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Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice since the Tajik Civil War

Introduction

They said, ‘we won’t say anything to Kyrgyz people, you can come back,’ and my husband believed. Akai Ibrohim, the one who just died, people said that Afghans had made him a slave, that they took his wife and daughter, and we believed. Today they say we came back because of our money. [...] We came so that our children should not suffer, let’s go to our homeland we thought, but nobody asked in this war whether you have weapons or not, whether you are guilty or not. During this war, those who had no sins came back, those who were guilty didn’t go, they knew they were guilty and left; those without sin came and were taken instead of the guilty. [...] We came to Shahrituz and they made us climb a truck, bigger than our house. They brought us to this school PTU and picked out the men. [...] If you were Tajik, that’s it, you died. (Interview, Shahrituz, January 2007).

Modern Tajik schoolbooks devote a mere two pages in Class 9 and ten pages in Class 11 to the civil war (1992 and 1997).¹ Compare this to World War II (also known as the Great Patriotic War), to which ten pages are dedicated in Class 9, twenty-seven pages in Class 10 and nine pages in Class 11. In Class 11, pupils learn that the civil war was the result of the sudden emergence of several political parties, all of which scrambled for power and took up arms against the ruling government. The categories utilised contain an unmistakable message: a single party system and a strong leader guarantees peace, while political opposition can easily turn into a threat to social harmony. In this narrative, Tajikness is an ethnic category that goes back to the Samanides (9th century) and may be traced through the great leaders of history. Here, the civil

1. Tim Epkenhans (2012) has mentioned that the production of these texts has accompanied the creation of Tajik historiography since independence in 1991.

war is merely a disturbing moment that was overcome by reuniting Tajiks (the annual National Unity Day is celebrated on 27 June). In this official rhetoric we can hear the ethnic subtext being transmitted to prevent any further splitting of categories.

The political categories used to describe oppositional activities have been transformed since Tajikistan gained independence in 1991. While in the early 1990s opposition to the communists was articulated through Islamic and democratic parties, during the war these opposition groups changed, leading the Islamic party to oppose the democrats who had previously been communists. Today political activism is most often referred to as a 'terrorist' threat to cultural and political harmony, whether the actors have a religious agenda or not. While categories of analysis change with the political context, there have been few attempts to investigate how these categories relate to local practices and actors, and to what degree categories of practice are linked to politically-shaped discourses. In this paper, I will investigate how categories of analysis and categories of practice are related to each other. I am interested in the transformative power of the conflict and the impact it had on defining communities and actors both during and after the war. My interest is not in how the war really erupted (cause analysis) but how the conflict has shaped these categories.²

Using Categories in Conflict Settings

Categories of analysis aim to situate events within a meaningful framework, to identify patterns, structures and logic, and to make complex processes understandable and comparable. Here, categories of analysis do not necessarily match categories of practice. Despite being an essential tool for meaningful engagement with conflict, categories of analysis also lead to viewing conflict in terms of the features that appear to be characteristic of a specific conflict situation but which may actually misrepresent it.

By category of analysis, I first mean the ordering of civil war events by researchers and journalists according to specific features that were seen as the causes of the conflict, and more generally, according to Western political approaches (for instance, the consequences of communism or Islamic terrorism). Second, I mean the ruling lineage that imposes its category of analysis and order of history based on a cultural-historical argument in order to establish political legitimacy and national unity. Category of practice refers to the categories that

2. This paper was first presented at the colloquium 'Le fait guerrier' at the EHESS in Paris organized by Gilles Bataillon and Stéphane A. Rouzeau on 16 May 2012 and it benefited from two further sources. First, the workshop at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek "Remembering the Civil War in Tajikistan" in September 2012 organised by Tim Epkenhans and Maxim Ryabkov at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the Academy of Dialogue in Dushanbe. This workshop brought together former actors to recall the years 1991 and 1992. The second source was the feedback of my colleague Antia Mato Bouzas from Zentrum Moderner Orient, as well as the ZMO itself. Financially the work presented here was supported by the BMBF and the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology.

ordinary people³ use to explain and structure the past and the present, and relates to contemporary social practices.⁴

The context of civil war poses several challenges to ethnographers and limits participant observation. Most studies are conducted in the wake of military interventions or in more accessible settings such as refugee camps. While we expect people to tell us a great deal about the civil war immediately after the events, this may not be the primary concern of those who have more urgent practical questions to resolve (reinventing peaceful continuities within their communities, securing food, everyday life, etc.). It follows that many Tajiks have become adept at omitting the civil war period when recounting their biographies. Yet, the civil war remains a point of reference in narratives, in memory and in numerous practices. Events are recalled by situating them before, during or after the war (*pesh az jang*, *dar vaqti jang*, *ba'di jang*). The war experience has shaped the re-organisation of their lives; in other words, it has been integrated into categories of practice. Conflicts often divide history into sections. In fact, war memories have shaped the way people relate to each other and how local conflicts are solved and interpreted without these memories constantly being recalled. While the younger generation has little memory of the war in their country, it has nevertheless been socialised in Tajik society and has taken over certain categories of practice; one of the most important of these being ethnic and/or religious versus secular identifications and classifications.

The study of practice allows us to link the war period to the present by reconnecting it with people's contemporary lives. It also helps to see how interpretations of the conflict become transformed along with practices. I first visited Tajikistan in 2002, and therefore have no personal experience of the civil war. Through the narratives of ordinary people, however, and through colleagues and their scientific work, I gradually learned to visualise and understand how the war affected ordinary people's lives. Unlike political analysis, ordinary people frequently explain the civil war using categories from their personal war experience. Let me give one example: although for ordinary people, notably parents, one of the most urgent issues during the civil war was the youth, in political explanations this is almost irrelevant. Parents reflect on the war from their own position: their concern for their children and their efforts to restrain them from joining militant groups. In their eyes, the civil war was an opportunity for young boys to play out their masculinity. Political categories make little sense to the mother who went to the mountains to pick up her son who had joined a combatant group 'because it was cool to have a weapon.' Obviously, she used her own categories to explain the civil war: young people engaged in armed struggle

3. By ordinary people in this context, I mean all those who do not claim political, religious or military leadership. This category is admittedly imprecise but necessary to differentiate between the various actors during the civil war, particularly between those who were able to mobilise others and those who followed, feared, rejected or questioned mobilisation.

