



The faithful assistant. Muhiddin Faizulloev's life and work in the light of Soviet ethnography

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Programmes scientifiques

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Sophie Roche

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Muhiddin Faizulloev studied ethnography in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and Moscow and finished his dissertation after a long and painful struggle against established authorities. Over the course of his career Muhiddin Faizulloev accompanied more than thirty ethnographic and archaeological expeditions and produced many ethnographic field diaries. Even more interesting was that he had worked with and for Sergei Polyakov (Moscow State University) and Valentin Bushkov (Main Archival Department, Moscow), two ethnographers who have published extensively on the Tajik people. Faizulloev's view of events and scholarly works is refreshing and helps contextualize the sometimes problematic books that Moscow's ethnographers produced. The article sheds light on the question of ethnographic knowledge production more generally and on the ethnographic work and life of Muhiddin Faizulloev in Tajikistan more specifically.

Working Papers Series

The faithful assistant. Muhiddin Faizulloev's life and work in the light of Soviet ethnography

Sophie Roche

November 2014

The authors

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Recent publications: *The Faceless Terrorist. Jihād and Mujāhid in the Cultural Context of Central Asia*. (Accepted by Transcultural Research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context); *Domesticating youth. The Dynamics of Youth Bulge in Tajikistan*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014; *Central Asian Intellectuals on Islam: between Scholarship, Politics and Identity*. (Editor of the volume) Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, ZMO Studien 32, 2014.

Muhiddin Faizulloev accomplished his ethnographic studies in Moscow in 1974. He defended his doctoral thesis (aspirantura) in 1986 in Moscow. He worked and contributed to the ethnographic Museum in Khujand, taught at the Technical University of Khujand, the State University of Khujand and prepared the path to the opening of the first Ethnographic Department in Tajikistan in 1999. Throughout his academic life he accompanied ethnographic and archaeological expedition and headed research groups and researcher teams in the field. Beside his academic work he is today consulted for political events and cultural decisions on the regional level (region of Sughd). He has indebt ethnographic experiences in Tajikistan and has conducted field trips to Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Russia.

Selection of publications: M. Faizulloev and A. Abduqodirov. *Marosimu ma'arakahoi Khujand*. Khujand: Maqomoti ijroiayi hokimiyati davlatii shahri Khujand, 2008; *Makhalla sovernogo Tadjikistana kontsa XIX vv.* (na primere Khodzenta i ego prigorodov). Khodzhen, 1974; « Izmenenie traditsinnoi kul'tury tadjikov v sotsial'noi edinetse – makhalle kontsa XIX I nachala XX vv ». In: Yunesko-50, *Kul'tua, proshloe, nastoyashchee i budushee*. Khodzhen, 1997; « Slozhenie sovremennykh gorodskikh kvartalov-makhallya v Tadjikistane (po materialam g. Khodzenta) ». In: *Islam i narodnaya kul'tura*, 1998.

The text

This paper was developed during a research stay as a Directeur d'étude associé (DEA), with the FMSH in Paris in 2014, based on material provided between 2013 and 2014 by Muhiddin Faizulloev from the University of Khujand, and has profited from the careful comments and suggestions by Tsypylma Darieva, from the University of Jena.

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Abstract

Muhiddin Faizulloev studied ethnography in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and Moscow and finished his dissertation after a long and painful struggle against established authorities. Over the course of his career Muhiddin Faizulloev accompanied more than thirty ethnographic and archaeological expeditions and produced many ethnographic field diaries. Even more interesting was that he had worked with and for Sergei Polyakov (Moscow State University) and Valentin Bushkov (Main Archival Department, Moscow), two ethnographers who have published extensively on the Tajik people. Faizulloev's view of events and scholarly works is refreshing and helps contextualize the sometimes problematic books that Moscow's ethnographers produced. The article sheds light on the question of ethnographic knowledge production more generally and on the ethnographic work and life of Muhiddin Faizulloev in Tajikistan more specifically.

Keywords

soviet ethnography, Tajikistan, biography, ethnicity, Islam, Polyakov, Bushkov, ethnography, USSR

Le fidèle assistant. Vie et œuvre de Muhiddin Faizulloev à la lumière de l'ethnographie soviétique

Résumé

Muhiddin Faizulloev, après avoir poursuivi ses études d'ethnographie à Douchanbé au Tadjikistan et à Moscou, dut lutter contre les autorités établies pour achever sa thèse. Pendant ses vingt ans de carrière, Faizulloev a participé à une trentaine d'expéditions ethnographiques et archéologiques, produisant de nombreux carnets de terrain ethnographiques. Il eut l'occasion de travailler, entre autres, avec Sergei Poliyakov (de l'université d'Etat de Moscou) et Valentin Bushkov (du Département principal des Archives à Moscou), deux ethnographes qui ont beaucoup publié sur la population du Tadjikistan. Les perspectives de Faizulloev sur les événements des quarante dernières années et sur la production de savoir ethnographique dans cette période renouvellent les questionnements et aident à penser dans leur contexte historique les ouvrages académiques parfois problématiques produits à Moscou. L'article met en lumière plus généralement la question de la production de savoir ethnographique et, plus spécifiquement, la vie et le travail ethnographique de Muhiddin Faizulloev au Tadjikistan.

Mots-clefs

ethnographie soviétique, Tadjikistan, biographie, ethnicité, islam, Polyakov, Bushkov, ethnographie, Union Soviétique, URSS

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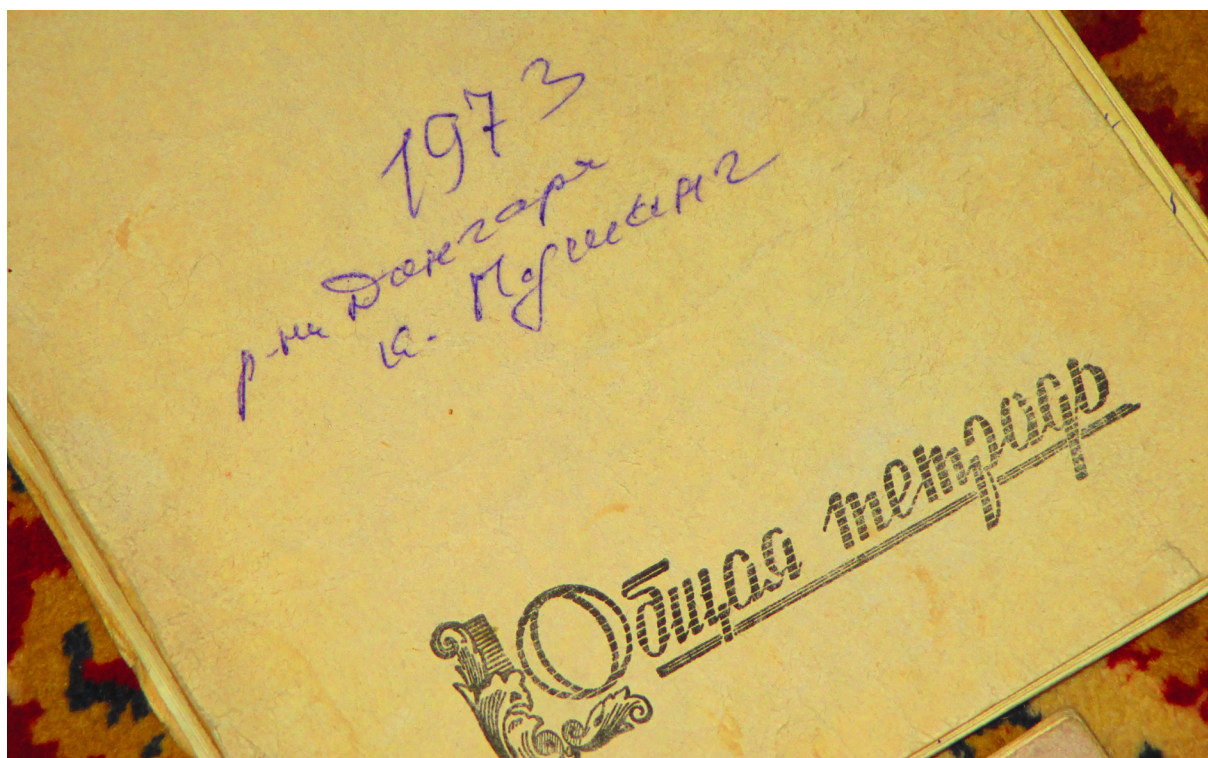
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When I first met Muhiddin Faizulloev in Khujand in 2013, I was impressed by his ethnographic knowledge but confused by the fact that despite having read quite a few Russian ethnographies, I had never heard his name in relation to ethnography in Tajikistan.¹ In the course of our conversations I discovered that Muhiddin Faizulloev had worked as an assistant to Russian ethnographers, whom usually lacked the local language competencies to work in remote rural areas. However, as an ethnographer who had been trained in Tajikistan and Russia, he was not only an assistant but an excellent and sensitive observer who supplied Russian ethnographers with precious material. Over the course of twenty years Muhiddin Faizulloev accompanied more than thirty expeditions and produced many ethnographic field diaries. Even more interesting was that he had worked with and for Sergei Polyakov (Moscow State University) and Valentin Bushkov (Main Archival Department, Moscow), two ethnographers who have published extensively on the Tajik people, particularly in the Ferghana Valley. When I learned about Faizulloev's life, which was so deeply interwoven with the lives of Russian and western ethnographers, I decided to review some of the existing literature by Polyakov and Bushkov through the biographic and ethnographic writings of Faizulloev himself.

Faizulloev studied in Dushanbe and Moscow and finished his dissertation after a long struggle. Later, Polyakov asked him to finish his habilitation. However, by that time the Soviet Union had collapsed and Faizulloev had neither the resources nor the time for such work. Throughout his career he was caught between power struggles and personal jealousy games; he was a researcher who served as an assistant and colleague with insights into knowledge production in the field of Soviet ethnography.² The ethnographic material upon which Polyakov and Bushkov built their

theories is contained in the numerous field notebooks³ that fill his private study room. Yet in the Russian language ethnographies, the material has been filtered according to the trend set in Moscow. Until the mid-1980s this trend followed Yulian Bromlei's theory of ethnicity and since perestroika turned towards the study of Central Asian societies as primarily Muslim people, a turn that broke the intimate relationship between the ethnographers from the centre (Moscow) and the periphery (Tajikistan).

Faizulloev has remained faithful to his teachers and despite all his difficulties, rejects judging the past negatively. This approach helps him examine the past less through a systematic deconstruction than through intimate narratives and observations. Further, it offers a look at knowledge production not as a one-dimensional activity of the intelligentsia, but as an intimate, public and conflicting encounter. It will take many years to evaluate Muhiddin Faizulloev's ethnographic material. Thus, the aim of this paper is modest, namely to examine Faizulloev's intellectual life in relation to aspects of the ethnographic theories and writings of his time by focusing on encounters with Polyakov and Bushkov.⁴ Both of these authors were specialists on ethnicity in Central Asia in the 1970s and 80s and focused on Tajikistan and the Ferghana Valley. With perestroika, the authors turned to a religious narrative that led to a reformulation of Central Asian populations as primarily Islamic societies. This paradigm shift has had disturbing effects on Tajik ethnographers, who rejected the study of Islam as an ethnographic subject and instead continued to develop the ethnic narrative, which has been taken over by the independent nation state and turned into a proscribed history. Polyakov and Bushkov's contact to Muhiddin Faizulloev from Tajikistan shaped their ethnographic life just as much as they affected Faizulloev's way of thinking and how he conducted his ethnographic fieldwork. In this paper, the biography of Faizulloev provides the main account that reflects upon the history of Russian ethnographic studies

1. This paper was developed during a research stay with the FMSH in Paris in 2014 based on material provided between 2013 and 2014 by Muhiddin Faizulloev from the University of Khujand, and has profited from the careful comments and suggestions by Tsypelma Darieva, from the University of Jena.

2. In our discussions, Muhiddin Faizulloev insisted upon calling the work of the ethnographers in Russia (primarily Moscow) "Soviet ethnography". I will keep this terminology, although I believe that here, Soviet means primarily Russian, which gives little space to either theoretical concepts or academic voices from the rest of the Soviet Union.

3. I prefer to call them field notebooks rather than diaries because they contain mainly interview notes, and less observations and personal reflections, which are typical of a diary.

4. By encounters I do not mean formal meetings but the moments in which Faizulloev's life crossed the one of Polyakov and Bushkov affecting all participants' view of society and theory.

in Tajikistan as both knowledge production *and* social relationship.⁵

Methods

The last two decades have witnessed a boom in biographic approaches in history just as much as in social sciences. Far from recalling the life of great heroes in history, the method has opened the door to numerous accounts of ordinary people, thus displaying the plurality of possible life courses and solutions to questions of life. This increase in self-consciousness helped shape a genre of biographic writings that we find far beyond the Chicago School⁶, the German School⁷, or the Soviet Union.⁸ Indeed, in the Soviet Union exemplary biographies were often turned into classics with the aim of shaping activism among socialist citizens.⁹ However, not all biographies were shared – marginalised groups or politically contested groups abstained from detailed narratives to allow their children easier access into Soviet society. For instance, many ethnic minorities that resettled during and after the

Great Patriotic War (WWII) suffered from a lack of memory and a right to remember. Gabriele Rosenthal concludes in her study on Germans of the Soviet Union that the lack of impromptu stories (*Stegreiferzählungen*) goes back to a “prescribed silence”, which made it impossible for individuals to create other biographic narratives than those in line with the system.¹⁰ Under these circumstances heroic biographies of Bolsheviks, veterans¹¹ and Russian scientists and heroes held a central place in the Soviet Union.

In academia, biographies are usually used to identify “Who is who?”, as well as pinpoint the source of ideas, which makes one assume that theories are the result of individual genius.¹² For instance, the specialist on South Slavs and head of the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow, Yulyan Bromlei (1921-1990), turned into a leading scholarly authority on ethnicity after an article that he published more by accident than with a conscious challenge to existing theories and the intellectual environment of which he was part.¹³ Knowledge production is the result of encounters and contexts that are time- and space-specific. Key moments in academic knowledge production are certainly encounters with other scholars and their subjects. To incorporate these encounters, I suggest a cross-biographic approach.¹⁴

5. With this I follow – though in much more modest way – examples of Frédéric Bertrand 2002. *L'anthropologie soviétique des années 20-30. Configuration d'une rupture*. Pessac : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux; Georgi M. Derluguian 2005. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus. A world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6. Jean Peneff 1990. *La méthode biographique. De l'école de Chicago à l'histoire orale*. Paris: Armand Colin, Pp. 14 – 20. In Europe the biographic approach gained popularity within the disciplines of history along with a call for micro-history in the 1990s. Jacques Revel 1995. Microanalysis and the construction of the social. In *ibid.* and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histoires. French constructions of the past*. New York: The New Press, pp. 492-502.

