to work abroad as specialists, advisors, or translators, were likewise informed of their special role in aiding their less fortunate cousins, or serve the cause of peace and understanding. Meanwhile, comments by visitors praising the republic were frequently repeated at party meetings and in the press.

Tursun-zade was only the most famous of the figures who took part in delegations and wrote about their experiences in poetry and prose, but he was far from alone. Writers, artists, and party members all took part in extensive junkets and returned home to write about their experiences in newspaper articles, brochures, and books. Rahmatov, for example, wrote a book about Africa that was published in 1961. Abdullahad Kahhorov, who spent many years working in planning and served as Chairman of the Council of Ministers between 1964 and 1974, co-authored a book, published in Tajik in 1959 called *Economic and Technical Cooperation of the USSR with a the Poorly Developed Countries of the East*, which included a chapter highlighting how Tajikistan and the other Central Asian republics compared favourably to the countries of South and South-East Asia, and “set an example for the weakly developed countries…the Republics of the Soviet east will be torches lighting the way to...”

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42 Interviews. See also Holmurod Sharifov, *Tolori Baland* (Dushanbe: Pazhuhishgohi fari-tojiki, 2010) which discusses the author's travels to Afghanistan, South Asia, and Africa.
43 Mirzo Rakhmatov, *Afrika idet k svobode* (Moscow: 1961)
progress and civilization for less developed countries.”\textsuperscript{44} Kakhorov later travelled to South and South-East Asia and parts of Africa and wrote about his experiences in a series of pamphlets published in Dushanbe, all of them in Tajik.\textsuperscript{45} Such publications differed in details but followed similar arcs: the writer described the suffering of these countries under colonialism and their struggle for freedom, supplementing facts gleaned primarily from Soviet publications with some eyewitness accounts. Inevitably, the writer also pointed to the yearning he or she found for friendship with the Soviet Union, and Moscow’s willingness to extend a helping hand. Often, as with Rahmatov’s memoir, they also included comparisons with the author’s own republic or home district.

\textbf{Fast-Forward: Tajikistan’s 1989}

At the same time, part of the republic's intelligentsia began to voice increasingly strong criticisms of the government's cultural policy. Poets and scholars who came of age in the 1960s, like Loiq Sherali and Gulruhsor Safieva, became frustrated at what they saw as Russian chauvinism in the arts, and at the same time forced to revisit earlier assumptions about the status of culture in countries like India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, for whom they were supposed to be the guiding light. In the 1970s, Loiq had challenged the Russian take on literary exchanges, which emphasized how Tajik and other Central Asian poets had learned from Russian masters, with an article that showed the deep influence of Persian classic on Russian poets going back to Tyutchev and Afanasei Fet.\textsuperscript{46} In the perestroika era, he would be the leading figure among those that sought to elevate the status of the Tajik language, a campaign that culminated in a 1989 law. In one of his more famous poems of the period, a lament addressed to his mother, he complains about living in a society where no one speaks his language – a barely hidden critique of the republic’s political leadership that seemed more comfortable in Russian than Tajik.\textsuperscript{47} Part of the intelligentsia even called for a return to the Arabic script, claiming that the language reforms of the 1920s and 1930s had set Tajikistan back rather than accelerating its progress.

This creative intelligentsia was increasingly willing to articulate an anti-colonial vision. As in other republics, institutions devoted to literary history and cultural heritage became the focal points where these ideas were first articulated. Yet these emerging critiques

\textsuperscript{44} A. Kakhorov and G. Prohorov, \textit{Xamkorii iqtisodi va texnikii SSSR bo mamlakatxoi susttaraqqiardai sharq} (Stalinobod: Nashriete davlatii Tojikiston, 1959), 44.
\textsuperscript{45} A. Kakhorov, \textit{Dar avstralia va Ceylon (qaydhoi safar)} (Dushanbe: Nashrieti davlatii Tojikiston, 1962).
\textsuperscript{46} Loiq, \textit{Druzhba Narodov}, 1976
\textsuperscript{47}
were not developed in isolation, but through a great deal of interaction and mutual influence across the entire union. Serguei Oushakine has argued that Soviet dissidents employed a kind of "mimetic resistance," copying the language and frameworks of the Soviet government to critique it. Yet the emerging nationalist intellectuals of the 1980s were also employing a kind of "mimetic resistance," but in different ways. On the one hand, they developed their critique on the basis of Soviet claims about equality and national culture, using official discourse and ideological texts to show that Soviet principals were constantly being violated.