4. I refer here to categories of practice and of analysis suggested by Bourdieu (1972) and by Brubaker and Cooper (2000). Categories of practice are everyday experiences, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, while categories of analysis are experience-distant categories used by scientists, journalists (and to a certain degree, politicians) (Brubaker, Cooper 2000, p.4).

to gain access to status and resources, given that gender constructions and age had made recruitment easy.

Consequently, the reintegration of sons into the family and the village after the war without openly questioning their activities was made possible via categories of practice rooted in a culture that conceptualises young men as maturing. Indeed, a young boy is only partly responsible for his activities – many of his actions are predetermined by ‘nature’ and a long maturing process. Most mothers do not contextualise their sons as political actors, but rather as family members who have a ‘natural’ interest in fights and are thus easy prey to the interests of others (who in turn are mature enough to consciously exploit the nature of youth).⁵

The problem of how to relate categories of analysis and categories of practice is not new and has been discussed in geographic scale analysis (Moore 2008) and sociology (Brubaker, Cooper 2000; Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins 2009). Criticism of the topic targets the use of categories of analysis as given facts and concrete things such as ‘nation or ethnicity,’ which are terms typically used in folk concepts and essential terms of reference. Accepting that social categories are constructed is not sufficient. Moore reminds us that we should not only be more careful in distinguishing the different scales of analysis, but we must also reify the practices of actors and organisations as focal points of research (not as political fiction). Defining them as politically motivated, Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins indicate that the categories ‘extremism’ and ‘moderation’ may, for instance, mean something very different to activists engaged in the struggle for justice than to the power-holding group.

The key aim of this contribution is to identify the categories of analysis developed and the resources they have become for politicians, and to contrast and link them to the categories of practice that shaped people’s lives during and after the conflict. I am not interested in rejecting categories of analysis per se, or replacing them with categories of practice. Instead, I shall place them in relation to one another in a constructive way in order to trace the dynamics of conflict representations and practices beyond the period of violence. Hence, the strategies and narratives of ordinary people must tell us something about the way conflict transforms society. Contemporary society, which was shaped by the conflict, tells us what categories of practice emerged in association with the conflict and how they relate to the categories of analysis employed.

Tajikistan in the Making

The new Republic of Tajikistan was cut out of the Soviet Socialist Republic Uzbekistan as an Autonomous Region by Stalin in 1924. Tajikistan was then recognised as an independent Republic in 1929 either because Stalin wanted Persian speakers to have a Socialist country as an example to other Persian speakers (Iran

5. A valuable source for different views and interpretations of mothers regarding their combatant sons is the Oral History Project Tajikistan, OSCE Bishkek, interviews collected in 2006; the project manager is Tim Epkenhans.

and Afghanistan), or because he recognised Tajiks as ‘the oldest inhabitants of the region,’ as some like to argue. The predominantly rural mountainous areas were not very suitable for a republic (both Persian speaking urban centres Samarkand and Bukhara were made part of the SSR Uzbekistan), and thus the city of Khujand was added to the republic when Tajikistan became an independent republic in 1929 (Bergne 2007). The country has no more than seven percent arable land suitable for agriculture, which was prevalently devoted to the monoculture of cotton. Within the economic redistribution system of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan contributed raw materials and received massive financial support.



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, Map Collection, 2012

The creation of nations in Central Asia was based on the theory of Marx, Engels and especially Lenin, namely that one nation should be based on one culture and one language.⁶ Consequently, a ‘Tajik culture’ had to be found within the new country’s territory. The area between Panjakent and Khujand came to be identified as of ‘original Tajik culture’ because it had produced many poets and various cultural practices.⁷ Numerous books were produced by ethnographers, historians and archaeologists and research gained great popularity. However, the cultural project was never internalised by all the people, and the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand as cultural centres of the Bukharan Emirate were never forgotten.

Theories of ethnicity claim that Tajiks, once deprived of their urban and cultural centres Samarkand and Bukhara, did not develop a cultural elite under the Soviet Union, and thus experienced an identity crisis along with the civil

6. ‘Nationalnost’ following Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is a necessary step along the path of human development towards Socialism (*pyatichlenka* – five steps: primitive society (tribal confederations), slavery, feudalism, capitalism (nationalities) and socialism. For a good example of how the *pyatichlenka* theory was applied in historiography, see Tchoroev 2002.

7. For instance Loik Sherali, Abuabduhlohi Rudaki, Mirzo Tursunzoda, Hofizi Sherozi just to name a few. Later Hisor was added as a cultural centre especially for ritual traditions such as weddings (Roche, Hohmann 2011).

war (Roy 2000, p.78). Similarly, Rubin (1998, p. 135) claimed that 'More than other Central Asian states, Tajikistan lacked a cohesive intelligentsia with a common conception of a Tajik nation. Hence there were few leaders or symbols to provide a focal point for ethnic nationalism, even among the 62 percent of the population who were classified as ethnic Tajiks.' Instead, Rubin suggests that ethnic identities in Tajik territory were developed through the pre-Soviet *bekliks* (local authorities under the Emir of Bukhara) which established culturally-transmitted local identities that could be politicised, leading to local 'ethnic' conflict (Rubin p.144). These territorial identities were maintained throughout history, acting as an obstacle to a more homogenous idea of national identity.