7. Ursula Apitzsch and Lena Inowlocki 2000. Biographical analysis: A ‘German’ school? In Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Tom Wengraf, *The turn to biographical methods in social science. Comparative issues and examples*. London and NY: Routledge, pp. 53-70.

8. Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller (eds.) 2004. *Autobiographische Praktiken in Russland. Autobiographical practices in Russia*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

9. Sadriidding Ayni is one of the authors who, in his book “Yoddoshtho” (Memories), and even more in “Maktabi kūhna” autobiographically describes the change from the old regime (Bukharan Emirate) to the Soviet Union by clearly distinguishing between the old-fashioned and the new progress. Ayni, S. 1955. *Maktabi kūhna* [The old school]. Stalinobod: Nashriyoti Davlatii Tojikiston; *Ibid.* 1962. *Yoddoshtho* [Memories]. *Kulliyot* [Complete works], Vol. 6. Dushanbe: Nashriyoti Davlatii Tojikiston; Marianne R. Kamp 2001. Three lives of Saodat: communist, Uzbek, survivor. *The Oral History Review* 28(2): 21-58; Hellbeck and Heller (eds.) 2004. *Autobiographische Praktiken in Russland*.

10. Gabriele Rosenthal 2005. Biographie und Kollektivgeschichte. *Sozialer Sinn* 2: 311-329; Catherine Merridale 2000. *Night of Stone. Death and memory in Russia*. London: Granta.

11. Veterans of WWII continue to be honoured with medals and military parades in many post-Soviet countries.

12. Vered Amit (ed.) 2004. *Biographical dictionary of social and cultural anthropology*. London, New York: Routledge. Nancy E. Gallagher 1994. *Approaches to the history of the Middle East: Interviews with leading Middle East historians*. Reading: Ithaca Press.

13. Since perestroika, biographies were increasingly used to display the system's less successful side. Among others, Svetlana Alexievich published “Tsinkovye Mal'chiki” (Zinky Boys), which uncovered the atrocities of the Afghan-Soviet war, and later Georgi M. Derlugian's study of Muso Shanib's transformation, along with the changes in and after the Soviet Union. Svetlana Alexievich 1992. *Zinky Boys*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company; Georgi M. Derluguian 2005. *Bourdieu's secret admirer in the Caucasus. A world-system biography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

14. Roland Littlewood in an article argues that „A biography is the intersection of two lives,“ (p. 91). In other words, the biography is not a course of events strung together, but rather the result of social and intellectual interactions. While the representation of life, the biographic narrative, may in fact mainly affect the biographer and the person, the life itself is shaped by sometimes more, sometimes less important encounters with countless people, ideas and things. Ro-

The use of biographies to refer to scholars has remained problematic, not only in post-Soviet countries. Besides the use of biographies to classify scholars along intellectual schools or in a CV-genre that foregrounds one's academic success, there has been little reflection about the link between biography, time and knowledge.

In contrast, life writing has become a popular genre both in and outside the Soviet Union. Yet, criticism continues over whether it is enough to tell personal stories or how biographies need to be contextualised and hence contribute to theory. This question has not stopped before social anthropology, a discipline that from its foundation has used life histories as one of its main sources.¹⁵ In some works the individuals are more foregrounded, in other works life histories dissolve into general features.

Using biographies for intellectual history has been done hesitantly, that is, for tracing the encounters of theories, schools of thought, political thinking and academic disciplines not to classify schools and theories but as personal subjective processes. Hence, to pinpoint individuals to specific schools of ideas is at best useful to personalise theories, but it neither helps to understand intellectual history nor the role of academics and their surroundings in the development of intellectual history. Thus, the role of the often marginalised "assistant" in ethnographic research may turn into a central figure if we accept that knowledge is the result of social interaction rather than genius.¹⁶

The term "assistant" is very much shaped by a European way of engaging with people in the ethnographic field. Muhiddin Faizulloev prefers to use the term "*shogird*", which refers to a teacher-student-relationship and is a life-long hierarchical relationship. According to Faizulloev in Russian they used simply "student" (*uchenik*) to refer to this position, giving it another quality

than the "assistant", even if de facto he worked as such. Faizulloev understands himself as a *shogird* of his *ustod* (teacher) Poliakov, and thus his relationship has a specific character.¹⁷

How can we then link scholars to the intellectual field of their time? Using individuals' biographies and their academic productions as a path of cross-cutting experiences may be one way to approach the subject. Allowing the individual to interlink ideas, scholars, and research material creatively and subjectively provides a vivid account of intellectual history, which is often less smooth and linear than schoolbooks lead one to believe.¹⁸ Instead, political events, an individual's intellectual capacity, the place of education, and even the country of origin are as important as the teachers one meets and the subject one chooses.

The aim of this paper is to link the life of an assistant and scholar to the production of ethnographic works by Russian ethnographers during the Soviet period and after. The goal is neither to discredit any scholar nor their academic production, but instead to rethink the field of ethnographic writing.¹⁹ Muhiddin Faizulloev has generously agreed to have his life and ethnographic material (field notebooks) presented in this paper in order to discuss how ethnographic knowledge on Tajiks was produced during the Soviet period. Faizulloev was an assistant and a colleague of Sergei Petrovich Polyakov and Valentin Ivanovich Bushkov, two Moscow ethnographers who have studied Tajikistan since the 1960s and 70s. Faizulloev kept a good relationship with both of

land Littlewood 1992. Putting out the life. From biography to ideology among the Earth People. In J. Okely and H. Callaway (eds.), *Anthropology and autobiography*. New York: Routledge, pp. 81-98.

15. An important debate was launched by Crapanzano in the 1980s, and taken up by social anthropologists after him. Vincent Crapanzano 1984. Life-histories. *American Anthropologist* 4, pp. 953-60.

16. See some of the contributions in Judith Okely and Helen Callaway (eds.) 1992. *Anthropology and autobiography*. New York: Routledge; Kevin Dwyer 1982. *Moroccan dialogues. Anthropology in question*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

17. "(H)istorically, the relationship between elders and juniors was marked in the family, the educational system, the system of apprenticeship, the organisation of religious brotherhoods, and the military establishment" (Asad 2003[1997]:361). Talal Asad 2003 [1997]. Europe against Islam. Islam in Europe. In B.S. Turner (ed.), *Islam: Critical concepts in sociology*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 345-56. See also Adeeb Khalid 1998. *The politics of Muslim cultural reform*. Berkeley: University of California, p. 29. Jeanine E. Dayyeli 2011. *Gott liebt das Handwerk*. Wiesbaden: L. Reichert.

18. A criticism that Bourdieu has put forward already in 1986. Pierre Bourdieu 1986. L'illusion biographique. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62-63, pp. 69-72.

19. I will move between the "I" and the "we" where necessary and ignore any rules of coherence for the simple reasons that this paper uses much of Muhiddin Faizulloev's works, and hence it is *his* paper; at the same time, much of the reflections and the order of ideas are fully my responsibility. I am aware that this genre is unusual in academics, but it is the most honest for displaying knowledge as a process of interaction and not individual genius.

them over the decades despite occasional tensions and criticisms – he still respects them today, even after they have passed away.

Sergei Petrovich Polyakov was a doctor of science of history with a specialisation in history-ethnography (istorik-enograf). In 1955 he finalised his studies at the Faculty of History of the Moscow State University and the Department of Ethnography (Kafedru Etnografii Moskovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta). In 1966 Polyakov completed his thesis (kandidatskuyu dissertatsiyu) and in 1993 he became a Doctor of History, who then worked as a professor in the Department of Ethnography of the Moscow State University (Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni M.V. Lomonosova, MGU).

Polyakov's interests include medieval archaeology and the ethnography of Central Asia. His main scientific works are on ethnic history, Islamic studies, social structure, and the methods and techniques of examining historical material. Polyakov organised expeditions to Central Asia, the Northern Caucasus, Mordovia, Kareli and Central Russia over the course of 44 field working seasons. Polyakov is also the author of five books and around 100 publications written in various languages.

Valentin Ivanovich Bushkov completed his thesis in history and worked as a specialist of historical-ethnography. In 1971 he finished working at the Faculty of History in the Department of Ethnography of the Moscow State University, and worked at the Main Archival Department in the Council of Ministers of the USSR and as staff member of the Council of Ministers. In 1990 he became a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (RAN), which specialises on population history (*chislenie istori*) and the cultural history of Central Asian populations (Tajik, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Arabs). Between 1968 and 1995 Bushkov participated in expeditions during 24 field working seasons. Bushkov is the author of more than 60 publications, including 5 books in Russian, English, German, French, Dutch, Mongolian and Tajik.²⁰

Further, Polyakov and Bushkov have worked for many decades in the Ferghana Valley, and more generally in Tajikistan. Their ethnographies in

this region belong to the most important ones of their times; both were among the first to have been translated into European languages, and thus they helped shape western ideas about Central Asians in the early 1990s. Muhiddin Faizulloev was certainly not the only assistant whose influence is inscribed in the ethnographic works of Russian ethnographers, but he is certainly one of the most important in the study of the Ferghana Valley. Faizulloev studied in Dushanbe and Moscow, and later worked at the University of Khujand in the Faculty of History. He thus not only witnessed the relationship between the centrality of Moscow and its Tajik periphery in scientific work, but also Tajiki struggles to satisfy and control this relationship, particularly access to positions and power.

The paper is based on the biographic account of Muhiddin Faizulloev and his encounters with Sergei Polyakov, Valentin Bushkov, and to a lesser extent with Sergei Abashin – all three of whom are Russian ethnographers specializing on northern Tajikistan and Central Asia and have worked with and profited from Faizulloev during their expeditions. While Polyakov died in 2012 (he was born in 1932) and Bushkov in 2009 (he was born in 1946), Sergei Abashin is currently Professor for Social Anthropology at the European University in St. Petersburg.

Much criticism has been expressed about Soviet academic work, but appreciation has nonetheless been shown for the ethnographic material that these researchers collected. In these debates the voice of the assistants hardly comes through, yet it is no secret that most Soviet ethnographers were not fluent in the language(s) of the people they studied; they instead remained dependent upon assistants and translators (though most had linguistic interests and paid attention to key terms).²¹ What would an “assistant” tell us, if he was given the opportunity, about the work of these ethnographers?

20. These academic biographies have been taken from: *Issledovaniya po prikladnoy i neotlozhnoy etnologii, Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN*, 1997, No. 108, p. 4.

21. Interestingly this seems different in the Caucasus where ethnographic institutes worked more independently producing as much as three quarters of the material in local languages. For a history of the different ethnographic institutes and museums in the Caucasus region within Soviet academic politics see the interview with Sergei Arutyunov by Alexander Formozov 2010. *Etnografiya Kavkaza i eyo sotsial'naya organizatsiya*. Sergei Arutyunov v besede s Aleksandrom Formozovym. *Laboratorium* 1, pp. 205-22.

The biography of a *shogird*

"I studied ten years in school number 5 of Khujand, here in Tajikistan. We had a good history teacher – I need to mention that our teachers were all very good. However, my interest in history emerged primarily within my family. There is no way I can be mistaken here because my grandmother, the mother of my father, we call her *ocha* in Khujand, was a very knowledgeable woman, a *biotun*²², who had many *shogirds* (disciples). I received an education in old knowledge with the help of my *ocha*. From her I know the Arabic alphabet, however, I do not know Arabic – I can read but I cannot translate. There is no need to assign blame for this, it was the Soviet period, it was the time. To conclude my story, I finished school in 1968 and wanted to study economics. My father's brother was in Dushanbe and he invited me to study in Dushanbe. ... They took me to the state university named after Lenin and I had a look at all the subjects ... I liked history, thanks to this teacher; his life itself had reflected history, and hence I eventually entered the Faculty of History. ... I became a free listener (*shunavandai ozod*), meaning that I studied half a year without any stipend or place in a students' dormitory. When the winter exams started, I submitted the tests – I had no booklet so they just gave me a piece of paper that I used on both sides, and the teachers then wrote their marks.²³ Everyone discovered that I received marks with distinction and asked 'How is it possible that you managed the exams but you are not even a student yet?' I told them that I hadn't managed to become a student at the beginning of the year but that they had allowed me to be a free listener student. This is how I entered the university." (Interview 19.03.2014)

Muhiddin Faizulloev entered university and soon became one of the best students; eventually he profited from a grant that was distributed to such students.²⁴ He was even paid the grant

retrospectively for the half year he had been a free listener. "I knew how to find my way!" he explains. Faizulloev had already been an active member of Komsomol in Khujand and was engaged in university politics in Dushanbe. It was not unusual that people did not manage to pass their exams because many young people, especially from rural areas, lacked the knowledge necessary to even pass university entrance exams. Thus, failing one's exams was not a sign of lacking intelligence. On the contrary, Faizulloev exemplifies many young people from rural areas, and more generally from the periphery, who entered university through their personal efforts and intelligence. Similar to what the rags-to-riches story is in the United States was the provincial (rural) youth ascending to the political, educated elite in Central Asia.

"I accomplished the second course was the dean of the faculty in Dushanbe, Professor M. Bobokhonov (1968-1970) asked whether I wanted to go to Moscow. I told them that I did not know Russian, I wouldn't be able to study in Russia. ... With the third course finished, I was working in a brick factory in the full heat of July when again the new dean of the faculty, Professor T. Lyqmonov came to me and said: 'So you prefer to sweat, instead of going to Moscow!' I agreed with their proposal and they told me that they would send me to Moscow or Sankt Petersburg – I continued to doubt myself, but they said: 'We know that you can do it.' This is how I got to Moscow." (Interview 19.03.2014)

When Dushanbe sent Faizulloev to Moscow, they told him to join the Faculty of History at the Moscow State University (MGU) in the Department of the History of the Communist Party, a faculty of great prestige and an important political link to the far centre Moscow. Thus, Faizulloev went to study the history of the Communist Party, but came back as ethnographer.

Within one semester Faizulloev learned Russian. One day in the corridor he met Sergei Polyakov, whom he knew from an expedition in Tajikistan. Polyakov is a Russian archaeologist and ethnographer who had been working in Tajikistan for many years. When Polyakov heard that Faizulloev had come to study the history of the Communist Party he convinced him with little difficulties to join the history department of archaeology and ethnography.