At the same time, they used memes that were being shared across the Soviet space. Novels like Chingiz Aytmatov's *The Day Lasts Longer Than a Hundred Years* had an impact far beyond the author's native Kyrgyzstan. The novel recounts the life of an aging Kazakh railway worker, a veteran of the Great Patriotic War who had escaped a German POW camp, joined Josip Broz Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia, only to fall under suspicion back in the Soviet Union. The novel's greatest resonance, however, comes from a parallel plotline, which tells the legend of a torture technique supposedly by employed certain Mongol warriors. The warriors, so the legend goes, would stretch skins over the heads of captives, then leave them without food or water in the hot sun. As the skins dried, they shrunk on the captive's head, putting immense pressure on his skull. After three days the captive, if he was still alive, was spiritually broken. Completely subservient to his captors, the "mankurt," also lacked any memory of his past. At the novel's emotional peak, the main character shouts the term "mankurt" as an epithet against members of the younger generation who seem to have lost touch with their traditions.

The novel, which also touches on themes of ecological degradation, echoes the "village prose" pioneered by Russian writers in the thaw and developed in the 1970s and 1980s, which often set up an idealized rural Russia against a corrupt urban modernity and economic development that brought ecological and social disaster. Yet while the "village prose" movement mostly served to rally Russian nationalists, Aytmatov's novel resonated more widely, not only within Central Asia but across the USSR, including the liberal Russian intelligentsia which found the village prose writers' nationalist tendencies suspicious. It had particular resonance, of course, in Central Asia. The writer Juma Odinaev's daughter recalled that immediately after reading it as a teenager she asked her father if she, too, was a mankurt.

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48 Oushaking, Terrifying Mimicry

49 On "Village Prose" see Brudny…Hosking, Zubok, 330.
since she attended a Russian school and had no particular ties to Tajik culture.\textsuperscript{50} The anxiety about becoming "mankurts" permeated the political discussion in the late 1980s and early 1980s.

Even more important for developing an anti-colonial stance with regards to the Soviet Union, however, were the networks that Tajikistani intellectuals had built up inside and outside the USSR. Their travels in post-colonial countries had exposed them to anti-colonial politics as well as skepticism towards the USSR's own claims of equality. The cultural elite also had become quite well integrated into Soviet institutions in the post-war decades, and through them came into close contact not only with staunch defenders of official orthodoxy but also those who, while working within the system, began to articulate fundamental critiques.

Consider, for example, the case of Muhammadjon Shukurov (Shukuri) (1926-2012). Born in Bukhoro, he was the son of Sadri Ziyo (1867-1932), a \textit{Qazi} in the Bukharan emirate in the years before revolution, and who managed to make a career of sorts under the Soviet regime before perishing in the purges. Although born in Bukhara, Muhammadjon studied in Stalinabad (Dushanbe), at the pedagogical institute, graduating in 1945. After defending a dissertation he spent most of his career in the Academy of Sciences. In his memoirs, Shukurov recalls that in the early perestroika era he heard people from different republics complaining about the poor state of "national" culture in the USSR at meetings with cultural figures in Moscow. Among the speakers Shukuri recalled was Aytmatov, who complained that there was only one Kirgiz-language school in the Kirgiz capital of Frunze (Bishkek) and that only the least-able students were sent to study there; a Moldovan deputy who complained about the switch to cyrillic from latin script, and even the Academician Dmitry Likhachev, the Russian historian and cultural preservationist.\textsuperscript{51} Their inspiration drove him to write a series of articles on the state of national languages in the republic. One of the first, after some difficulty, came out in Moscow in \textit{Literaturnaia Gazeta}. Once again, his networks and integration into the Soviet literary world made it possible for him to argue a position that was at the core of the emerging nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Shukuri, Hikoiahtoe akandah az hayat…28-29.