Along with other Central Asian states, Tajikistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in September 1991. Independence however went along with an economic crisis and struggles for power. From 22 March 1992, people started to gather in Dushanbe on '*Shahidon*' (Martyrs) Square. Several parties (Lali Badaghshan, Rastokhez, Islamic Revival Party, Democratic Party, etc.)⁸ called for political change and transparent economic reforms (especially concerning the privatisation of industry and agriculture). In 1990, the government had banned the export of agricultural products from private plots, which for many was the main source of revenue. Furthermore, some local leaders of agricultural farms (mainly *kolkhoz*) had gained considerable power among local people. However, arbitrary privatisation processes raised the anger of many, who subsequently joined the political protests.

Rahmon Nabiev, a Tajik party chief from the early 1980s, became the first elected president of independent Tajikistan in December 1991. However, instead of cooperating with the emerging opposition parties and taking their claims seriously, he turned increasingly against any opposition. In early 1992 the regime took active measures against the opposition groups. One event in particular was to set the stage for future regional conflict. Safarali Kenjayev, the Speaker of Parliament, accused the Minister of Interior, Mamadayaz Navjavanov, of corruption and did so by discrediting him as a 'Pamiri' (a person from the Gorno Badakhshan district, an inhabitant of the Pamirs). Although this was not the only event in which regional origin was used as an identity marker, the episode played a key role in defining political categories (Whitlock 2002, pp. 154-55). Local actors from the civil war see Safarali Kenjayev as one of the key players who elevated regionalism to a major resource in the conflict.⁹ This does not mean that regional identities had not been strong before; however, they had not previously been a source of political confrontation and violent conflict.

8. The opposition (United Tajik Opposition) was characterized by the inclusion of multiple groups, including the Pomiri, the Democratic Party (Hizbi Demokrati Tojikiston), the Islamic Revival Party (Hizbi Nahzati Islomi), Rastokhes, and the La'li Badakhshan Party (Karim 1997, p. 410).

9. Pisari S. Kenjaev '*Padaram farzandi zamoni khud bud [...]*' (the son of S. Kenjaev: 'My father was a child of his time [...]', interview with the son of Kenjaev, published in Ozodi, <http://www.ozodi.org>. Parviz Mullojonov argues that regionalism was already a political tool during the election processes in November 1991, when Nabiev won in a flawed election and voting patterns clearly reflected regional loyalties. For a more multi-layered approach, see Dudoignon 1994.

Demonstrations in the capital from late 1991 onwards became the scene of political tension. The opposition organised demonstrations (*miting*) and demanded economic reforms and a regime change. Their supporters came from rural areas of Kurgan Tepe, the Qarategin valley, and also urban areas (intellectuals). Pro-state demonstrations were organised by those in power in early 1992, who for this purpose brought young boys from southern rural areas, mainly Kulob. The slogans¹⁰ on these squares may have been not so relevant for the population, but they were relevant for external observers (and for taking sides and setting categories of analysis). On one side (the opposition), calls for democracy went along with demands for economic reform and religious liberalisation, while, on the other side, demonstrators in favour of a communist state had gathered.

When religious slogans appeared at the '*shahidon*' square where the opposition met, urban-dwellers (many of whom were Slavs) were alarmed and the opposition was soon labeled as being made up of radical Islamists.¹¹ This view was reinforced by the television station whose reporting was influenced by the party controlling it.¹² Thus, at times anti-opposition propaganda (warnings about 'radical Islam') shaped the perceptions of many people, while at times portrayals of the violent activities of pro-government militias' reversed this view. Thus, to local people the political tension in Dushanbe appeared in the first instance to be ideological: on the one hand, democratic-Islamic parties were confronting a communist regime; on the other hand, radical Islamists were portrayed as a threat to the state. Eventually the parties organised a coalition government of National Reconciliation in May 1992 (30 percent participation was granted to the opposition) that ended in November the same year after fresh outbreaks of violence had begun to affect numerous areas.

The question of how political tensions turned into violent confrontation is explained differently by various actors, but this shall not be the major question here. What may have been important factors in this context, among others, were the lack of an army obedient to the acting president, the assumption of each side that the other side was already armed, easy access to weapons thanks to corrupt Russian soldiers (and Afghanistan), local (criminal) leaders that had their personal youth groups and agenda, the economic crisis, and opaque processes of economic transformation. In May 1992, open confrontation erupted, leading to the first mass movements of refugees. Combatant leaders began to recruit from

10. Participants in the demonstration claim that on the state side they believed in re-establishing the Soviet Union and that if necessary, 'we will go to Moscow for this.' When the Popular Front first raised its flags – the first flag that the Popular Front brought to the square and put in front of the Majlis Oli and parliament had the verses '*nest bod ba Islom*' (down with Islam) written on the right-hand side, and '*nest bod ba Turajonzoda*' (down with Turajonzoda) on the left-hand side. With these slogans they entered the square arguing that their claims were based on the Constitution (Interview with M. Haitv, member of the IRPT, Dushanbe, July 2011).

11. This all happened in an urban context: about 38 percent of the population of Dushanbe were Tajik, the rest being Slavic and of other Central Asian, European and Asian nationalities (Rubin, p. 140).