22. Razia Sultanova 2011. *From shamanism to sufism: Women, Islam and culture in Central Asia*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
Sigrid Kleinmichel 2001. *Halpa in Choresm and Atin Ayi in Ferghana*. Anor. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch. Anette Krämer 2002. *Geistliche Autorität und islamische Gesellschaft im Wandel*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz.

23. Each officially registered student received a booklet (*zachenaya knizhka*) in which the grade would be marked.

24. Grants were distributed to students depending on their marks.

"Well this was how I went to Moscow. I completed all the exams and suffered through half a year; I was really about to leave Moscow. I was in the Department of the History of the Communist Party because they had told me 'you go there and become a specialist on the history of the party, this is prestigious and we need it'. Well, this was in demand at that time. I had been studying about half a year when by chance one day I met Sergei Petrovich Polyakov, whom I had met when I participated in an archaeological expedition in Shahrstan, at Kalai Kah Kaha (northern Tajikistan)." (Interview 19.3.2014)

"You do not know me, but I know you from the expedition to Shahrstan," I told him. "Oh yes, what did you come for?" he asked. "I just finished the second year in the department of history and started the third year". He said 'what are you doing, all of you come to study the history of the party, all want to become famous for the history of the Soviet Union but know neither feudalism nor capitalism, come and change to the department of ethnography.' I told him 'no, I have come through a lot of effort and started with difficulties.' "No problem, tomorrow I will get you to the faculty myself and have your documents changed." He arranged some papers and I moved to the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, but I was half a year behind (it was 1971)." (Interview 16.03.2014)

"I changed departments and with great effort I earned my diploma on time and with distinction. ... When I finished there, several professors were ready to accept me as an aspirant. But, being a cadre from Tajikistan, I had to receive official permission from Tajikistan to continue my education.²⁵ However, the country did not permit me to leave and they (in Moscow) could not hire me without a letter of permission, because I had been sent there based on vocational leave. There were three scientists that were ready to take me as *shogird*, G. E. Markov (ethnographer), L. Lashuk (ethnographer) and Sergei Polyakov (historical-ethnography).

25. If a student was paid through the budget of his or her own country, they were expected to become a party cadre eventually. They could neither choose their subject nor whether they wanted to extend their education. After their education they had to return home and accept any job that was offered.

It did not work out and I went back to Dushanbe, but neither the Academy of Science nor the State University took me. Instead I was told: 'Go and work at the school in Yovon!' During the Soviet time Russians were occupying the posts in the ministries. I asked them 'Why did I bring a diploma from Moscow, you made me go and become a specialist – I am an ethnographer.' 'Here in Tajikistan it does not matter what you are, there is the state, what else you do want to say.' 'I will throw my diploma away and leave, I will become an ordinary worker,' I told them. Then I called Polyakov in Moscow and he said 'Ah, you Tajiks – you did not understand each other, you couldn't agree. I will find a letter here and solve the problem, be patient. I went to Khujand and back again ... When I arrived in Dushanbe a letter from the Dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Law had arrived. I took the letter to the Dean of the Faculty Saifiddin Osumi – today he is president of the Academy of Science.

In Moscow, three sectors of the Academy of Sciences were immediately ready to accept me as an aspirant: the archaeologists, the cultural historians and the ethnographers. At that time the leader in the sector for archaeology was V. A. Ranov, in the sector for cultural history it was Akademik N. N. Negmatov, and in the sector for ethnography it was M. Homidjonova. I said that I wanted to join the sector for cultural history because Negmatov was a friend of Polyakov, but this decision was the beginning of a path of suffering! After I was enrolled, they made me change the subject of my dissertation three times in one year. Rumours were spread about me that I would not be allowed to participate in expeditions. The rumours had even reached Polyakov, so that he did not even pick up the phone anymore when I called. ... The first time Polyakov turned away from me was when he had planned an expedition but my supervisor told me that if I joined Polyakov's expedition instead of my supervisor's survey, he would fire me. In the course of the three years I did however go on expedition in 1975 with the archaeologist N. Negmatov to the archaeological site of the fortress of Alexander the Great, just beside the fortress of Khujand." (Interview 19.3.2014)

Faizulloev became caught up in rivalries and conflicting interests, but simultaneously received

a great deal of appreciation for his work and proficiency. He took exams five times but every time one party would make sure he failed.²⁶ He broke off his studies and went home in 1977 because he could not stand the working atmosphere anymore, and back home his wife, whom he had married in 1975, was waiting with their first son. Faizulloev was employed at the Museum of the district Sughd (at this time Leninabad district) in Khujand and organised his own expeditions to collect exhibits for the Museum; among others he went to the archaeological sites of Panjikent where the Russians had been working since 1948, and to Taboshar in 1978.

“After one expedition in Panjikent I had come with a truck full of exhibits. Abdullo Ishaqov²⁷ came and asked what method I had used to collect them. ‘What did you tell the people,’ he asked. I told him that I did not know anything special. ‘But the things that the student brought in these twenty days sum up to almost 100 exhibits!’ This was in old Panjikent in 1978 and the exhibits were old. They told me that I had to become an archaeologist and that they would take me for work. Then I received a letter from Moscow saying that they accepted me in this department right away, and I became scared.

The strange thing was that it was the centre who wrote about my qualifications. It is from such performance that the quarrels started – Negmatov had said that he would take me, then the ethnographers took me, and I was caught in two fires. When I was going to pass the exams, they decided that I would not pass. Every time they found one more book or text that I had to work on.” (Interview 16.03.2014)

Faizulloev’s academic career took a perilous turn, shaped by the conflicting interests of various influential people. Everybody was helping one’s own students and subordinated the rest. At one point the Tajik ambassador of the Permanent Representation of Tajikistan in Russia

even wanted to make Faizulloev the director of the Office for National Culture, but he refused because he did not want to stay in Moscow any longer.

Any individual decisions could easily bring unintended consequences to one’s career. Between his work as an assistant to Russian researchers and the games of the Tajik authorities, Faizulloev managed his life to his own satisfaction – or maybe not fully, as he never received the degree he deserved, and each step of his academic career was accomplished only through great effort, scares and suffering.

In order to become a doctoral candidate (aspirant) students from the republics needed a letter from their home country confirming that they were sent and financially supported by the state (*budgeti davlati*). Faizulloev did not receive such a letter because he had no one behind him. Rather, he went on his own risk but had great difficulties in Moscow. According to Faizulloev, it seems to have been rare that Tajiks found their way to Moscow on their own. Therefore, local students were precious to the scholars who depended on locals for their academic work (such as archaeologists and ethnographers).

In 1982 Faizulloev went back to Moscow to become an aspirant at the Moscow State University (MGU) in the Department of Ethnography, but they made him fail his exams in the subject “the history of the party”. After repeatedly being dismissed without reason, Faizulloev began investigating the reasons and found that in the Security Department they had simply decided that he and some other student would never pass. After discovering this and demanding that the exams be held in front of the director, he and two other students passed and were admitted as aspirants (which included a stipend) from 1983 to 1986. After accomplishing his work he went back to Khujand to work at the Museum and care for his family.

“Well, one should not talk bad about the dead and it is nothing anymore – eventually it worked to my advantage. Between 1969 when I first went with an expedition until the last one in 1988, I accompanied more than 30 expeditions, and in some of these I was even the academic leader, or the treasurer. They trusted me to the degree that in the University of Moscow they would say ‘give the budget to

26. Once he was told to take exams in Arabic because Tajik and Persian would be considered “the same language”, and he had to take a foreign language. The rest of the time he failed in political philosophy, that is, the people in the KPSS itself made him fail. He passed this exam only when he mobilised enough authorities who managed to ask one of the KPSS authority to personally attend the exams.

27. Ishaqov worked for the Ethnographic Museum of Soviet People (Muzei Etnographii Khalkhoi SSR).

this man, he works clean,' and I would take care of it. I worked in expeditions all over Central Asia: from Ashghobot to Osh, from Tashkent to Kulob.²⁸

My real love for ethnography started when I took the subject of *maballa*, which was in 1971 – a subject Polyakov had given me during an expedition. I walked from house to house to collect information. They would say this doesn't work – but I had my little notebook and wrote everything down. I made many mistakes and I did not know how to conduct an interview properly. Anyway, my first subject hence was 'what is a *maballa*?' They had given me the subject in Russian, and along with it they gave me five or six more questions to be investigated. I organised my research myself and continued collecting material even after the expedition had left.

During the expedition they would say: 'if you need something, get it from Faizulloev.' The girls, the aspirants would come and beg me for information. This way, with the exception of Badakhshan, I went from Mascho, Jagnob, to all districts (*nobia*) of the south, the centre and the north of Tajikistan. I did not sit in the houses but walked from one house to the next, I did not speak with only one informant but talked to many people – when spending a month in one village and talking to many informants, I would fill several notebooks. The informants would even help me to translate difficult terms into Russian, as I had to collect the dialect of the *maballa*. It even happened that the people came to look for me in order to tell their story or correct information they had given days before.

Many of my field notebooks remained in the Department of Ethnography in Moscow, in the private archives of my leaders (*rohbar*), then my friend Bushkov and later Abashin both took a lot of information from me to Russia." (Interview 19.3.2014)

"But there was one thing I did not agree with: I told them, 'You do not know the local language, so you will work with translators and the Russian teacher, who is on holiday!' They used to favour June, July and August for expeditions, and relied on the history teachers who had less experience in translation. ... But they

knew local terminology very well." (Auto-biographic presentation at the workshop "Ongoing Research Exchange" 20.3.14)

"Dimitri Mikul'skii, an orientalist and arabist who learned about me was eager to meet me, and the next year he came to take lessons in Tajik. He was a specialist in the Arabic language and had worked as a translator. He worked and accompanied delegations that visited Arab countries.

I wrote and provided many books to Mikul'skii and asked him to mention where he had gotten the material from, and he said yes, yes. He took the books, but nowhere in his publications was the name Faizulloev even mentioned! ... I have already given up ethnography. I do not work anymore." (Interview 19.3.2014)

Faizulloev eventually did receive a job at the Faculty of History of the State University of Khujand. He even became Dean of the Faculty for History in 1998, and focussed all his efforts on having the first Department for Archaeology and Ethnography opened. He was given involuntary leave in 1999 on the grounds that he was being sent to accomplish his habilitation, but his dream to have a Department for Archaeology and Ethnography was nevertheless carried out. "The first Department for Archaeology and Ethnography in Tajikistan was founded in 1999 in Khujand. Until today there is none in Dushanbe." (Private conversation 12.09.2014)

However, ethnography is considered an "outdated subject" and is hardly taught today because it carries no prestige. It is believed that there is no need for specialisation to teach this subject. Thus, in Dushanbe it continues to be one lesson in a history course.

"You see, this colleague whose hours did not suffice, he took over the hours of ethnography. Although we do have ethnography in the curriculum of the Faculty of History, I had half an hour lesson, there weren't more available! Today there is no other person who has undergone a proper education in ethnography at the Department of Ethnography.

... I have to admit that the son of Sadridin Aini, Marhum Kamol Aini, a respected aristocrat and knowledgeable man, as well as many others were friends of mine. L. F. Monogarova,

28. A list of his expeditions can be found in the Appendix 2.

B. Kh. Karmysheva, I remember them all. The interesting thing is that all the material I collected, I always gave it away generously. ... I do not want to challenge any of them, they took the information and worked on it, and I do not pretend to have been a major figure in the expeditions. I would constantly be called on: 'Muhiddin come here: take this boy to the following place. Take that girl there and help her do this work.' All of them had interesting subjects. The strange thing was that each one of the students that came along had chosen his or her own subject at the University of Moscow, at our department of ethnography. They had the right to work on all kinds of subjects, the birth of children, child death, how to bury bodies – they even brought doctors to investigate why children would die shortly after birth." (Interview 19.3.2014)

With his double function as an educated ethnographer and assistant, Faizulloev was used by students just as much as by teachers, and for twenty years he provided information to ethnographers interested in Tajikistan. Even if he was not the only assistant, the role this one person played in shaping information on Tajikistan cannot be ignored. Because they lacked language competencies and because some (younger) scholars also lacked an understanding of research methodologies, many Russian ethnographers, both students and researchers, fully depended on "assistants" or better *shogirds* like Muhiddin Faizulloev. It goes without saying that the ethnographic knowledge he accumulated during his work amounts to several dissertations. But as we will see further below, knowledge is also a threat to power. Faizulloev's generous sharing of information did not ease his way but rather hindered him from fully developing an academic career. He remained dependent on Tajik state structures until the time of his retirement in 2014.

From *tabaqa* society to ethnic theories

To contextualise the work and life of Muhiddin Faizulloev, we need some information on how Soviet ethnography developed and why ethnicity was the core of research in the 1980s.²⁹ Based

29. A good overview of ethnographic theories and practices has been provided in the collected volume by Florian Mühlfried and Sergei Sokolovskiy 2011. *Exploring the edge of empire*. Zürich, Münster: Lit.

on censuses, the region of the former Emirate of Bukhara and Turkestan was restructured along ethnic categories in the 1920s, resulting in the Soviet Republics, which evolved into the Soviet Union.³⁰ This political process went along with academic works on ethnicity conducted at the Academy of Science in Moscow.³¹ Ethnography was a part of historical and archaeological studies, and hence studying the past in the present was one of the core subjects of Soviet ethnography at the periphery of the Soviet empire. Russian ethnographers maintained close relationships with their informants, but most ethnographic material was collected during expeditions. Such an expedition would formally have a leader, *robbar*, (who could claim the information collected by the other participants) and would also include researchers of different disciplines and a selection of advanced students working on different questions, each through one's own disciplinary lens. Language competencies other than Russian were not a requirement, as the local village's Russian teacher or any person who knew some Russian would be at the service of the expedition for translations.

Theories on ethnicity were formulated within the Academy of Science in Moscow or Leningrad. This raises the question about the kind of material that was collected, as well as the techniques and the relationships that ethnographers maintained with the local population. Generally, the ethnographer's relationship to their subject of research is a very intimate one. This is of course not unproblematic and demands some kind of reflection. In the case of Tajikistan, students like Faizulloev worked as de facto "assistants", but remained powerless in the academic hierarchy.

Muhiddin Faizulloev has participated in more than 30 expeditions with colleagues from the Academy of Sciences in Moscow and Tajikistan, the Department of Ethnology of the MGU, and the Museum of the Sughd/Leninabad district; he has thus worked throughout Central Asia and even in Russia. He held various positions within these expeditions, ranging from cook to secretary to academic leader, but was highly valuable in all

30. Sergey Abashin 2007. *Die Sartenproblematik in der russischen Geschichtsschreibung des 19. und des ersten Viertels des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Anor, 18. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz.