With the coming of perestroika, moreover, some Tajik economists began to articulate a more direct comparison between their own situation and the problems of the Third World. For example, Hojamahmat Umarov, an economist who attended university in the late 1960s and defended a dissertation in Moscow in the mid-1970s, went on a number of trips to India where he was expected to lecture on the successes of Soviet agriculture and economic development more generally. Over time, however, he also found that he had much to learn from his Indian counterparts. For example, he was inspired by his interactions with Indian economists to study poverty, and ultimately to recommend family planning as a way to raise the standard of living for Central Asians. By 1989 he had emerged as a strong critic of Soviet economic policy within Central Asia, and within Tajikistan in particular. In an article published that year, he argued that economic relations in the union were inconsistent with claims to equality between nationalities: “According to the constitution of the USSR, one of the political foundations of Soviet society is that it is a federation of nations and nationalities, and the friendship between them. It was believed that between them there were not and there could not be conflict (protivorechie). When such conflicts did appear, they were hushed up.”

Umarov’s specific complaints were not much different to what Tajik economists had been saying for some time. Like them, he decried the spread of cotton monoculture and low levels of industrialization. Referring presumably to the aluminium plant described above, Umarov argued that to the extent that industry had been constructed in the republic, it had done little for the native population, and effectively extended Tajikistan’s role as a raw material’s producer. What changed was how he articulated the problem. Not only was Umarov’s language more forceful than what was typical for his fellow economists, but he explicitly compared Central Asia to other less-developed countries:

Many social-economic and demographic problems of the Central Asian republics are analogous to the problems facing developing countries in the East. The majority of them are the result of the fast population growth…This is the contradiction between the growth of the size of the average family and the growth of the demographic load on the working members of the family, between the fast pace of natural population growth and the shrinking availability of land per person. No less serious is the contradiction between the excess labour resources and the insufficient number of

qualified working cadres and specialists, the necessity of providing for full employment and the insufficiency of productive reserves...

Moreover, Umarov did not see this as simply a problem of mistakes in planning, but rather a more fundamental issue resulting from the relationship between the centre and the periphery: It seems that this situation is explained by the strict regulation of regional development from a single center, which infringes local and regional interests, suppresses initiative and enterprise from the population and territorial organs, sharply decreases interest in a more complete and effective involvement of the productive resources of the region.

Umarov was a relative moderate, but similar views about the centre-periphery relationship also politicized another economist of Umarov’s generation, Tohir Abdujabbor. Their biographies overlapped: both came of age in the 60s, studied in Moscow in the 1970s, and worked abroad for part of the 1980s. Abdujabbor, too had started his career working on issues related to development. As a graduate student at the Institute of Oriental Studies, he wrote a thesis entitled *North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan: Social-Economic Features*, a survey of climate, natural resources, and labour reserves intended to serve as a further guideline for development strategy. Curiously, many of the issues Abdujabbor raised were ones that Tajik economists were debating with regard to their own republic: the shortcomings of industrialization, the problem of excess labour, the difficulty in balancing heavy and light industry, and so forth. Still, it remains a fairly conventional work for the time period – very much the kind of scholarship encouraged among Central Asian intellectuals, geared towards (Soviet led) development.

Abdujabbor’s transition from Soviet intellectual to opposition figure seems to have begun in Afghanistan, where he worked during the Soviet occupation of that country. He became one of the founders of Rastokhez (revival) a perestroika-era group that pushed for the revival of the Tajik language and its use at the government level. Beyond the cultural and linguistic argument that became so central to Rastokhez’s campaigns, there were also more concrete economic complaints. In his articles and speeches, Abdujabbor criticized the cotton monoculture imposed on Tajikistan for the benefit of the center while degrading the soil and harming the health of farmers through the use of pesticides. He also rejected the notion that Tajikistan was backward until the Russian revolution. On the contrary, Abdujabbor wrote, the

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54 Umarov “Regional’nye osobennosti”
55 Umarov “Regional’nye osobennosti”
region had a vibrant agriculture. Comparing industrial production levels to 1913 might show a great transformation, he said, but that failed to account for the fact that half the working population was engaged in farming, and that the standard of living was the lowest in the Soviet Union.