12. The role of television in the Tajik civil war has not yet been fully examined. At various stages it was used to disgrace the opposition (or to propagate against the communists once the TV station had been taken over by the opposition), and hence was blamed for fuelling hatred. Thus, many claim to have taken sides only after having seen killings and the massacre of 'their people.'

among their villages and kin groups, and more broadly in their regions. The activation of 'regionalism' as a political tool emerged in this political context. Soon all political categories became rewritten within this category. The main explanation for the war remains 'regionalism,' or '*mahallgaroi*' in Tajik. Here we face the first confusion between the political confrontation and mobilisation strategies. While the opposition saw a political agenda at the core of the conflict, the ruling party used the *mahallgaroi* argument to both downplay the importance of politics in violent confrontation and label political activism as 'criminal' and to disrupt the activities of local leaders.¹³ The civil war thus dissolved political processes into a generalised power struggle that set the categories of analysis for the Tajik civil war.¹⁴ The question is thus not which category is 'right' or 'wrong', but what resource do these categories constitute once they have entered journalistic reports and travelled the globe, and what interests stand behind such categories. States claim to hold the power to define categories and establish orders of things, and they do so in order to favour national interests (Herren, Rüesch, Sibille 2012), yet how they make their choices demands careful investigation. In the Tajik case, the order of the civil war in history is controversial and interesting. In the following sections I will investigate two categories (*mahallgaroi* and violence specialists), analysing their genealogy, context and relation to practices. Here I am interested in how the conflict transformed group identities, as well as the role of cultural practices in this process. In other words, I will move between different levels of categories and analyse their relationship in terms of interdependence or independence.

The *Mahallgaroi* Argument

The administrative division of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) into *oblast* (district), *jamoat* (several villages) and *kishlok* (village) created an administrative hierarchy that also defined access to resources and power. The system of *kolkhoz*¹⁵ (collective farms) and later of *sovkhoz* (state collective farms) organised not only labour but whole communities.¹⁶ For instance, the *kolkhoz* used the labour of men, women and children during work-intensive periods (e.g., harvest), provided shops and paid music groups, and organised the flow of goods (buying and selling of products). In this way, local communities were reinforced through the admin-

13. In order to disqualify the Islamic-communist opposition, the new president Emomali Rahmon first went to Mecca in March 1997. Later he extensively supported 'old Tajik culture,' which he believed to be an 'Arian culture' and hosted a conference about "Imomi Azam" (Abū Hanifa) in 2009. (Epkenhans 2012).

14. It is worth mentioning here that during the meeting in Bishkek in 2012 with actors and specialists from the civil war (see Footnote 2), religion did not come up as a theme or subject of debate. All discussions concerned the truth and justification of concrete actions in light of political tensions and individual responsibility.

15. Abbreviation of '*kollektivnos khozjaistvo*' (collective farm).

16. It was Roy (1998) who first mentioned that *kolkhoz* organisations were built according to regional and local patterns. Roy stressed that the role of the *kolkhoz* in the building of community identity was diachronic to clan affiliation. According to Roy, the civil war may even be understood as 'the War of the *kolkhoz*' (2000, p. 94).

istrative division, the economic system, and the reproduction of local traditions as cultural markers.¹⁷ The collective farms were also the basis for reconstituting religious communities under the Soviet regime. Rather than destroying traditional ways of life – as had been the intention behind collectivisation – the collective farms provided the necessary space and links between local, rural and urban elites for maintaining, remaking and adapting religious dynamics, as Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noak's (2013) comprehensive book shows.

According to the literature, local solidarity groups were established in Tajikistan among people who were forcibly relocated in the 1940s and 1950s, and indeed up until the 1970s (Roy 2000; Ferrando 2011). Complete villages were transferred from mountainous areas to the plains to cultivate cotton. The village communities were maintained and became working units (brigades) within the agricultural structure (*kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*). Any political career in rural areas necessarily moved from the village context via the agricultural or other village industrial enterprise to the regional and national levels. Vice versa, a youth who studied in Dushanbe was expected to return to his village school to teach and engage in a career within his own community. While no village was made up of only one lineage or group, most of these communities had a limited number of kinship groups and shared the same traditional practices (Roy 1998, 1999, 2000).¹⁸ Using the Turkmenistan *sovkhoz* as an example, Dudoignon and Qalandar (2013) have suggested that power struggles within the collective farm were led by religiously established authorities (lineages), self-proclaimed *mullahs* and alternative Islamic solidarity networks and private entrepreneurs. On the eve of the civil war, these local communities were said to be at the core of local patronage networks and capable of recruiting for violent engagements (Kilavuz 2009). Thus, administrative units set the structure for mobilisation during the war. John Heathershaw (2009) has added to the discussion that this regionalism is not as territorially bound as it seems at first glance, claiming that 'Soviet legacies provide a unique historical basis for Central Asia's new regionalism – network elites across the region who share similar experiences, spaces, and discourses' (p. 133). While this literature emphasises the plurality of possible identifications and the competition of lineage, religious and economic groups, it also proves that the collective farm was the central institution in which these dynamics developed. The material drawn on in this literature suggests a far more complex picture of the *mahallgaroi* argument than the version that became the major explanation for the civil war among ordinary people.¹⁹ To understand the move from complex dynamics to clear-cut oppositions, I turn to a concrete example in

17. This is based on in-depth research in Qarategin. After independence, many workers retreated from the *sovkhoz*, and thus lost membership when the land was privatised among the *sovkhoz* members only. In many cases, families kept a foot in the *sovkhoz* only through a daughter who was entitled to land when it was privatised.

18. Traditions vary from region to region and even from village to village, and are markers of communities more than of ethnic groups. The study by Olivier Ferrando (2011) is a good example of how lineage and ethnic dynamics developed among relocated populations.

19. Websites such as Ozodi, for instance, frequently serve as a platform for political discussions that still today often point to regional interest groups as the cause of any political or economic failure.

which the civil war facilitated a simplification of distinctions and helped create oppositions and hostilities.

Specifically I will use a concrete example of a group that was resettled in 1953 from mountainous areas of the Jirgatol district²⁰ to the cotton-growing plains in the south of Tajikistan. The example is as specific as it is representative. It is specific in its scope for possible identifications – these differ considerably between the areas to which people were relocated (for instance Shahrituz) and the areas that were emptied (for example Jirgatol) – but is general in terms of the strategies employed to create group solidarity and divisions. The Qandowi (from the village Qandow in the Jirgatol district) came to live with other relocated groups from Tavildara, and with ‘Mestnis’ (locals), Arabs, Qungurot, Lakai and Uzbeks, in the area of Shahrituz. On old Soviet maps, Shahrituz is depicted as being situated in a wild forest. It must have been only in the 1940s that the forest was cleared to create open spaces for cotton plantations, and many people were relocated from mountainous areas. Today Shahrituz is a conglomerate of many different social and ethnic groups, including some varieties of ‘Arabs,’ various Uzbek tribes and Afghans – to name just a few.