31. The Communist Party (KPSS) had its own Academic Department and it had been the first one to publish these ethnic censuses.

of these positions. As an educated ethnographer, Faizulloev has produced field notebooks throughout these years that provided insight into the organisation of the expedition and the material the expeditions have worked upon. The rich material that the assistant and co-author of this article has provided also demands a review of knowledge production. While ethnicity was the primary interest of Moscow's ethnographers since Bromlei, they all had a slightly different agenda and became specialists in their sector (e.g., the history of farmer family, clothing, *mahalla*). Muhiddin Faizulloev became a specialist in *mahalla*, the traditional neighbourhood of Central Asia.

In 1969 Yulian Vladimirovich Bromlei³² wrote an article titled "Ethnos and Endogamy" in the journal "Sovjetskaya Etnografiya" in which he displayed his ideas and further developed the ethnic concepts of Sergei Shirokogorov, an ethnographer of the early 20th century.³³ In this article Bromlei redefined ethnos as a biological construction beyond the markers that had been accorded to ethnic groups since Stalin: language, culture, and territory. Endogamy, or more generally marriage within a group was the main mechanism that sustained ethnic unities over long periods and against socialist evolutionary theory, which had predicted that ethnic groups would merge into nationalities and finally into a socialist society.³⁴ While language, culture and other social determinants can be found in many social groups, the ethnic group has a "genetic barrier" that, if broken, leads to the dissolution of the ethnic group. In the words of Bromlei "ethnos though in various degrees, functions as biological unifier."³⁵

Bromlei was a specialist in Slavic studies but was made Director of the Ethnographic Institute in 1966 by the party itself, rather than through competition with the much elder ethnographer L. P. Potapov (1907-2000), who specialised in the Turkic population of the Altai and Central Asia.³⁶ Bromlei's ethnos theory was much discussed and became controversial among ethnographers; it highly influenced ethnographers during the last decades of the Soviet Union.³⁷ In the eyes of his students, Bromlei's primordial ethnos theory directly contradicted the conservative Marxist approach of historical materialism, and was hence received as a fresh idea by many ethnographers, who started to investigate ethnicity in all its facets. Tamara Dragadze (2011)³⁸ remembers that "The beauty of ethnos theory was that indeed one criteria of an ethnos was that it should encompass more than one class. In Moscow academic circles, this was much appreciated," (p. 29) According to Faizulloev, Bromlei openly questioned the whole project of the Soviet Union during his lessons, which shook many students' secure frame of reference. Although Bromlei did not reject history as such for the concept of ethnic group – the reference for ethnographers remained human history and the history of mankind (Dragadze 1990: 207)³⁹ – he did identify that ethnic groups resist or at least readapt to the grand development narrative of historical materialism. The ethnographers Polyakov and after him Bushkov and Faizulloev grew up with these ideas.⁴⁰

In the writing of the ethnographers, ethnic theory replaced all other types of possible identifications, less in the ethnographic material itself than in

32. Until today Bromlei is discussed among ethnographers working in and on Tajikistan. He has left lasting ideas on ethnicity.

33. S. M. Shirokogorov (1887-1939) was an ethnographer specialised in the Siberian population. He moved to China in the 1920, and it was only in the 1970s that Bromlei reused his theory of ethnos in his own theories. Frédéric Bertrand 2002. *L'anthropologie soviétique des années 20-30*, pp. 326-7.

34. For a concrete example of how the evolutionary model of society coined as „pyatichlenka“ was used, see T. Tchoroev 2002. Historiography of post-soviet Kyrgyzstan. *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, pp. 351-374.

35. In Sergei Abashin "Sovetskaya teoriya etnosa: o genealogii kontseptsii", public lecture at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 30 June 2008. Sergei Abashin 1983. *Natsionalizmy v Sredney Asii*, especially page 68-71. For the original text see: Yulian V. Bromlei 1983. *Ocherki teorii etnosa*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", pp. 57-58.

36. Bertrand 2002. *L'anthropologie soviétique des années 20-30*, pp. 323.

37. Presentation of Sergei Abashin, p. 20.

38. Tamara Dragadze 2011. Soviet Ethnography: Structure and Sentiment. In Mühlfried and Sokolovskiy (eds.), *Exploring the edge of empire*, pp. 21-34.

39. Tamara Dragadze 1990. Some changes in perspectives. On ethnicity theory in the 1980s: A brief sketch. *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, XXXI (2-3): 205-212.

40. In 2000 Valery Tishkov took over the post as director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow and re-launched the discussion on ethnicity and nationalism in 20th century. In his book "Requiem for Ethnos" he screens the notion of ethnicity and nation, and concludes that the latter is harmful to people and should be given up. His debates no longer influence Tajik ethnographers, who themselves have been co-opted by national history and ordered to write about authentic traditions and historical Tajikness. Valery Tishkov 2003. *Requiem for ethnos. Research in social and cultural anthropology*. Moscow: Nauka.

the conclusions and interpretations until far into the 1990s.⁴¹ In the studies on Central Asia, ethnic theories became the major framework, following Bromlei, to contextualise ethnographic knowledge that is increasingly being replaced by the concept of Islamic or Muslims' society. Depending on the level of analysis, Tajikistan was divided into the four ethnic sub-regions of Leninabad, Kulob, Karategin and Pamir, then into sub-ethnic groups that could be as small as one village.⁴² The ethno-regional groups were later identified as being congruent with political identities that formed the basis of the parties during the civil war of the 1990s in Tajikistan (see further down).

However, there was no reason that ethnic identities would be the only order ruling Central Asia. Cities in the Ferghana Valley in pre-Soviet times were constructed based on "caste"-like relationships (*tabaqa*, in this context referring to layers in society).⁴³ The ruling elite (*khuja*, *tūra*, *oya*, and *sayyid* to which *mirzo* and *makhsum* were subordinated) were Uzbek and Tajik speakers, and were often bilingual. They would distinguish themselves from people (called *ommi* or *khalki*, *khalkiya*, the people, the masses) who were any kind of people. The relationship between the different groups was grounded in religious terms. For instance, any important life-cycle ritual of *ommi* would necessarily be accompanied by one

of the higher *tabaqa*s. Usually the relationship between them was lasting and inherited, which led to *murud-tūra* relationships over long distances and many generations. This distinction is also found in a distinction between the *oksūyak* (white bones) and ordinary people. The language was not relevant in this relationship, and cultural differences were reduced to some ritualised and sacralised specificities (e.g., the highest *tabaqa* insists on addressing even the smallest child with the polite you, *shumo*). Interestingly, this system survived the Soviet period (although it was officially declared non-existent) thanks to the fluid borders that divided the Ferghana Valley, but it was seriously shaken in the 1990s when access to power and the economy were redistributed. The privileges of the highest *tabaqa* were restricted when the Bolsheviks elevated the *ommi* (*khalki*) into leading positions. However, they never fully dissolved but retreated to other sectors and economic niches during the harshest Soviet years. Obviously, such a "caste society" did not match the ethnic narrative that the ethnographers in Russia and Europe had imagined and that was to replace theories of class society. Thus, over time ethnic identifications were promoted as national categories, and successfully became ethno-national identities a century later.⁴⁴

While the *tabaqa* society of the Ferghana Valley is specific to the north and the composition of its population, Russian ethnographers have portrayed the Emirate of Bukhara as patriarchal and as having remained a "feudal society" until the Soviet Union reformed the system and liberated women and children from their subversive positions. The Russian ethnographers A. K. Pisarchik and N. A. Kislyakov, who conducted research in the eastern part of Tajikistan (Karategin and Darvaz), organised their 1975 book on the "Tajiks of Katategin and Darvaz" according to ethnographic chapters, each followed by a short note on classification, for instance: "True, there were customs and a couple of rules that belong to feudal etiquette which often enough interested the 'local rich' and the 'respected' people, but which trampled human dignity, such as for instance forcing children to honour the elderly, to hold the horse by

41. See, for instance, studies in the journal of an academic institute in Moscow *Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya v Sovremennoy Mire*, Rossiyskaya Akademiya Nauk, Institut Etnografii i Antropologii.

42. Sergei Abashin 2007. *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii: v poiskakh identichnosti*. Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN. Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteiya. This sub-ethnic theory was applied to the analysis of the civil war in Tajikistan, which was described as regional (*mahallgaroi*), a notion that translated back as "ethnic sub-groups" I. Jean and P. Mullojanov 2008. *Reflecting on peace practice project. Conflict and peacebuilding in Tajikistan*. Cambridge: Collaborative Learning Projects.

43. We have had many discussions on the term "caste", which Muhiddin Faizulloev reserved solely for India. However, we did not find an alternative for explaining the existence of elite families (*tūra*, *oya*, *khuja*, *sayyid*) living in hierarchies with other groups of people (*mirzo*, *makhsum*), as well as the ordinary population (*ommi*, *khalki*) that defined and in many cases still defines their social status, their economic niche, their political power and religious interdependency. Therefore, I have continued to use the term "caste" in brackets to mark the caste-like structure, and *tabaqa* without brackets to give it an ethnographic name. In Tajik, Faizulloev uses *tabaqa*, which means layer or rank, and is thus nearer to "caste" than to an economic concept of class, which is *sinf* (e.g., *sinfi korgar* – working class).

44. The terminology used in this context is complex and will be skipped at this point. For a good discussion, consider either the ethnographic works by Russian ethnographers or the concise summary by Tamara Dragadze 1990, *Some Changes in Perspectives. On Ethnicity Theory in the 1980s: A Brief Sketch*.

the bridle, to bring the shoes, etc... Customs and rituals of the Tajiks from Karategin and Darvaz, obviously come from ancient times..." (Kislyakov and Pisarchik, 1975, p. 95)⁴⁵ These classifications served to the rich and detailed material within cultural and economic levels of development. The model of *pyatichlenka* forced any society to fit into one of the five possible steps (tribal society, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism).⁴⁶ Within this feudal system, patriarchal features were the main narrative for distinguishing the (primitive) past from the (modern progressive) present.⁴⁷ This category encompassed almost all the societies south of Moscow, though it was possible to pass the stage of capitalism in order to reach socialism right away. Yet Faizulloev never mentioned feudalism anywhere in his field notebooks – obviously the construction of feudalism was not in his mind when he interviewed dependencies among social groups. In a personal conversation he admitted that all these concepts, which he enthusiastically discussed in Moscow, did not make much sense in the field, especially feudalism.

Against the background of such concepts of society, it is interesting that Muhiddin Faizulloev used a "caste" (or *tabaqa*) idea to write down his observations when he went to one of his first expeditions in Danghara in 1973. He only gradually accepted the ethnicisation of Central Asia and was again bluntly confronted with another concept of society in the 1990s that foregrounded religion as the main criteria. It is not exceptional that rulers impose their will to gain better control over regions and people. However, how these orders shape local inhabitants and researchers' subjects remains an issue of study.⁴⁸

45. Nikolai Andreevich Kislyakov and Antonnina Konstantinovna Pisarchik 1975. *Tadzhiki Karategina i Darvaza*. Dushanbe: Donish.

46. "Essentially, there is said to exist a social group vaguely defined as 'ethnic' which manifests itself in different clothing according to the socio-economic formation in which it appears: 'tribe' in pre-class society, 'people' in feudal society, 'nation' in capitalist society," (Dragadze 1990: 206) Dragadze 1990. *Some changes in perspectives*.

47. For the use of gender in remaking Central Asia, see Gregory J. Massell 1974. *The surrogate proletariat. Moslem women and revolutionary strategies in Soviet Central Asia: 1919 – 1929*. Princeton: Princeton University; Douglas Northrop 2004. *Veiled empire. Gender and power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University; Marianne Kamp 2006. *The new woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, modernity, and unveiling under communism*. Seattle, London: University of Washington.

48. Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch and Christiane Si-

"The people (*khalki*) worked in animal husbandry in Vakhsh, and left for Moskovskii (Sovkhoz), in Kurgan-Tepa.⁴⁹ The Muslims gathered and said they would destroy the Bas-machi. The local inhabitants (*aboli*) became known for cattle-breeding. The owners (*khujain*) of the land earlier on were the *mirs*. Until the revolution, 200 families lived there. The *amlakdor* was subjected to the *bek* in Bal'juvon. The earth was worked by the people (*khalki*). The Tajiks were afraid of the Uzbeks, as they said they would kill them, this is why there were few Tajiks until the revolution in Pushang. If the *amlakdor* died, his kin or his son would become the *amlakdor*. ... All four mosques had contact with each other. They would read books, reasoned and talk together. ... The people (*khalki*) would allow marriages. The Uzbeks would not take Tajiks. The Tajiks would take other people. If they marry a girl, the boy stays at home, if his wife comes from another place he goes to another place. The mosques were built by strong and honourable men. In the mosque they would only pray, that's all," (field notes from 14 July 1973).

While Faizulloev struggled with notions of ethnicity and never seemed interested in providing one clear definition of the term, he pays careful attention to notions that describe different elites – most of them "Uzbek". However, with the term "Tajik" the confusion is greatest: sometimes Tajiks are subsumed to *khalki* in opposition to Uzbeks, sometimes they become an Uzbek-speaking Tajik elite. "Elderly people called themselves Tajiks and they knew Uzbek. Their sons called themselves Karlyk and Uzbeks," (field notes from 18 July 1973). In this description the author moves between concepts of *khalki* (ordinary people understood as serving the ruling elite) and ethnic identification to demonstrate purity (rejecting to marry Tajiks). "Tajiks would give girls to the Uzbeks, but the Uzbeks would not give their girls away," (field notes from 20 July 1973). The use of marriage is crucial, as it is there that concepts of purity and distinction matter most in Khujand. Thus, Faizulloev's observation in southern Tajikistan merges concepts of purity and a caste-like

bille 2012. *Transcultural history: theories methods sources*. Heidelberg: Springer.

49. *Khalkiya/khalki* in this description, is the rest of the people, Kungurot, Lakai and many other groups (sometimes including, sometimes excluding "Tajiks") that are mentioned in relation to a settlement.

distinction from the north with ethno-linguistic markers that he observes as being important in the south.

It may be worth mentioning that during another expedition in July 1984 (that is, before perestroika) Faizulloev provides great detail on the development of the village Ghonchi (in the Leninabad district). Although he did use ethnic categories in other parts of Central Asia (see further down), in Ghonchi his descriptions mention that the social structure is defined by rich and poor (*boiho* and *kambaghalho*), a Soviet way of referring to a class society. The notes focus on land distribution and crops, a subject that he has also followed in other diaries, and that together provide a nice insight into how the agricultural transformation determined social changes at the beginning of the 20th century.