Although Abdujabbor spent more time on language and culture than on economic questions as such, he saw the two as linked. Industrial development and the modern cities built in the Soviet period had failed to attract the Tajiks, because they were built with Russians in mind. The culture of the Tajiks and their needs had not been taken into account when building cities, and a strict regime of residence permits made it hard for them to settle there even if they did want to. “It is no accident that today after more than 70 years have passed since the foundation of the Soviet Union the number of Tajiks in the cities and especially among works and specialist cadres in industrial factories and construction is very insignificant. This is not without influence on the progress and advancement of the nation, language, and culture.” These ideas were at the core of the economy and ecology section of Rastokhez’s program, approved in September 1989. Short on specifics, the program called for Tajikistan’s “economic independence:” control over Tajik economic institutions, infrastructure, planning, and so on.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Abdujabbor’s experience in Afghanistan, as a trained economist and interpreter, affected his political ideas. At least one of his former colleagues remembers that Abdujabbor seemed to combine his critique of the Soviet intervention with Tajikistan’s position in the Soviet Union and the feeling of cultural loss – sometimes evoking the now common trope of the "mankurt". Although few of the thousands of military veterans, translators, and advisers who went to Afghanistan were politicized in this way by their experience, it appears that Abdujabbor’s path was similar to that followed by some other members of Rastokhez. Nevertheless, we should not

58 Ibid, 179.
59 Ibid. 189. It was not just ethnic Tajiks who held these views. V.I. Vetrov, writing in the Academy of Science’s monthly journal, described the previous decades as a period when more advanced republics, like the Baltics, became even more advanced relative to the Central Asian republics, at the same time demanding an ever greater share of raw materials. V.I. Vetrov “Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskie probemy razvitie respubliki” 1990, No.1, p.3.
60 Barnomae sozmoni Rastokhez – junbishi mardumi Jumhuri Tojikiston” in Komilzoda, ed., Me’mori istikloli Tokikiston, 223-226
overemphasize the Afghan experience. Both Umarov and Abdujabbor had studied in Moscow in the 1970s and had been exposed to various dissident ideas. Rastokhez seems to have been inspired by similar groups in the Baltic republics, and another former activist listed the Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov and the American writer Ernest Hemingway as his influences.

The professional elite that emerged in the 1960s fulfilled the goals of Soviet education policies. Shaped by their experiences at the institutes and universities, their time in the Komsomol, army, and studying in the union "centers," they could be devoted to working for the economic and cultural life of their republic even as they sought to continue their own personal growth. They felt a connection to broader developments in the Soviet Union and even the world at large. Understanding their experiences in the post-war decades helps us make sense of how they dealt with the dilemmas of modernization and “cultural construction” as they took on positions of responsibility in academia, publishing, and planning.

Scholars of Central Asian studies during the Cold War noted the impressive growth of the new professional elite and wondered what it would mean for union politics in the long run. Indeed, by the 1970s and especially the 1980s part of this elite would begin to criticize the very foundations of the Soviet system. Yet when individuals like Loiq Sherali or the economist Tohir Abdujabbor began to complain about the failures of the political system or Russian arrogance, they were acting very much like the intelligentsia in Russia, Iran, and other developing countries. Arguably, in taking seriously their responsibility for Tajikistan's economic and cultural growth, they were fulfilling the mandate set by the Soviet Union's internal nation-building poliices. Some of them began to take on the features of a colonial intelligentsia, and to consciously think of themselves in those terms. They did so, however, in dialogue with developments in Russia and elsewhere in the USSR, and with what they learned (or imagined) about the Third World when they went there as emissaries of Soviet modernization and anti-imperialism.

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63 Authors interview with H. Umarov, Dushanbe, May 2013, and M. Ibrohimov, Dushanbe, July 2013. Ibrohimov was Abdujabbor’s roommate in Moscow and later became a Rastokhez sympathizer. He remembered Abdujabbor as being engaged with various dissident debates in Moscow at the time.