The Qandowi were called ‘Kyrgyz’ by their neighbours because they had moved from an area mainly populated by Kyrgyz. Thus, they held on to the etic term ‘Kyrgyz’ despite using Tajik as their primary language and participated in community life as part of which each group celebrated its local traditions as a specific identity marker. This allowed for regular participation in each other’s life-cycle rituals, and for the establishment of friendship groups among the cultural groups. Close cohabitation of different people that use different languages, economic niches, or cultural expressions is characteristic of the whole of Central Asia and has led to variously mixed versions and modes of cohabitation (Finke, Sancak 2012).

The Tajiks’ kinship system is a case in point, as it differs depending on the people they are living with. A Tajik can marry anyone except his own siblings and his father’s brother’s children. This provides them with a maximally open kinship system that allows for integration and adaptation. Religious lineages tend to be more selective in the choice of marriage partners in order to maintain their status. Other lineages intermarried to the degree that their original group identity eventually dissolved. In Jirgatol for instance, some lineages were unable to define themselves as Tajik or Kyrgyz, but called themselves ‘*chalish*’ (mixed) and chose which identity to emphasise according to the political context. Kinship remained central for reproducing territorial solidarity. The Qandowi intermarried – preferably with other Tajik from the mountains – but also with Kyrgyz and more rarely with Uzbeks and Mestni, both local groups.²¹

20. This district was earlier referred to as ‘Kirgizia,’ as it was settled mainly by Kyrgyz people. Under Soviet administration, the idea that the area was mainly settled by Kyrgyz remained, yet it was integrated into Tajikistan.

21. This is based on statistical analysis of detailed demographic data collected by the author between 2006 and 2007.

Hence, we find different levels of identification that move from kinship, village and ethnic belonging, to regional identifications.²² By the end of the 1990s there was no guarantee that any of these identities had grown stronger than others. It might be revealing to share that when I first visited a village in Jirgatal and asked the people ‘Who they were?’ I received the answer ‘*boston*.’ This is a Kyrgyz tribal term, but was applied by Tajik and Kyrgyz alike. Upon further investigation, I realised that this had been the name of the regional *buzkashi* team (horse polo).²³ Hence, the first identity I was told was the one they shared from a sports team. Only later did various other identifications emerge, with the ethnic distinction of Kyrgyz versus Tajik being the most recent one, still heavily debated. Even today identities continue to be played out in sport teams. Football for instance, has become the main scene in which to display political opposition through regional identities. Attending football matches in 2011, amongst others between Istiqlol (the team of the president’s son) and ‘Khaïr’ from Vahdat, I witnessed how football was used as a way of publicly displaying regional identities.²⁴ The public would provide support by screaming ‘Vahdat, Vahdat’ rather than the team’s name (Khaïr), and shouting to the players their religious status rather than their names (*Hoji bidav – Haji run*). Just from watching this game one could identify the regional origin and the political power behind the team.

Another cultural practice that reproduces local group identities as well as inter-group links is friendship. More than ten different terms for friendship exist in today’s Tajik language, and many are used for friendship that cross-cuts groups, whether ethnic or regional or of any other kind (Roche 2010). One of the most prominent polyadic friendship groups are the ‘*hamsinf*’ (class mates). *Hamsinf* (in Russian: *odno classnik*) are strong groups that exist throughout life and for many became the most real alternative to kinship and village-group belonging. Although I never came across any of these groups that formed the basis of a combatant group, I did observe that these *hamsinf* groups recovered after the war even before people started to attend each other’s life cycle rituals again.²⁵ In addition, we have dual friendships between two men (*rafiqi qiyomat, jura*) which

22. For a critical study of how identification affects conflict settings, see Schlee (2008).

23. Karmysheva (1976) made a similar observation regarding Tajiks and Uzbeks in other parts of Tajikistan in the 1950s.

24. Other football teams are called SSKA Pomir, Regar-TADA3, etc. While it is usual for teams to be named after cities all over the world, in Tajikistan the official teams have strong political imprints. In Gharm football was long seen as un-Islamic and discouraged. Thus, I was amazed to hear that the local *hukumat* had ‘ordered’ the creation of a football team in 2011. The young men who had initiated numerous youth activities, including wrestling (*gushtin*), a national sport, and had been asked to organize the team were half-hearted and told me ‘they do not really pay, so why should we make a team?’ While boys do play football in their spare time, a network of player institutions does not exist. Similarly, it was only in 2010 that I heard Tajiks in Russia say that they were planning a football team so that they could compete against Russian teams. So far they have lost all of their games because they lack good players.

25. While many of those who had groups before the war revived their group, the younger generation in Shahrituz has not yet done so. The son of a Qandowi, for instance, had been refusing to go to school – for almost a year at the time of being interviewed. When I asked him why, he told me that he was beaten up by youths from other local groups and since he had no backing he preferred not to attend school.

have been initiated by their mother, grandparents or any other person. These are often explicitly initiated between boys from different families, whether on ethnic or other grounds, and they bind men together independently of any possible conflicts between their families or communities because they are divine friendships. To summarise, community identities during the Soviet period were reinforced not only by the socialist administration and organisation of labour, but also through sports, friendships, and life cycle rituals. At the same time, cultural institutions such as friendship and religious education interconnected the communities.