The national ethnic narrative (*narodnost'*) was a conscious project within the Soviet Union, a project upon which the Tajik historian Bobojon Ghafurov (1908-1977) was going to write the script for Tajikistan.⁵⁰ When the Soviet Union collapsed, Muhiddin Faizulloev knew Tajikistan in its "ethnic diversity", not as a national project but as a collection of jokes and nicknames, and a plurality of languages, professions and occupations, as well as practices. The plurality of possible identification in Soviet Central Asia became a way of integrating into the ideological whole – like the saying "the five fingers of a hand are all different".

Similar to the nationalizing of ethnicity, the Soviets followed the project to lead society towards a "Soviet culture" to which all people would eventually aspire. Soviet culture was an imagined common culture of the elite (concerning politics, sciences and cultural producers like artists, musicians, architects, etc.) that was sometimes more and sometimes less aspired to by ordinary people and the cultivation for folkloric specificities, as well as tolerance for local practices. This Soviet culture was based on Russian standards and ritual practice and was expected to be adopted and standardised over time. Even literature was produced on how this Soviet culture would look like and to what degree it was to be practiced.⁵¹ Even

nowadays we can find certain elements from this Soviet culture in the ritual practices of marriages in Tajikistan (e.g., the bride's white clothing and the so-called *komsomol tūy*).

"They used to say, today we have the Soviet Union. And this Soviet Union has its culture (*farhang*), and within this culture they would look down or up to society and culture (depending on the "level of development" a people had acquired) – all were parts of the Soviet Union. Bromlei was a very big person. He used to say, 'we haven't reached the Soviet Union yet, we will never become a Soviet Union.' We were scared of his words – how could it be that we still hadn't reached the Soviet Union (in which we all had learned to believe)? ... He would argue: 'The states are artificial states, everything is artificial, how could we then claim to be a Soviet Union?'⁵² But the Soviet Union existed, even if there may have been regions like the Baltics, the East, and Central Asia, and we knew we were Tajiks. We used to speak of the Soviet civilisation (*tamaduni shuravi*), the Soviet culture (*madaniyati shuravi*), or Soviet tradition (*farhangi shuravi, an'ana*).⁵³ Sometimes the authorities would bring examples and write books about it. They felt we should all turn to one kind of material culture (*madaniyati moddi*), we should all share one ideology – the Marxist Leninist one. We should all follow one custom and tradition (*urfu odathoi an'anavi shuravi*). Sometimes they would urge us to report about the use of these artificial practices, to the degree that – and I know it definitely – when a person died in Central Asia they would pressure to bury him like in Europe. Although what we saw as 'European' was in reality Russian, I think about, for instance: to leave the dead and organise a meeting around him. In Islam when a person dies – when he dies according to the shari'a – they put him in a separate room to wash him, either by the

nauchnogo ateisma (Akademiya obshchestvennykh nauk) Mezhprespublikanskii filial v g. Kieve: Golovnoe, Faizulloev owns the book.

52. Here, Bromlei, in the words of Faizulloev, used America as the naturally-grown and much stronger Soviet Union (*shuravi*).

53. I. Baldauf 2007. Tradition, Revolution, Adaption: Die kulturelle Sowjetisierung Zentralasiens. in M. Sapper, V. Weichsel and A. Huterer (eds.), *Machtmosaik Zentralasien*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, pp. 99–20.

50. Bobojon Ghafurov 1998 [first edition 1947]. *Tojikon: Ta'rikhi qadimtarin, qadim, asri miyona va davrai nav*. Dushanbe: Nashriyoti "Irfon".

51. M. M. Zakovyykh, M.A. Orlik, P.I. Kosukha and V.A. Perunov 1986. *Sotsialisticheskaya obryadnost'*. Institut

relatives or the corpse-washer, depending on the region. They prepare him quickly, they wash him, they clean him and bid farewell in order to bury him. Towards the end of the Soviet Union these practices had declined. In order to push these things (Soviet rituals) so that they would become general Soviet practices, they even had books 'Sotsialisticheskaya obryadnost'⁵⁴ on socialist rituals.

They would also speak about marriage and international marriages (*nikohi baynalmilali*) as Soviet rituals.⁵⁵ "... Then during the Soviet time local people would try – whether they managed or not remains to be studied – to break down their walls and veils and to break with religion. They used to pay great respect to a woman who had become a leader or gained a prominent position and call her a 'European woman'; they would take her with honour and respect. This did exist. ... We lived in a completely different world. ...

Many countries have lived under empires, each one with its traditions and religion; the last empire was the USSR, the Soviet Union (*shuravi*)." (Interview 16.3.2014)

The work of the ethnographer was not to shape national or Soviet customs. Instead, the 1980s were marked by a search for more and more detailed customs and traditions of "ethnic groups". In the diary of Faizulloev we find, for instance, a detailed description of "the Chairychi", who "do not know marriage, they do not have the custom of stealing brides (like the Kyrgyz). They invite only the nearest relatives. According to her (the informant), marriage has a completely different meaning. They only gather for the *komsomol* evening, then all the relatives come," (field notes from 27 July 1988). The Chairychi cultivate their own memory of history and do not mix with other groups. Such groups were identified based on Bromlei's concept of intermarriage and ethnicity, not only in Central Asia but throughout the Soviet Union. The reports appearing in the faculty's publication "Institut Etnologii i Antropologii RAN SSSR. Issledovaniya po prikladnoi i neotlozhnoi etnologii" from the 1980s and 90s is proof of this approach. The journal contains – almost

exclusively – reports on ethnic groups and interethnic relationships. Hereby, ethnic specificities are turned into the main problem for increasing tensions during perestroika and immediately following independence.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the ethnographers Polyakov, Bushkov, Abashin and Faizulloev were involved in a state financed peace project, and engaged in efforts to promote friendship even in the very late 1980s. Hence, in his diary entry from 21 July 1988 detailing a visit to the Sovkhoz Frunze in the Batken district, Faizulloev writes that together with the instructor of Propaganda and Agitation of the PK in Batkent, Polyakov held a lecture and Faizulloev, together with another member of the expeditions, spoke about the Friendship of People of the USSR among the workers of the Kolkhoz, the reason being that the population had been in conflict over water and territory for so long. Due to the tension in the region, the ethnographers had been asked to participate in a conflict prevention project and hold lectures on this topic.

This diary passage on friendship lecturing is followed by a detailed description of the ethnic groups of single villages. "In the village of Rovud lives a group of Kyrgyz from the kinship group Naiman, Avat and some Russian families. In the village of Uch-Tepe lives Abat-Kyrgyz," (field notes from 25 July 1988). The conclusion taken from this experience and theory was that the tension between Kyrgyz and Tajik or Uzbek was grounded in ethno-economic specificities: the Kyrgyz used to be nomads who came down to the fertile plains and settled, and used irrigated land for their animals, leading to conflict with the settled farmers (Abashin 2007).⁵⁶

Detailed knowledge on ethnic identifications, territorial claims, as well as working conditions and conflicts made the ethnographers Polyakov, Bushkov and Faizulloev promote Soviet ideas of friendship of people as a way out of local tensions. From Faizulloev's notebook we learn that most tensions and conflict were not rooted in ethnic problems but in territorial claims and resource conflicts. Today the regions of Isfara and Batkent have become one of the tensest regions in the Fergana Valley. Although there is little doubt that resource conflicts are the main reason, the ethnic

54. Zakovych et al. 1986. *Sotsialisticheskaya obryadnost'*.

55. Adrienne Edgar 2007. Marriage, modernity and the 'Friendship of Nations': Interethnic intimacy in postwar soviet Central Asia in comparative perspective. *Central Asian Survey* 26 (4), pp. 581-600.

56. Abashin 2007. *Natsionalizmy v Srednei Azii*.

narrative is increasingly brought to the forefront since being elevated to a national issue in 2010.⁵⁷

The detailed knowledge of single villages, districts and regions that Muhiddin Faizulloev accumulated over the years made him, on the one hand, an incredible source of information – which was generously used by ethnographers from Russia⁵⁸ and later from Europe and Australia. On the other hand, Faizulloev's knowledge made him a suspicious person for the newly-independent state, which tried to impose its own national narrative. In this new narrative the "ethnic differences" were considered dangerous. Thus he was warned: "keep the knowledge you have with you". He kept his knowledge with him for two decades, but at the cost of losing prestige and access to resources. He hardly worked as an ethnographer anymore; sometimes authorities came to consult him about details in order to re-traditionalise Khujand, and he was given an office in the administration building of the university. Faizulloev was even invited some years ago to prepare an exhibition on the years 1991/92. In November 1992 the 16th session of the Supreme Council held their meeting nearby Khujand, at a castle called Kasri Arbob. It was during this session that the constitution was changed and Emomali Rahmonov was elected Chairman of the Supreme Council – the beginning of a political leadership that has held until today. Faizulloev travelled to Dushanbe and found photographs, collected material and designed an exhibition that was supposed to stay at Kasri Arbob. But the room is locked, and the museum staff are reluctant to open it to the public.⁵⁹ However, when the city mayor of Khujand was replaced in 2013, the first work that Faizulloev was given was to find the picture where this mayor had shaken President Rahmon's

hand. In other words, Faizulloev was supposed to find the picture that would situate the new mayor in the political family of Rahmon by creating a narrative of long-term loyalty.

In 2007 the Tajik government passed a law⁶⁰ that was meant to restrict the expenses of life-cycle rituals.⁶¹ While the law's primary goal was economic, its secondary goal was to standardise Tajik traditions. Life-cycle rituals in particular differ from village to village and are subject to lively discussions. Against this background it is impossible to speak of a "Tajik wedding" or a "Tajik funeral". The law was meant to establish "the Tajik rituals". "I told them already then that it was not possible to create one standard ritual practice. Whose rituals should become the standard? For instance, there was a Pamir person in the committee working on the law who wondered what '*domodtalbon*'⁶² is and who suggested to simply forbid this ritual, of which he had never heard, among the Pamir people. He did not know that it is central to the wedding in Khujand," (private conversation 18.08.2014). The new law allows a maximum of 15 people for *domodtalbon* while in Khujand this is perceived as the second wedding from the bride's side, and before 2007 up to 1500 people would be invited to this event.

A year after the law on rituals was implemented, Faizulloev was asked to document its success at introducing traditional standards.⁶³ However, the booklet that he produced is only partly a success story because the book brings to mind a plurality of Central Asian life-cycle rituals. He nevertheless

57. Among her many important contributions, Madeleine Reeves has questioned the analytical use of ethnicity by conflict groups just as much as by conflict prevention initiatives. See, for instance, Madeleine Reeves, 'The ethnicisation of violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan', 21 June 2010 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/>.

58. Sergei Abashin, the student of Bushkov, used to visit and work with Faizulloev as if he had inherited the rights over his assistantship. The countless articles that he wrote on the Ferghana Valley throughout the first two decades of independence are in fact proof of his excellent assistant's knowledge on religious issues, just as much as on Sarts and ethnic categorisations and self-identifications.

59. They even denied that the exhibition exists when I visited the place in 2013. Only after insisting on seeing it did they eventually bring a key and open the door.

60. Jumhuri Tojikiston [Republic of Tajikistan], 2007. Sanadhoi me'jorii huquqi oid ba tanzimi an'ana va jashnu marosimho [Standard document of law about tanzimi tradition/custom and celebration and ceremonies]. Dushanbe: Jumhuri Tojikiston. Available in short form: http://www.president.tj/habarho_090706.html [Accessed 9 September 2009].

61. For a discussion on the law, see Sophie Roche and Sophie Hohmann 2011. Wedding rituals and the struggle over national identities. *Central Asian Survey* 30(1): 113–128.

62. *Domodtalbon* is the welcoming of the newly-married couple to the bride's family. Today *domodtalbon* is celebrated in restaurants rather than at home. The *domod* (son-in-law) is accompanied by his relatives and received by his wife's relatives. Both sides give the couple gifts such as washing machines, refrigerators, air conditioners of fans, stoves and other expensive items.

63. M. Faizulloev and A. Abduqodirov 2008. *Marosimu ma'rakaboi Khujand*. Khujand: Maqomoti ijroiayi hokimiyati davlatii shahri Khujand. Interestingly, the picture on the 60-page booklet shows the *bukumat* (state) building, not a wedding or any other traditional feast.

attests to its success: “This way, through the interference of the leader of the country... from the point of view of the people (*khalq*), the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan ‘about traditional customs and celebration and ceremonies of the Republic of Tajikistan’ from the 8th June 2007 (No 272) has established a consensus. ... The acceptance of the law has promoted regulation, (allowed for) savings and (secured) the quality of celebrations” (2008: 54). The book is a kind of guideline to authorities and people how to adapt feasts to the law and provides arguments for understanding how and why the new cultural standard (that the law has introduced) is appropriated, namely because they are rooted in Central Asian pre-Soviet traditions. For Faizulloev, the book has yet another meaning: it acknowledges “local traditions” against current efforts to Islamise life-cycle rituals, that is, to cleanse rituals from non-Islamic elements.

Thus, while Muhiddin Faizulloev became a resource to state authorities where cultural and political continuity and standards needed to be installed, they also fear his knowledge, most importantly about the joking relationships (nicknames – *lakab*) among different peoples. According to Muhiddin, Faizulloev pre-Soviet Central Asia was characterised by economically interdependent relationships (fostered by various climatic conditions) between nearby areas. Instead of using ethnic notions, rural villages referred to each other with nicknames. For instance, the people of Istarafshan were called the “cherry-eaters” by the Khujand people because the cherries were ripe earlier in the plains of Khujand and taken for sale to Istarafshan, who apparently used to buy them a lot. Or the people of the mountainous regions of Kulob were referred to as the cow-riders because they used cows to carry loads, and children would ride on them when going to the mountains during the summer. The countless examples testify that rather than using ethnic terms, certain characteristics were used as ascriptions, often based on agricultural specificities and economic relationships. However, today such stories and nicknames are seen as insults and threatening to the integrity of a large ethnic Tajik nation, whose narrative is linear and stretches into previous centuries. It is in fact a pity that the incredible knowledge that Faizulloev and maybe a few other Tajik “assistants” possess will disappear before ever having

reached social anthropology, thus making space to a homogenous ethnic narratives.

From ethnic groups to Islamic society

“You hardly find anything about Islam in my ethnographic notebooks – why? As a matter of fact, they called us atheist and hence I thought it better not to write about religion. It was a very delicate thing, a very sensitive issue and they could have blamed us easily,” (Interview 20.3.2014).

