To cite this article: Bernardo Fazendeiro (2018) Making Uzbekistan: nation, empire, and revolution in the early USSR, *Nationalities Papers*, 46:3, 535-537, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2017.1390982

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1390982

Book Reviews

Making Uzbekistan: nation, empire, and revolution in the early USSR

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Making Uzbekistan: nation, empire, and revolution in the early USSR, by Adeeb Khalid, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015, $39.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0801454097

The book offers a detailed and comprehensive study of Uzbekistan's foundation in the 1920s and early 1930s. Adeeb Khalid builds on his already impressive research of Islamic and reformist thinking across sedentary Central Asia (see *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*), offering a compelling account of how Uzbekistan as a nation-state came into being, both as an intellectual concept, debated initially by a minority of Central Asian intellectuals, and as an applied political unit, negotiated with a receptive, albeit increasingly repressive, Soviet center. Besides complementing Khalid's earlier works, the book is and will surely remain a key contribution to the study of early Central Asian nation-making and Soviet history, complementing other existing and important works in the field, namely Adrienne Edgar's *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, Ali Igmen's *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, and Paul Bergne's *The Birth of Tajikistan: National Identity and the Origins of the Republic*. The book is relevant for those interested in studying the origins of Uzbekistan itself, as well as those hoping to take a deeper look into the making of modern Central Asia. Khalid recognizes, rightly to my mind, that "the history of Uzbekistan is in some sense the history of all of Central Asia" (5), not only because of its current historical and geographical centrality in the region, encompassing its key historical sites, but also

because of how the very indigenous idea of a nation sparked wider debates on the nature of modernity and authenticity across Central Asia.

The book is composed of 12 interwoven chapters, plus an introduction and an epilogue. Chapters 1–2 describe the wider political context under which the Jadids, a minority of indigenous intellectuals, focused on modern reform and developed their ideas, including how the collapse of the Russian empire further instigated debates about the nature and goals of modernization in the region. For those already familiar with Khalid's previous work, these chapters build upon his concern with Islamic thinking and reform across the region.

Chapters 3–7 subsequently detail how growing Soviet influence in the region, coupled with the ideas of minority Jadid thinkers, gradually prompted a local cultural revolution, which soon turned into a political project, focused on modernizing Islam and creating a nation. Here, Khalid offers an especially important account. Not only does his argument reinforce the idea that Soviet nation-making, at least in Central Asia, was driven far beyond the aim of divide and rule, he also shows that the concept of Uzbekistan as a nation itself cannot be understood without reference to local intellectuals and indigenous revolutionary leaders, many of whom actively cooperated with the Bolsheviks for the sake of applying their own notions of modernity and authenticity. Khalid shows in chronological order how Moscow came to cooperate and make use of those local intellectuals, most of whom in turn appropriated the revolutionary context to further their own aims.

Chapters 8 and 9 then highlight the results of and fault lines within those projects, Jadid and Soviet, and how radical intellectuals from Bukhara, with Soviet assistance, succeeded in uniting the sedentary peoples of Central Asia under one political boundary, thus implementing their own version of a Turkic, *Chaghatay* nation. These two chapters are especially important for showing how the Jadid project was composed of a core nationalist underpinning that was Turkic in scope, yet not pan-Turkic, as in intent on uniting the Turkic people of the world under a common whole. Turkic peoples outside sedentary Central Asia were not, for many Jadids, encompassed within their own Turkic idea of Uzbekistan. Rather, the search for authenticity was territorially and historically based, premised on the achievements of Tamerlane and his successors (the Timurids), including their specific *Chaghatay* language, which was increasingly identified as Uzbek

by many, albeit certainly not all, Jadids. In fact, Khalid demonstrates how political grievances within those indigenous elites later led to the creation of Tajikistan. In this regard, the book details how Moscow mediated the dispute and agreed to a partition of Uzbekistan. Khalid's arguments hereby offer an especially important viewpoint for those also interested in contemporary nation-making in Central Asia, for it is worth bearing in mind how Uzbekistan's more recent leadership was also reluctant to embrace an all-Turkic agenda in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, a reluctance which blatantly contrasted with the policies first embraced by their initial supporters in Turkey in the early 1990s. While the first President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, made a few references in the 1990s to "Turkestan – Our common home," he always did so more on the basis of territory and local history than on pan-Turkism. Khalid's findings therefore open additional avenues of research by which to address past and present ideas of "Uzbekness," and whether today's notions of territoriality and cultural authenticity are historically connected or the result of two independent time periods.

Finally, Chapters 10–12 detail how Moscow tightened its control over the region and gradually came to curb nationalist thinking during the late 1920s and 1930s, following the increasingly repressive policy implemented throughout Stalin's rule of the USSR.

All in all, it is worth highlighting the perspective adopted by Khalid, who pays close attention to how Central Asian intellectuals interpreted the wider global context before and during the revolution of 1917. Khalid indeed criticizes approaches which "have been so busy reading between the lines" (19) that they do not appreciate the complex cultural politics of those societies, seeing them as broader criticisms "of the Soviet order," not of their own society. For those studying the politics of Central Asia, whether past or present, alluding to the priorities of local actors is a refreshing prism through which to read the region's history and to understand how sundry ideas were made, interpreted, and applied locally.

Khalid could, however, have offered a few more thoughts in the epilogue, particularly on the lasting consequences of Uzbekistani nation-making and its search for authenticity. It would have been interesting to engage further with the nature of Uzbekness today, although I acknowledge, of course, that those aims lay far beyond the remit of Khalid's specific study and selfishly in line with my own interest in post-Soviet Uzbekistani politics. That said, Khalid concludes that present-day Central Asian rulers have

reinvented themselves as "national leaders" (394–395), while barely distancing themselves from the approaches and tropes taken later during the Soviet period. And yet, given the extent to which Khalid underscores the voices of intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s, a brief allusion to current debates, besides those between Uzbek and Tajik historians, would have been in keeping with the general thread of his approach, premised on local interpretations of nationhood. Khalid could well have made some additional remarks on the continued development of Uzbek nation-making, connecting them to key contributions in the field, like Laura Adams's *The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan*.

Aside from the connections between the past and present, the book provides a complex and no doubt valuable contribution to our understanding of Central Asia during the formation of the Soviet Union. It should become essential reading for anyone interested in knowing how the idea of modern Uzbekistan came to be proposed, negotiated, and applied in a period of revolution and rapid political change.

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