What was the role of these different levels of identifications when the war reached the Qandowi in Shahrituz in November 1992? The Tajik-Kyrgyz Qandowi community provides a good example for testing emic and ethnic concepts of community and the impact of conflict on the different identifications. When the pro-government combatant groups arrived around Shahrituz in November 1992, the Qandowi left, less because they felt guilty – ‘we were without (political) sins,’ a woman believed – but because they were migrants. A Mestni had climbed aboard their truck so as to flee with them, and they tried to convince him to stay. It was neither clear nor obvious where lines of opposition should be drawn and who was a friend and who a foe.

Violent contexts demand an ad hoc definition of friend and foe, and this is how, once the war had reached Shahrituz, communities took sides in the conflict. In this period two terms came into use to define opposition: *vowchik* (from Wahhabi, meaning an Islamic partisan) and *jurchik* (from the Russian name Jurchak, which is representative of communist dominance). These terms do not refer to regional identities but to political categories. In parallel we have another opposition that draws from regional dialects: *tushka* and *kartoshka* (both meaning potato in two different dialects). While these were not representative of any particular community, they provided an immediate means of classifying a person.

The Qandowi, together with the Tajik from Tavildara,²⁶ fled southwards and soon reached the Amu Darya that separated them from Afghanistan. Attacked by the pro-government militia on one side and by Russian border guards on the other, the refugees bribed the Russian border guards (‘with a milk can full of gold jewellery collected among the refugees’) to allow them to cross over without being shot at. Once the Tajik-Kyrgyz left, the Mestni plundered their houses, whereas pro-state militias killed those who had remained (usually elderly people) and bulldozed their houses. Sometime later, an Uzbek regional commander of Shahrituz called back the ‘Kyrgyz’ because he considered them ethno-linguistic brothers of the Uzbek, who supported the government. Several families from the Qandowi decided that they were Kyrgyz enough to return. When they came back, the men were identified as enemies from Qarategin and were all killed, while the women were dumped somewhere around Dushanbe.

26. One man from the Tavildara migrant community recalled how he had exchanged his car for weapons received from Afghanistan. It was easy and cheap to buy weapons from Afghanistan, where they had been left from the Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1989).

This is how they learned their ethnic lesson. Today they know that they are Tajiks. And whenever a conflict erupts in the region, security forces take the side of the Tajiks, thus their Tajikness has become a way to increase the security of their community members.

According to the *mahallgaroi* argument, the Qandowi were killed because of their regional origin. In other words, being Qandowi was an ethnic marker similar to that of the Pamiri who live in Badaghshan. This is how the categories of analysis were established out of the complex interrelationship of various groups (kinship, regional, religious, economic, political) in order to explain war mobilisation. Yet the example of Qandowi, who confused emic and etic identifications shows that neither regional identities nor language and other ethnic markers (e.g., Turkic origin) were clear references for all, and that it was only in the course of the violent confrontation that the lines were clearly laid out in favour of a Tajik identity.

Today *mahallgaroi* is commonly accepted as the main cause for conflict. Sometimes *mahallgaroi* is merged with ethnicity or ethnic-sub groups (Jean, Mullojonov 2008). These groups are perceived as enjoying a common identity strong enough to have been mobilised. While many of the markers for ethnic groups apply to these groups (they are ascribed a common identity, they are family encompassing, stretch over generations, and are not territorially bounded), one central marker is missing: self-identification.²⁷ As we have seen in the example, some groups lack an emic concept and accept etic ascriptions. Kılavuz (2009) has presented many more similar examples in which regional ascriptions did not produce self-identification. Kılavuz has used the concept of patronage in order to overcome this identification confusion. While he does not specify the nature of these patronage networks, his article emphasises the importance of individual actors in shaping conflict settings. Hence, a look at the actors may be more revealing than assumptions of categories.

If we assume that the conflict affected community identifications, then this must have some impact on the communities today. In light of this hypothesis I will now describe confrontations that occurred during my field work. Hereby I pay attention to the way actors were contextualised. In all the examples the stories were interpreted to me against the background of civil war events and community belonging, not as individual criminal activity. Hence, we can see that criminal acts in Shahrituz today are not judged as individual acts that should be restrained by the legal forces, but as representations of community relations. In this sense, not only did the civil war have a deep impact on how identities were shaped and fixed, but these identities have been constantly reinforced, becoming categories of practice. These individual acts and the way they are interpreted stand in contrast to the official rhetoric that rejects *mahallgaroi* as a cause of conflict for the sake of nation building. As such, the civil war is seen as an episode within a continuity of peaceful cohabitation.

27. I follow Elwert's (1989) definition of ethnic group whereby this is a we-group marked by: 1) an emic identity; 2) ascription; 3) being family encompassing; and 4) being inter-generational.

Today, fifteen years after the massacres²⁸ in Shahrituz, it is deadly dangerous for an Uzbek man to enter certain Tajik neighbourhoods in Shahrituz. If he is a young man he will be beaten up with no legal consequences for the aggressors. While friendship groups and visits of life cycle rituals have been reactivated, they are also misused by individual people to take revenge. I witnessed how, during a life cycle ritual at the home of a Qandowi, a youth from another local group pulled the host's elderly father into the room and threw him down in front of the guests. This is among the worst insults to honour and hence a direct provocation. This, say the people, is not an exception but has become a way to harass one other. When Tajik young men are invited to a Mestni's life cycle ritual, they first eat and then start to quarrel, a woman explains. They fight until the police come, knowing that they will side with the Tajiks and hence there is no legal justice. During the Soviet period Uzbeks held key positions, but today the leader of the cotton industry is the brother of the president's wife, the head of *hukumat* of Shahrituz is a *hamkurs* (a study friend) of the president, and the chief of the KGB was an old guard from Kulob.²⁹

These examples suffice to show that the civil war not only led to a redistribution of power and the establishment of a quasi-kingdom, but that categories of analysis that were developed during the war to explain political processes and mobilisation became a tool for immediately identifying friends and foes (*tushka* versus *kartoshka*), and as such created categories of practice that continue to be applied and that reinforce community belonging through regular conflicts initiated by young individuals who are seen as representatives of their community, not as individual criminal actors.