In 1972 and 1973 Faizulloev wrote a field notebook in Tajik, then translated it into Russian. Since this was at the beginning of his academic career he notes the interviews with little censoring. Consequently, religious themes occur on almost all the pages. “Collective work within the *mahalla* (neighbourhood) was done by the inhabitants of the *mahalla* itself. Brothers used to remain in one *havli* (compound), meaning that one *avlod* (usually 3–4 generations) would live together.⁶⁴ The reason was the decreasing number of mosques. Gafurboi said that Stalin had told the imams to share the income collected by the *shaikhs*. ... The mosque would be built with the money of the devoted people from the *mahalla*. Each *mahalla* used to have one mosque. Mosques that needed renovation would be taken over by a powerful person (*odami bo davlat*). *Namoz* would be prayed according to class rank,” (field notebook 1972 – no precise date).

The diary of 1973, which focuses on the Danghara district, also has religious rituals and institutions mentioned throughout. Islam was an integral part of life and the history of mosques and religious rituals were recorded most carefully. Expressions like “it was no shame to pray *namoz*. The mosques were built by the people (*khalq*),” (notes from 19 July 1973) are found throughout the notebook. It seems that neither the people whom he talked to nor he himself seemed to have felt the need to restrict information on Islam. We can thus assume that the censorship of the religious in ethnographic works was self-censoring (as Faizulloev explains in the interview), and a careful exclusion of ethnographic writings by Russian ethnographers.

64. At other places the term *avlod* becomes a nickname (*lakab*). “*Uruk* stands for nation. *Avlod* is seen as *lakab*,” (field notes from 16 July 1973).

In Faizulloev's field notebooks, accounts of the past and the present merge together and the reader is never sure how far back the events actually occurred. He seems to prefer to talk to elderly people (over 70 years) and thus his narratives obviously do refer to the past. However, what is crucial here is less an exact dating of information than the centrality of religious ideas in almost each ethnographic interview in this field notebook, whereas Faizulloev did not interpret this as specifically religious. In other words, there is no distinction between practices as being specifically religious or remnants of past practices (Rus. *perezhitki*, Taj. *khurofoi*) – life and culture is presented in its everyday plurality with the many solutions people find to questions and problems (whether these are questions of identity or practical problems) within a specific state order, the Soviet Union. At times it appears as if praying *namoz* and even mosques had nothing specifically religious about them, but were just part of people's everyday lives. The identification of the "Islamic" in the material culture and in practices turned into an explicit subject only in the late 1980s. Thus, rather than distinguishing between Islamic and non-Islamic practices, Faizulloev experienced the distinction between a Soviet culture (in essence, Russian cultural practices) and a traditional culture.

This view of the traditional as something a-historical and rooted in everyday practices is found even in his late field notebooks. In the notebook from 1988, we again read a lot about marriage, including gift exchange, the person conducting *nikoh* (religious marriage) and details about the bride's wealth "*Kalym* money, is the value of a sheep (if they are able to, one worth 150 rubles). One sheep equals 25 kilograms and 150 rubles. The money is 2000 rubles (set by the local authorities). Today the *kalym* is less. Earlier on, the *kalym* was more. From the bride's side – 500 rubles, only for a coat, cloak and shoes. And they give her more; they give clothes to the bride," (field notes from 27 July 1988).

Despite religion being part of the intimate knowledge that ethnographers held, it is only with perestroika that Islam turned into a research question, especially in its negative effects (hindering Sovietisation, keeping people backward, producing radicals, establishing alternative power hierarchies etc.). Thus, besides the major ethnographic narrative that entered Soviet

ethnographies in the Russian language there was another narrative – I will call it the intimate narrative – as a result of direct observations and discussions. This intimate knowledge moved only little into the ethnographies written back in Russia prior to the 1980s. Until perestroika, religion was one of the topics that was there, observable and even presented in interviews but not a subject of discussion. "Religion was not a topic," Faizulloev emphasises. Nonetheless, his diaries are full of religious accounts, but it was not a category of research and not discussed among ethnographers. Academic atheism included an intimate deal not to write about Islam (it was, however, taught in the university within the subject of world religions).

Hence, when Russian ethnographers in the late 1980s and 1990s suddenly wrote books in which the religious narrative appeared at the forefront (Bushkov and Mikulski's account of the Tajik civil war or Polyakov's account of everyday Islam), Faizulloev felt cheated – first, because theory had agreed upon the official non-existence of religion and hence accepting that Islam was part of the intimate and belonging to the past⁶⁵. And second, because this narrative was not based on the systematic collection of ethnographic material but rather on non-spoken intimate communication and associated ideas (journalistic interviews with politicians, kinship and ethnic descriptions and arbitrary associations)⁶⁶.

"Only in recent years did Polyakov turn into a specialist on religion. ... They all started to spoil Islam's reputation (*hama islomro badnom kardand*)" (private conversation 12.09.2014).

Polyakov published his book "Everyday Islam" in 1989⁶⁷, one year after the expedition in which he, Bushkov, Abashin and Faizulloev took part. The book was then translated by Anthony Olcott into English (1992) and spread throughout the English-speaking academic community. The

65. I refer here solely to the knowledge that Muhiddin Faizulloev had and the public writings of the Russian ethnographers. The security department treated religion with very different categories.

66. According to Faizulloev, the official denial of Muslimness went so far that Tajiks who would travel to Arab states would be identified as "Christian" in their passports.

67. S. Polyakov 1989. *Traditsionalizm v sovremennom sredneaziatskom obshchestve*. Moscow: Bsesoyuznoe obshchestvo "Znanie". Translated into English by Anthony Olcott in S. Polyakov 1992. *Everyday Islam: Religion and tradition in rural Central Asia*. Amonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

book is relevant insofar as it was one of the first by a Russian ethnographer that both specialised on Tajikistan and made Islam a central subject. The author starts with a criticism of previous studies that had situated Central Asia within a Marxist model of “Asiatic feudalism” (Asiatic Mode of Production). Traditionalism is then introduced as the continuum of resistance to modernisation and development, which, according to Polyakov, is spread through Russian language and culture.

It is worth remembering that the 1988 expedition took place in the era of perestroika⁶⁸, which was a period of sudden and intense revival of Islam in Central Asia, especially in public discourse.⁶⁹ Polyakov and other researchers considered Islam to be a major power able to challenge the Soviet state. In this sense the book “Everyday Islam” by Polyakov is a fearful Russian response vis-à-vis this enthusiastic revival, as well as an acknowledgement that in fact Islam had always played a role in society, even when it was obstinately ignored by academics. It is also an acknowledgement, or for Faizulloev even a betrayal, of an intimate relationship which showed that Islam existed without being paid particular attention.

“Why did they call it Everyday Islam? ... This *barrüza* is disgraceful, it was irritating on the part of Polyakov. This is why they had to call the book’s translation ‘Everyday Islam’: because everything (all social practices) was now essentially Islamic. The term is from Polyakov, the translators told me. There is one thing I really wonder (about how Islam is presented in the book) – the things that I live as ‘Tajik’ are now suddenly ‘Muslim’. This assumes that the things I do not accept are not from ‘us’ and consequently don’t enter the ‘*shar’iat*’. But this is not how things are... these are the phrases of Polyakov in the book everyday Islam – he uses traditionalism in Islam. Ok, this is gone. ... These last years, was it 2010 or

2011 they brought me many books like ‘Muslimanskii sredni azii’” (autobiographic presentation at the workshop “Ongoing Research Exchange” 20.3.14).

Until the 1980s Islam as a religion was the realm of Oriental Studies, while ethnographers focused on “tradition”. “Our traditions (*odatu an’anai mo*) are distinct (*judo*) from Islam, was the argument.” However, in Central Asia the distinction between Islam and tradition became a difficult enterprise and a personal judgment. Furthermore, studies of culture were embedded in history – remember that ethnographers were closely linked to archaeologists. The interesting question of why certain practices or items survive over long periods while others are abandoned was approached through the concept of survival and framed into an evolutionary Marxist theory. Devin DeWeese (2011)⁷⁰ has summarised this discussion, and showed that this approach wishes to take apart “culture” in its different elements (pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian, modern, Islamic etc.) but in reality it creates a dissociated present.

The problem of religion in the study of ethnography is not limited to some academic writings. Instead, many people, especially the urban elite, distanced themselves from a religiously informed life which they considered, if not backward then at least restrictive. In the 1980s then, the concept of (harmless) survival of (pre-)Islamic practices – a proof of society’s smooth transition into Soviet society – was abandoned in favour of a concept of harmful and dangerous Islam. “Those who then went to Arabiston came back after the Soviet Union and started to criticise our traditions even more than the Russians. For instance, they have shortened the *janoza* ritual to three days of mourning,” (private conversation 26.8.14). This led to the polarisation of society in the late perestroika period: one part welcomed Islam in their lives, the other perceived it as a threat.

What entered the literature as a “revival of Islam” was in reality an interwoven, immense misunderstanding and confusion of different approaches and ideas. Western literature has focused on concrete movements to study this revival (e.g., Islamic Revival Party) and emphasised that religious practices existed throughout the Soviet era – with

68. For the rural population in Tajikistan, above all *perestroika* represented the liberalisation of religious practices; perestroika is associated less with economic liberation than with religious freedom.

69. My own ethnographic research shows that this was the beginning of mass education in Islam – even the least educated local mullahs had at least 20 to 40 *shogirds* (most of them adults) coming to learn about Islam (later these mullahs had only 5 to 10 young children per season). This enthusiasm did not last and normalised over time. However, along with the sudden spread of local mosques, perestroika must have been an impressive experience for the ethnographers.

70. D. DeWeese 2011. Survival strategies: Reflections on the notion of religious ‘survivals’ in Soviet ethnographic studies of Muslim religious life in Central Asia. In F. Mühlfried and S. Sokolovskiy (eds.) *Exploring the edge of empire*, pp.35-58.

this they seem to have solved all epistemological problems of the Soviet Union. However, for our Soviet ethnographers matters were more complicated: first, the civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s catapulted Islam onto the highest level of politics and society, and prompted Bushkov to join Mikul'skii for a series of papers on the conflict. In other words, experts on Islam who had been working on the Middle East for their entire careers overnight became specialists of Central Asian Islam, turning the whole narrative of survival and intimate relationship into the major narrative.⁷¹ Second, the fact that the religious narrative so easily replaced the ethnic one in foreign academic writing showed local scholars that they could ignore the elite's efforts to adapt to Soviet modernity. Many had accepted its norms and ethics and felt that the new narrative cheated their version of the story. The intimate religious was not meant to become a political power.

Examining ethnographers' publications from the beginning of the 1990s reveals that Islam is accorded a "dangerous" place in dynamic social and political processes. "Contrasting what the literature says about pre-Islamic history...[this] demonstrate[s] how unfounded it is to speak about Islam having a constructive role," (Everyday Islam, p. 131). The fear that Islam could become the key to socio-political change derives precisely from the second half of the 1980s and the unexpected boom of mosque building, of religious practices, and eventually of religious-political movements. Of course Islam was there before and the ethnographers did know about it, but the silent agreement to ignore religious issues made it a kind of open secret. This seems to have been the case even during the expedition of 1988. In his field notebook Faizulloev conducts an interview with a woman telling about the *paranja* in the 1920s and how the village had wanted to lapidate her but she was saved by a young volunteer from the red army who married her.⁷² In this same notebook Faizulloev also mentions *otuns* (also *otin*) and other religious practices without linking them specifically to Islam or politics.

71. This Islamic revival narrative incorporated the concept of "survival" well, as the Islamic narrative was similarly active in identifying harmful "non-Islamic" elements as a proof of ignorance and Soviet isolation from the rest of the Muslim world.

72. For a great biographic narrative on female agency in different Soviet periods, see Kamp 2001. Three lives of Sodat.

"*Janoza* always existed – it was never forbidden. *Janoza* wasn't read in the mosque but in the *havli* or at the graveyard. Today they try to read mainly in the mosque. When a person dies they first go to see the Domullo, then the *piri mahalla* (the *mahalla* elder), they seek advice from the elders of the *avlod*. ... I know everything from the washing of the dead up to the burial. But this was not my subject, mine was completely different. ... When I studied ethnography during the Soviet period we wouldn't say 'you are a Muslim, you ought to study Islam or Christianity, or so'. Generally there were subjects on religion, it was part of the studies on world populations. ... We had a very good specialist on religion who respected all religions. But we were all researchers and it was a political subject, and an ideological issue – as they used to say back then – atheism was widespread. Orthodox communists had to be atheists and did not like religion. I used to tell people not to criticise religion so much and work on the subject they were specialised in. ... We used to live in the villages, to cry with the people when somebody died, and were invited to join them or helped them – this did not mean that I was a pure atheist. There was an Islamic way of life (*rūhm, rukni zindagi*) – if you did not wear a *toqi* (Central Asian head-dress, cap) you would have had the most difficult time," (autobiographic presentation at the workshop "Ongoing Research Exchange" 20.3.14).

Faizulloev's diaries do not differentiate between past and current practices unless referring to historical events (e.g., Basmatchi or *hujum*). Many practices that are inherently religious, like wedding and burial rituals, continued to exist (or were constantly readapted and reinvented) with many variations on how they were performed. It is through the pen of the Moscow ethnographers that these practices were turned into relics of the past, into elements that were to be replaced by Soviet rituals and eventually to Islamic resistance. Although Soviet rituals existed and were integrated (white dress, *komsomol* weddings, etc.) they did not become exclusively standard, but rather were an inclusive element of rituals that proved cultural pluralism.

One may wonder about the persistence of survival theories among Soviet ethnographers. In fact, it was only during perestroika that criticism from

within emerged. In his book “Everyday Islam” Polyakov specifically questions the approach that negated the existence and persistence of local practices (which he summarises in traditionalism, as being the resistant force): “It is also a pity that our publications present traditionalism and everything associated with it as nothing more than harmless holdovers from the past that do not seriously affect the development of our society. Great pains are taken to avoid the study of the economic, social, and political structure of modern Central Asian society, even at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, which remains silent,” (Everyday Islam, p.137). Thus, Polyakov blames the orientalist for having missed “seriously studying and criticizing domestic traditionalism,” (p. 134). Indeed, during the conference organised by the Institute of Oriental Studies in 1986, only one out of twenty papers was about Central Asia. Polyakov even makes attempts to show the missing logic for an “Islamic revival” because of half-truths and the invention of an “Islamic culture”.