Violence Specialists

Following Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins' (2009) suggestion to focus on actors to identify categories of practice, in this section I will examine violence specialists both during and after the war. Violence specialists (*Gewaltspezialisten*) enjoy the reputation of being dangerous even before the violence erupts because they have proven their professional ability to destroy, Jutta Bakonyi (2011, p. 65) explains. They not only come out of the state military apparatus and the criminal world, but may also enjoy cultural capital and titles that mark them as experts in the use of violence. In conflicts, this cultural capital becomes overvalued and is linked to political and military titles. Hence, violence specialists are also locally embedded actors, as they are both political and economic players.

While Elwert et al. (1999) (who only use the term 'warlord') suggest that violence specialists plan their action carefully and include economic considerations, these actors are also opportunistic and quick to adapt their strategies in line with the changing political and economic context. Violence specialists depend on the motivation of their combatants (whether economically or ideologi-

28. I have been told of at least two mass graves in the region. The Qandowi however have not to date found the place where their husbands, sons and male in-laws were buried.

29. All of this information was gathered during my field research between 2006 and 2007.

cally driven) and their loyalty. The Tajik civil war provides a good example to help us understand that violence did not simply appear, nor was it 'culturally' programmed, but that violence specialists were brought to the scene because the role of the armies was unclear. Unlike the category of analysis, not all of these violence specialists used *mahallgaroi* as a mode of mobilisation.³⁰

With independence, several Soviet armies and divisions remained on Tajik territory: the 201st rifle division,³¹ the 40th division that had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the 15th division,³² and the border guards.³³ In spite of the presence of all these military divisions, with independence the state lost power over the military. This became clear when newly-elected president Nabiev wanted to end the demonstration by force but the Minister of Interior, Navjavanov, refused to give the order to attack the demonstrators. In this context, it was evident that the government lacked an army to see its interests through and stop the demonstrations.³⁴ To solve the problem, Nabiev organised his own presidential guard in May 1992. He brought former criminals (some right out of prison) to Dushanbe under the lead of Sangak Safarov, himself a leader of the underground.

Young people were brought from the south, the Kulob region, and assembled and armed in Ozodi Square. Many of these youths had never held a weapon and the many lethal accidents that occurred when they received arms, fuelled the conflict even more. Sangak Safarov was entrusted to build the presidential guard with these boys. While political analyses explain that the choice of Sangak Safarov was based on regional considerations – Kulob having been a politically 'neglected' area throughout the Soviet period – others claim that it was his links with politicians and his authority among the youth that made him suitable for the job. This is also how he survived capture by the opposition at the beginning of the political confrontation. Sangak Safarov is described as a man in his sixties, strong as a bear and a person who knew how to speak to high-ranking officials (Atkin 2002, p. 102). In other words, his cultural capital of being a respected authority among youth became linked to his criminal career now overvalued as a military qualification. Safarov entered the history books as a hero because of his physical strength, *nomus* (honour code) and political recognition, all masculine values to which youth strongly adhere. Nowhere in the literature or accounts do

30. On the contrary, leaders of violence such as Yokub Salimov and a Pamiri leader had been close friends but led two opposing camps during the conflict.

31. The 201st army division was under the command of Ashurov, from the Garm region. He refused to actively engage while waiting for commands from Moscow that never came.

32. The 15th division is said to have actively engaged in the war after it had broken out in the area of Kurgan Tepe.

33. According to Whitlock, each side would hire tanks from the border guards for a couple of hours at a good price and bomb the other. However, opposition combatants claim not to have benefited from the tanks in the same way, but to have remained dependent on them for ammunition. The opposition also bought weapons of all kinds from Afghanistan where they were readily available and cheap (a Kalashnikov for two carpets). The Afghan-Soviet war had flooded Afghanistan with weapons.

34. The border guards were under CIS command and thus just as much beyond Nabiev's reach as the 201st Rifle Division which had to obey Moscow.

we learn of his political agenda or ideological views,³⁵ which leaves us to assume that his primary interests were simply to use his power to influence politics: it is no coincidence that his candidate, Emomali Rahmon, became head of government during the conflict.

Interesting in this discussion of violence specialists is the urban context. Several local leaders had divided out the town between them into zones of influence. Known as '*krisha*' the leaders of these areas were active amongst the local community (organising young men), the trading community (those selling at the *bazaars*) and the politicians. Hence, they were far more than simple underworld bosses.³⁶ Yakub Salimov was one of the more influential authorities that became the 'third force' (alongside the opposition and the pro-government demonstrations) to claim power. Despite Salimov's friendship with a Pamiri leader, he was co-opted by the pro-government forces, and even made it to Minister of Internal Affairs.³⁷ Considerable respect was also accorded to sports club authorities and other youth leaders who had already emerged during the Soviet period.³⁸

Ultimately the 'Afgantsy' (those who had participated in the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s) came to occupy a central role in the structure of what became known as 'the Popular Front,' the pro-state militia. Makhmud Khudoberdiev, an Uzbek by nationality, had gained experience during the Soviet-Afghan war. He was an important actor in the south of Tajikistan, including Shahrituz. In many of the former Soviet countries, the so-called Afgantsy became specialists of violence. While in Kazakhstan and Russia these Afgantsy became highly demanded as bodyguards (known to be strong and fearless), in other republics they formed groups that went into the underworld and maintained relations with political elites. These groups also provided security services in shadow businesses in which politicians were often involved. Hait has mentioned that the Popular Front not only made use of commanders and violence specialists of the Afghan-Soviet war, but the structure of the Afghan-Soviet war was the very basis for the Popular Front. 'For instance, Colonel Lunev, the head of KGB soldiers, Colonel Quachkov³⁹ expert in explosions – Lunev lives in London now – they organised the Popular Front' (Interview with Hait, Dushanbe, 2011). In other words, the pro-government militias organised themselves around various violence special-

35. According to Whitlock (2002), he hated the communists who had killed his father.

36. A more complete study on the different authorities in the civil war is currently being prepared by Tim Epkenhans.

37. Salimov was later sent as ambassador to Turkey by Rahmon to remove him from the power game. Sangak Safarov, Yakub Salimov and Khudoberdiev were only the best-known among the many other commanders. Yussuf and Madamin were two brothers in Dushanbe who controlled a district, and Kilavuz provides many more concrete examples of commanders and their engagement.