While Polyakov grounded his arguments about Islam – though increasingly negative – in ethnographic descriptions (thereby turning the former “survivals” into historical constants), the following texts produced by Bushkov and Abashin or Bushkov and Mikul’skii skipped the everyday discussion of Polyakov by distinguishing only between ethnic groups (and all their variations) and Wahhabism as the dominant new form of Islam.⁷³ “One of the destabilizing factors that contribute to the omission of non-indigenous populations (though not to the same degree as in Dushanbe and the city of Ferghana) are the established powerful Muslim groups, not only in the rayons but also in cities, that propagate a Wahhabi ideology. The goals of that group aim at the conditions in Central Asia, and work on rigorously liberating the existing norms from European cultural influences ...” (Abashin and Bushkov 1991, p.4).⁷⁴

Faizulloev participated in the 1988 expedition where they went to Isfara and its surroundings,

as well as to Namangan, Andijan and all other cities of the Ferghana Valley that became centres of religious revival during perestroika. While Faizulloev did not explicitly write that the role of Islam changed in any way, he did observe Polyakov’s interest in Islam and wondered about the meaning he accorded to various acts that appeared unspectacular to him. Indeed, everything people did suddenly came to be interpreted as coming out of Islam. Was it only Polyakov who changed his perspective through which to look at society, or did people themselves reinterpret their activities in such a light? As a matter of fact, the late 1980s represent a boom in mosque building and a hunger to rehabilitate Islam at the public level, which goes along with ascribing religious explanations to banal activities.⁷⁵

Faizulloev writes:

“In 1988 I was in the village of Vorukh with our ethnographic expedition. When we were standing at the local school he (Polyakov) took notes on Islam because religion had become liberalised and Gorbachev’s perestroika had started. Suddenly I see that one worker from the school who is part of the Sovkhoz goes towards the mosque. The school had a large garden with an apricot grove, apple grove and many other things. Seeing him with one basket in his hand, Polyakov asks ‘Where are you going?’ and he replies ‘To the mosque’. He took a picture and a year later in Moscow I saw ‘School garden, *waqf* of the mosque’ and heard his presentations about this. I started to be afraid, how could the garden of the school be the *waqf* of the mosque, would pupils collect apricots and bring them to the mosque? Religious people would take their ‘*risk*’ (a share that God has prepared for him) and take a basket. I told him ‘No, it is not like this, they give apricots to the neighbours and to all kinds of people just because they are so plenty – they are owned by the school!’ Their fear was that if religion starts to develop, all Central Asia would become fully ‘Islamised’. This is why he wrote Everyday Islam, Islam of the everyday, traditional Islam,” (autobiographic presentation at the workshop “Ongoing Research Exchange” 20.3.14).

73. Poliakov reserves the term Wahhabism for „designating a society based strictly upon Koranic practices“. (Everyday Islam, p. 4)

74. S.N. Abashin and V.I. Bushkov 1991. *Sotsial’naya napryazhennost’ i mezhnatsional’nye konflikty v severnykh raionakh Tadzhikistana*. Mezhnatsional’nye Otnosheniya SSSR, Institut Etnografii AN SSSR, Document 24.

75. Samuli Schielke 2006. *Sakralisierung des Alltags und Banalisierung des Heiligen: Religion und Konsum in Ägypten*. Working Papers 69, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Department of Anthropology and African Studies.

Thus, upon hearing about the book “Traditsionalizm v sovremnnom sredneaziatskom obshestve”⁷⁶ (Everyday Islam), Faizulloev was almost shocked about how, after more than forty years of intimate work in the region, his colleagues and leaders in Moscow assigned the region a religious narrative.

“Polyakov and Bushkov had many friends who would receive them, they were invited to celebrations. As ethnographers they were not distant from the population. They consulted many students... I learned a lot from them,” (autobiographic presentation at the workshop “Ongoing Research Exchange” 20.3.14).

Faizulloev keeps a picture of his teacher Polyakov in his flat and remembers the past with some nostalgia. But at the same time, perestroika showed him the blunt hierarchy that these ethnographers had lived in, where each student was assigned a place according to the authorities’ wishes. Further, perestroika was also an awakening for him and probably other academics; their mutual agreement (not to speak of Islam) could easily be broken, even worse, could become the main shortcoming for people who had shared their most intimate experiences with these ethnographers. The intimate relationship was of course not without tension. On the contrary, heavy conflicts and tensions (often provoked from outside) shaped Faizulloev’s relationship to Polyakov. And yet the relationship was important for both sides: Faizulloev was told that shortly before dying, Polyakov had called for “Mukhidin”. During the last days of his life, it was the intimate relationship to his *shogird* that came to Polyakov’s mind, and the fact that he did not manage to make him a professor. Once the Soviet Union had ended, their relationship grew distant because of political and economic conditions, but Polyakov had repeatedly insisted that he come to Russia to make his professorship.

The civil war in Tajikistan through ethnographic material

“I recall today, that Mikul’skii’s earlier argument was that once the Soviet Union disappears, different ideas and concepts, politics of Muslim countries such Salafis, Tablighis, Hizb ut-Tahrir or any ideology of political party would spread quickly.

We used to say that religion is separated from the state (*din az davlat judo bud*); ‘Please, if you like to pray your *namoz* five times, go ahead,’ this was allowed,” (autobiographic presentation at the workshop “Ongoing Research Exchange” 20.3.14).

The first conflict that drew the attention of Russia’s scientists was in the Ferghana Valley in 1991. The ethnic components of the conflict motivated analysts to identify ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts.⁷⁷ However, ethnographers like Abashin and Bushkov⁷⁸ followed a different approach. For them, land shortage and conflicts over resources were the basis of ethnic conflicts in the Isfara region. The complexity of group identifications, history of sedentarisation and resources led to a differentiated picture in which only the Soviet politics’ remained uncriticised. Interestingly, Islam does not play a role in this narrative, and appears only as a potential threat (Wahhabism).

“The massive, and often violent settling of nomadic Turkic groups led to intense, artificially irrigated land redistribution that favoured these new groups; this led to confrontation. As farming land dwindled, more disputes arose between local groups. The situation was aggravated and gained a universal character due to uncontrolled population growth,” (Abashin and Bushkov 1991, p. 12).

The resistance of urban inhabitants to give up their dwellings in favour of multi-storey houses are taken as proof of demographic pressure just as much as land shortages. Populations grew “uncontrolled”, that is, with no cultural checks or civilizing factors, a view that became popular in the analysis of the civil war.⁷⁹ Ethnic identities

77. See for instance: Valery Tishkov 1997. *Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The mind aflame*. London et al.: SAGE.

78. S. N. Abashin and V. I. Bushkov 1991. . *Sotsial’naya napryazhennost’ i mezhnatsional’nye konflikty v severnykh raionakh Tadzhikistana*. Moscow: Institut Etnologii i antropologii AN SSSR.

79. V.I. Bushkov 1993. Tadzhikistan vor dem Bürgerkrieg. Eine traditionelle Gesellschaft in der Krise. *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien*, 26. Cologne; Aziz Niyazi 1994. Tajikistan. In M. Mesbahi (ed.), *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, pp.164–90; ibid. 1999. Islam and Tajikistan’s human and ecological crisis. In M.H. Ruffin and D.C. Waugh (eds.), *Civil Society in Central Asia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, pp.180–97; Saodat Olimova 2000. Islam and the Tajik conflict. In R. Sagdeev and S. Eisenhower (eds.), *Islam and Central Asia*.

76. S. Polyakov 1989. *Traditsionalizm v sovremnnom sredneaziatskom obshestve*. Moscow: Bsesoyuznoe obshestvo “Znanie”.

are seen as the reason that groups confront each other, leading to numerous micro-conflict zones in the Ferghana Valley. Islam does not appear to be a part of this ethnic identity, but rather as the threat of radicalism. In other words, Wahhabism is an accelerating motor for radical and violent conflicts, especially among Tajiks but not exclusively:

“1. Zones of increasing social tension. For the region in question, this primarily concerns the new parts of the Matcha district. The causes for this situation lie in the establishment of the population, especially with regard to its settlement patterns, which is right on the border of the two republics. An essential feature in this situation comes from the Wahhabites, a powerful group who have an ideological impact on the population, especially on Tajiks,” (Abashin and Bushkov 1991, p. 13-14).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to include a detailed analysis of the many works written by Abashin after the 1990s in which he takes a differentiated and at times very critical approach to the ethnic theories of his colleagues and Islam in Russian ethnography. What matters here is how the material from the excursion in which Faizulloev participated moved into academic knowledge production during perestroika and shortly thereafter.

From 1992 onwards, Bushkov and Mikul'skii⁸⁰ became the main actors explaining the Tajik civil war from a sociological point of view. Whether it was in academic journals or international policy papers, these authors are among the first to have suggested an explanation and to claim knowledge through both ethnographic experiences (Bushkov) and the study of Islam (Mikul'skii). In one of their first papers (later, other variations were also published in German), they refer to Central Asia as “sovetskom vostokey” (1992, p. 1),

Washington, DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, pp.59–71.

80. V.I. Bushkov 1995. Politische Entwicklung im nachsozialistischen Mittelasien: der Machtkampf in Tadschikistan 1989–1994. *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien*, 4. Cologne: Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien; V. I. Bushkov and D. V. Mikul'skii 1992. Obshchestvenno-politicheskaya situatsiya v Tadzshikistane: yanvar 1992. *Mezhnatsional'nye Otnosheniya v Sovremennom Mire*, Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN. V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikul'skii 1995. *Tadzshikskaya revolyutsiya i grazhdanskaya voyni (1989–1994 gg.)*. Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN.

which distances the region from being an integral part of the Soviet Union (as the discourse on the friendship of peoples promoted).⁸¹

Mikul'skii visited Faizulloev in 1991 wishing to learn Tajik. As an Arabist he progressed very fast and collected much material via and from Faizulloev. When he left, Faizulloev asked Mikul'skii to refer to him when writing his book – but he was never mentioned in any of Mikul'skii's papers. Filtering all the “Islamic” from the ethnography, the papers became an interesting political-ethnography. On the one hand, with a rich description of practices and structures (now inherently Islamic). On the other hand, they merged with a political narrative of Islam that appears radical, dangerous and ideological.

In their co-edited article titled “Anatomiya grazhdanskoy voyni v Tadzshikistane”⁸², the authors describe land use through the *avlod*, the economic differentiation of families (p. 5), but not without a pejorative attitude that shows that they consider the extended family a tool of suppression of individuals and especially women. The authors also maintain the discourse of development, which says that under the late Soviet Union, those traditions of the *avlod* eventually started to weaken. The classification of “the Tajiks” as living the same way, whether in the south, the east or north, gives the ethnographic writing a national character, which goes along with the 1990s effort to create strong nation states. This stands in sharp contrast to the micro-ethnic descriptions that Abashin and Bushkov provide in their analysis of the Ferghana region and the conflicts they explain there. In other words, ethnographic knowledge could be used simultaneously to explain local conflicts over resources (in Isfara the Tajik confronting specific groups such as the Naiman or Avatar⁸³), national conflicts (the Tajiks having remained backward,

81. Note that Oriental Studies (*vostokovedenie*) during the Soviet period referred exclusively to regions outside the Soviet Union.

82. V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikul'skii 1996. *Anatomiya grazhdanskoy voyni v Tadzshikistane (ethno-sotsial'nie Protssesi i politicheskaya bor'ba 1992–1995)*. Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN; Institute prakticheskogo vostokovedeniya.

83. A detailed description of all such groups in the Isfara region is provided in the 1988 field notebook of Faizulloev. Later the groups are referred to as “the Kyrgyz”, which reduced the complexity of the conflict considerably, making it more “handy” and manageable to international actors who, for their conflict prevention programs, require clear-cut hostile groups.

religious, traditional, a highly-fertile society, etc.), and the civil war on the national level.

With Mikul'skii, Islam became known to Tajiks through religious political activism:

"In families of the religious clergy, children are given both religious education and artisan training. Like in the IRP, Ibrahimov studied religious sciences with his father and (other) unofficial clergy, and learned shoemaking from his father. Similarly, the youngest brothers of the Kuraish received religious education, although they never worked in this domain. We remember that Muslim religious education emerged in the urban artisan milieu. Most great Islamic scholars were artisans or traders. Likewise, traditional society in Central Asia did not distinguish between physical and intellectual work, and did not know class differences," (Bushkov and Mikul'skii 1996, p. 8).

In 1995 Muhiddin Faizulloev accompanied another expedition with Valentin Bushkov and Sergei Abashin to the Asht district and the village of Oshoba. This time we are presented a detailed history of mosques, including the generation and names of the *imam qatibs*. "Earlier on, Oshoba had about ten mosques [the names of the mosques and the mahalla are listed]... But today there is only one, the Sirli Mosque," (Faizulloev 12.04.1995 field notes). The mosque had a *chillakhona* (retreat room) and *mazor* (graveyard), and in 1933 it became part of the newly established Kolkhoz. It was later joined with other Kolkhoz after Stalin's death. This is just one example of the many-sided descriptions. During this expedition Bushkov was ill and Faizulloev took care of him with local medicine, showing once more his ability to care for Russian ethnographers with all their needs (research, finances, food, health, housing, etc.).

Beyond the local history of mahalla and its leadership hierarchies, we also learn about the "gap", that is, meetings of men in the mosque or elsewhere according to age groups, where they spend free time together. *Gaps* were popular throughout Central Asia, occasionally or regularly uniting workers of a company or institution, as well as classmates or students. Such "gaps" were also linked to the emergence of the Islamic Revival Party Tajikistan, yet Faizulloev does not mention any political activities when describing local practices, whether he identifies them as being

explicitly religious or not. One reason may in fact be the contemporariness of the political "gaps".⁸⁴

Unlike previous diaries in which Faizulloev seemed to have taken notes to remember, this diary contains long descriptions and impressive material on the *mahalla*. Yet, although in 1995 the civil war was anything but over, there is no link whatsoever to the ongoing conflict or the Islamic party. Past conflicts from 1922 and even the Great Patriotic war of the 1940s do make appearances, as they shaped the *mahallas*. The structure in the *mahalla* are presented as observed, without categorizing them into past survivals, or dangerous futures, and not even the changing nature of the state is mentioned (from Soviet to independence). This diary uncovers the intimate non-spoken aspect of the Soviet period (in the realm of religion), which later became the main ethnographic narrative describing Tajik people. This is proof that during later expeditions, religious life and institutions were researched by all excursion participants. What different scholars then interpreted from the material greatly differs. However, the diary of Faizulloev gives absolutely no reason to fear religious extremism or political-religious activism. So why did Polyakov, Bushkov and Mikul'skii present such a discourse of danger in Islam? In their papers on the Tajik civil war in 1995 and 1996, Bushkov and Mikul'skii began their narrative with an account of the *avlod*.⁸⁵ What had previously been simple "survival" now turned into a resistance to modernity through extended families (*avlod*) that only now (that is, at the end of the Soviet Union) started to collapse but "has shown remarkably great capacity to adapt even under totalitarian influence," and despite all efforts of collectivisation and resettlement, (1996: 6). Islam comes into the narrative as a political force in the form of parties (the group of Turajonzoda and the Islamic Revival Party Tajikistan), and "Islamists" from various places, including Afghanistan and the Caucasus. This political story is related to the civil war, and hence

84. We find the description of this institution in the texts of Bushkov and Mikul'skii (1995) on the civil war. "Male groupings (muzhskie ob'edineniya) also form the basis for organising IRPT activities." (p.52) V. I. Bushkov and D. V. Mikul'skii 1995. *Tadzhikskaya Revolyutsiya i grazhdanskaya vojna (1989-1994 gg.)*. Rossiyskaya Akademiya Nauk, Tsentrpo Izucheniya Mezhnatsional'nykh Otnosheniy, Instituta etnologii i antropologii RAN.

85. V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikul'skii 1996. *Anatomiya grazhdanskoy vojny v Tadzhikistane (ethno-sotsial'nie Protsessi i politicheskaya bor'ba 1992-1995)*.

to violence, which finds a detailed description in their 1995 text.⁸⁶

One source that Bushkov and Mikul'skii seem to have used extensively is print media. Their 1995 book "The Tajik Revolution and the Civil War"⁸⁷ begins with a short history of Tajikistan similar to other publications on the crisis of Tajik society, followed by a timeline of the events of the conflict from 1991 until 1994. Eventually the authors provide a list of laws and political parties based on print media. This section makes up two-thirds of the book. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full analysis, although such work would be useful because the choices of laws reflect the fears of Russian scholars on the eve of the Soviet Union's collapse.⁸⁸ This interesting combination of material in the co-edited book by the ethnographer and the Arabist gives the impression of religious activism grounded in politics and traditions. Thus, it is not the ethnographic experience itself that suggested that Islam endangered society, but the interpretations and the combination of expertise and sources that flowed through the pens of Moscow-based scholars.

Final remark

We have tried to trace the relationship between individual life and work and academic knowledge production, using the accounts and field notebooks of Muhiddin Faizulloev, together with the scholarly writings of the Russian (Soviet) ethnographers with whom he has worked for several decades. This cross-biographic approach allowed us to identify expeditions and personal meetings with scholars as key moments in knowledge production. Obviously it is through hindsight that certain discussions and meetings brought out key experiences in Faizulloev's life. For instance, was

it painful for him to learn that as a Tajik he was expected to study Tajiks and their "backwardness", and that it was in Moscow that his place in the academic hierarchy would be decided, often on an arbitrary basis rather than through his academic achievements. Many of his conversations with scholars from Moscow revolved around the question of what to study and how to contextualise the study.

"I asked them 'why don't you want me to study Russian ethnography, the life of Russian families? Why don't you want me to study the Russians of Ryazan or Kostrama or Orenburg. Why? They talked around this but did not provide an answer and ignored the question. I told them why do all people study us? You know, they used to call us a 'laboratory', they do their experiments with us, we are people who compared to them are 'backward', this is why they study us," (private conversation 11.9.14).

Faizulloev's view of events and scholarly works is revealing and helps contextualise the sometimes problematic books that Moscow's ethnographers produced, including "Everyday Islam". Instead of a general criticism, however, and a simple deconstruction of today's view, we have preferred to understand how and why ethnographic observations turned into threats and dangers once in Moscow. Throughout all his interviews, Faizulloev reminds us that he continues to respect his teachers as persons, as friends and colleagues, despite the fact that his *ustod* has played a central role in shaping his career, not only to the good. Faizulloev's exceptional experience (as ethnographer and assistant) and his agreement to share his life with the academic world have allowed us to reconsider writings of ethnographers at a key moment in history: perestroika and the decade following it.

The biographic narrative in relation to the field notebooks and the published material of Russian ethnographers reveals a very personal trajectory of knowledge production. While we did not intend to write the ultimate truth, the narrative represents a personal truth of historical events. Similar to Russian ethnography, the west reduced much of its initial approaches to Central Asia to Islam, a result of reproducing Islam as a narrative of resistance in the writings of Benningesen,

86. "... in absence of power, hundreds of troops on their way commit unseen cruelties, exhibited by both parties. Among the fighters from the side of the islamists mercenaries from other countries of the SNG (Russia, Pribaltika, Caucasus) and Afghan troops as well as Arab instructors are involved. ... It unfolds into an anti-Russian campaign..." (p.33) V. I. Bushkov and D. V. Mikul'skii 1995. *Tadzhikskaya revolyutsiya i grazhdanskaya vojna (1989-1994 gg.)*.

87. Bushkov and Mikul'skii 1995. *Tadzhikskaya revolyutsiya i grazhdanskaya vojna (1989-1994 gg.)*.

88. They pay great attention to the laws on language (already in 1989 the discussion emerged to make Tajik the national language) which is seen as a turn to national politics. Another subject that the authors focus is religion, the laws on religious freedom, regulations, the Islamic Revival Party and programs of the party at different periods.

Broxup, Wimbush and others.⁸⁹ But it is beyond the scope of this paper to look for further links between Russian and Euro-American ethnographies. The aim of this paper was to examine intellectual history from the point of view of what was considered the periphery. Many of the “ethnographic turns” in Soviet ethnography were decided at the centre – which was Moscow⁹⁰ – and applied to the Tajik “laboratory”, creating incomprehension among Tajik researchers who constantly had to re-learn Moscow’s parameters of analysing ethnographic material and interpreting society. While knowledge development at its core appears to develop logically and according to epistemological, political and theoretical shifts, in the periphery these developments lack logical foundations and appear inappropriate, disruptive and simply wrong. The life narrative of Faizulloev has offered a subjective reflection of this centre-periphery approach to knowledge creation, and suggests an alternative reading of the Russian ethnographies on Tajiks.

89. Alexandre Benningesen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1967. *Islam in the Soviet Union*. London: Pall Mall; Alexandre Benningesen and Maria Broxup 1983. *The Islamic threat to the Soviet state*. London: Taylor & Francis; Alexandre Benningesen and S. Enders Wimbush 1985. *Mystics and commissars, sufism in the Soviet Union*. London: Hurst; ibidem 1986. *Muslims of the Soviet empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University;

90. If somebody came from Moscow, he came from the centre. “Vy is tsentra priexali?” would be the question, Faizulloev remembers. The Soviet Union had its epicentre in Moscow, also and especially in academia.

Appendix 1 : Pictures from Muhiddin Faizulloev's academic and personal biography



M. Faizulloev's student years at the Moscow State University (MGU), 1971-1974.

M. Faizulloev with his wife, 1975.



An ethnographic *shogird*
Archaeological-ethnographic expedition with the Moscow State University (MGU), Danghara district, 1973.



M. Faizulloev "the cook".

Archaeological expedition
of the Faculty of History,
Department of Archae-
ology and Ethnography
of the Soviet Socialist
Republic Tajikistan (AN
Taj. SSR), Leninabad
district, Taboshar, 1978.

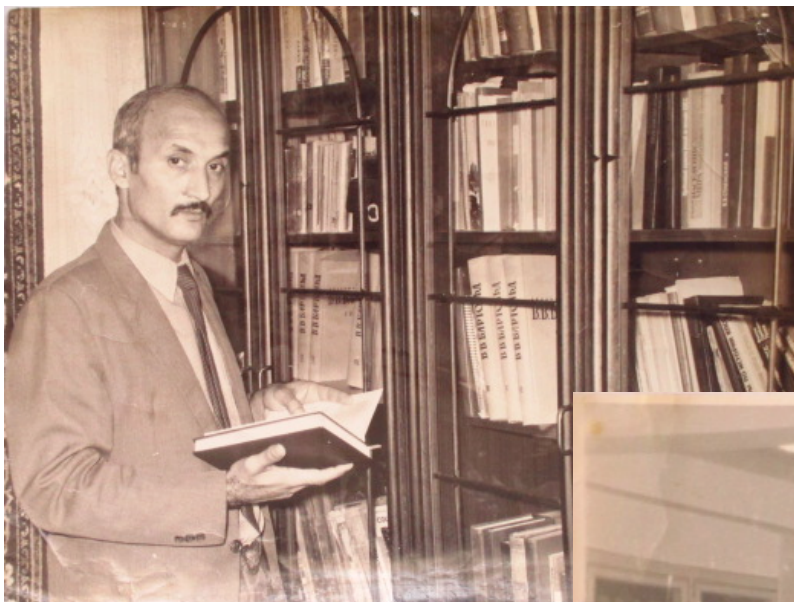


Academic discussions in the field

Member of the Central Asian Joined Expedition organized by the Moscow
State University (MGU) to Vorukh, Leninabad district, 1985.

On expedition with S.P. Polyakov (first right) and V.I. Bushkov (first left)

Members of the Central Asian Joined Expedition of the History Department, district of Khujand, 1979.



Dr. M. Faizulloev in his office at the university, Khujand, 1989.

His work as teacher
Senior Lecturer PhD
Muhiddin Faizulloev with
his students of the
Khujand branch of the
Tajik Technical University
during the seminar on the
history of the Tajik people,
1988-1989.





Among the Tajik leadership

Scientific-practical conference for the 60th anniversary of Muhiddin Faizulloev at the auditorium of the Faculty of History and Law of the State University of Khujand named after Bobojon Ghafurov, 2011.

M. Faizulloev in his home office among books on Soviet ethnography, 2014.



Portrait of Muhiddin Faizulloev

At the seminar "Ongoing Research Exchange", State University of Khujand, 2014.

Appendix 2

Participation of Muhiddin Faizulloev in expeditions and field-researcher trips of ethnography, archaeology, regional studies and museum science.

1969 After accomplishing the first course at the State University Tajikistan in Dushanbe, internship with archeologists at Qal'ai Kah-Kaha 2, in Shahrستان, region of Sughd. The leader of the expedition was N. Negmatov. In this year S. Polyakov from the MGU¹ led his own expedition to this place and I got to know him.

1972 During my studies at the Faculty for History of the MGU, they put in order a program for me in which I worked by myself on the subject of *mahalla* (neighbourhood) in the city of Leninabad² and the village around: Pulchukur, Shai-khburkhon, Unji, Rūmon, Arbob, Yova, Qistaqūz and written sources.

1973 archaeological-ethnographic expedition to the village Pushing by the Faculty of History of the MGU, under the lead of S. Polyakov who led the archaeological and ethnographic work. I collected ethnographic material in the villages Pushing, Alijon, Devchashma, Lavak, Ghichovak, Shuldara, Savda, Quruq, Sharshar, Loiluq, Parkamchi in the district of Kulob, Vose'. I also worked as cook occasionally in this expedition.

1973 I collected ethnographic material in the villages around Leninabad.

1974 participation in the archaeological expedition of the SAAEE (Central Asian Archaeological Ethnographic Expedition), the Faculty of History of the MGU. Archaeological excavation in the district Soviet (today Temurmaliq).

1974 (October-November) Sarlaborant³ of the Historical Institute, archaeology and ethnography AI RSS Tajikistan. Participant of the ethnographic expedition in the city of Norak from the Department for Cultural History.

1975 (June-September) archaeological excavation in Urda, the Castle of the city of Leninabad (Khujand). The expedition was led by N. Negmatov.

1976 (June-August) archeological excavation in Urda.

1977 (June-July) archeological excavation in Urda.

1978 Leader of students from the Pedagogical Institute of Leninobod (today the University of Khujand) on fieldwork to the district of Panjakent for the collection of ethnographic artefact.

1978 (August) Participation in the archaeological-ethnographic expedition of the MGU to the village of Dahana in the district of Asht.

1978 (September-October) Participation in archaeological excavations of the Citadel of Tirkashtepa in Taboshar, district of Bobojon Ghafurov. I was also the cook.

1980 (July) Participation in the archaeological excavation in Taboshar.

1980 Participation in the ethnographic expedition of the MGU to the district of Farghona, the villages: Gonji, Konibodom, Isfara, Chodaki (in Uzbekistan), Lailaki (in Kyrgyzstan). Leader of the expedition was S. Polyakov.

1981 (August-September) Participation in the ethnographic expedition of the MGU to the region of Sughd.

1983 Participation in the Joined Expedition on Central Asia (Sredniazitskaya Kompleksnaya Ekspeditsiya, the SKE)⁴ of the Faculty of History of the MGU. He had organized the expedition especially in a way that I could collect material for my dissertation and he made me the deputy of the academic leadership of the expedition and he joined as an ordinary member. The leader of the expedition was the docent S.V. Novikov. Ethnographic work in the district of Ghonchi, village of Metk.

1984 Participation in the expedition by the SKE of the MGU as aspirant leader to the village Rosrovud, to the district of Ghonchi. Within the three months also visits to Metk, Rosrovud, Dehkat, Khshekat, Ughuk, Ovchi, Basmanda, Yangiaryq, Qal'ai Dust, Qal'ai Mirzoboi, Chūyanchi,

1. MGU is the acronym for Moskovskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet imeni M.V. Lomonosova, the Moscow State University.

2. The town of Khujand had been renamed Leninobod in 1936 but took back its earlier name Khujand in 1991.

3. The sarlaborant works as academic assistant to a professor; it was often used as a position for students who want to enroll in a dissertation work but still needed to pass exams.

4. A "Joined Expedition" would include researchers from several different disciplines working on various subjects.

Qal'ai Hoji, Shohon, Daleni Poyon, Daleni Bolo, Khodzhai sof, Surkhob, Surkhobcha in order to collect ethnographic material.

1985 Leader of the expedition by the SKE of the MGU to the villages Vorukh and Chorku, district of Isfara.

1986 Leader of the expedition by the SKE of the MGU to the village of Ponghaz, district of Asht, the villages: Shaidon, Oshoba, Bobodarkhon, Khishtkhona.

1988 Participation in the expedition of the SKE of the MGU under the lead of S. Polyakov to the district of Batkent and to the region Oshi Jumhori in Kyrgyzstan in cooperation with the University of Kyrgyzstan.

1989-1993 very little material.

1993-2014 Participation and leadership of students on internship from archaeology, ethnography, museum science, archive and regional studies from the University of Khujand to the region of Sughd.

1995 Participation in the ethnographic research trip with the ethnographers of the Russian Federation V.I. Bushkov and S.N. Abashin to the village of Oshoba, district of Asht.

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