38. Bushkov and Mikuls'ki (1996, p. 51-54) argue that in all Central Asian cities young people had spaces where they would group and negotiate status. The *bazaars* were often the centre of neighbourhoods where youth exerted power over the traders, for instance the Bazaar Shoh Mansur, which was supported by the *qozi kalon Turajonzoda*.

39. Colonel Quachkov was the leader of the 15th brigade and responsible for the design and implementation of the entire military operation in Kughan Tepe.

ists who drew on their military or violent experiences, and who became overvalued through their participation in the Popular Front.⁴⁰

What about the opposition? How can we understand the commanders in the opposition, and on what resources did they draw? Obviously we find numerous opportunists among the commanders of the United Tajik Opposition, as well as in pro-government militias. One of these examples was Sodirov Rizvon Mardon, who entered the civil war arena as a religiously motivated fighter, but together with his brother soon became known as a ruthless commander with few ideological aspirations.

The *mujohid* who believed in some ethical principles were good – they also prayed, and they did not harass anybody. Those people [the Rizvon group, for example] just got hold of weapons and their way was open before them. They were hooligans and took whatever they wanted. He [Rizvon] was a law unto himself (Interview with Murad, Gharm District, October 2006).

Rizvon entered the scene after the conflict had started; he was known for heading up a group of thugs with little ideological commitment, and his group was extremely mobile (for some time, he even joined Ahmed Shah Masud in Afghanistan). In the end, his claims were not taken seriously during the peace negotiation process, and apart from his brothers, no one remained with him (Tutubalin 2006).

To understand other forms of leadership within the opposition, we have to turn to one of the leading actors, Said Abdullo Nuri; he was born in 1947, and therefore was 45 years old by the time the Soviet Union ended. Nuri had been the founder of the underground youth organisation, *Sozmoni Javononi Ozod* [Organization of Free Youth], later to become the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (*Hizbi Nahzati islomi*) (IRPT) in October 1991 (Hallbach 1996; Olimova 2000, 2004).⁴¹ Nuri had been repeatedly arrested for religious activism but did not stop his involvement. Earlier, his father had resisted the Bolsheviks and continued with religious engagements despite the communist ban. This family's religious lineage enjoyed deep respect within and beyond their *kolkhoz* community, which had been forcefully relocated in the 1950s.

While Nuri was far from being the best educated among the religious leaders in Tajikistan, he had accumulated religious knowledge with important authorities such as Hindustoni, and grew up in a religious family, both aspects that car-

40. Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev was the head of Kulob province. He also organised a military unit under the Popular Front and moved from the post of prime minister to Mayor of Dushanbe. In this position he took control of large sectors of cotton and aluminium exports (Atkin, p. 103).

41. Halbach (1996, p. 17) claims that youth-groups emerged in the southern territories to where people from Gharm had earlier been relocated. They became organized and in 1983 started to bring out the newspaper *hidojat* (guidance). 'The objective of this young group was to study and disseminate the reformist teachings of Hasan Al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt) and the ideas of Abdul Ala Mawdudi (the ideologist of a Pakistani branch of political Islam),' writes Olimova (2000, p. 65). The first all-Union Islamic Revival Party was founded in Astarakhan in 1990, later splitting into national sections.

ried important cultural capital.⁴² Further, he was a strong man who incorporated values of masculine honour (*nomus*). Almost all of the young people who learned from him or fought in the opposition described him as an exceptional leader and used terms of respect for this. These terms derive from a teacher-student relation (*ustod-shogird*). Still today Said Abdullo Nuri is referred to as '*ustod Nuri*' or even just as '*ustod*' by his party followers and many other people. *Ustod-shogrid* is a relation of respect, variations of which are to be found in all dual relations in which knowledge and skills are passed on to the younger generations. As well as being a bond of respect more generally, it also refers to craftsmen and their apprentices (Kikuta 2009; Dageyeli 2011) and to religious authorities and their disciples (Khalid 1998).

Against the background of this important institution, we can see that Said Abdullo Nuri benefited from cultural capital that helped him to attract young combatants. He was not the only one to make use of his cultural capital (*nomus*, religious education and well-known lineage). Indeed, others similarly enjoyed solid *shogird* support when the conflict erupted. Although this capital was not meant to produce violence, these individuals were able to integrate violence in order to defend their political and economic interests.⁴³ Several combatant leaders drew their cultural capital from the religious context. Consequently, we find terms such as *jihad* and *shahid* to have been reactivated and used by violence specialists to upgrade violence by means of religious terminology. Among the demonstrators at '*Shahidon*' Square, terms such as *jihad* and *shahid* became part of the militarisation of the opposition. Several informants recalled their fascination on discovering that Islam included concepts that gave a new meaning to death and made it possible to re-evaluate political events through religious terminology.⁴⁴ We need to clearly distinguish between religious scholars who discussed Islam as political opposition long before the civil war and the majority of people who were poorly informed about Islam beyond life-cycle rituals and selected practices such as Ramadan fasting and prayer. Thus, specialists were needed to translate the political events into religious terminology.

A first attempt to filter cultural capital into military value came with the nomination of general and other military titles during demonstrations – a reaction to the elevation of Safarov to the stage of the presidential guard. Although this remained an isolated case until the opposition organised itself more professionally with a staff quarter and hierarchy from which militant

42. The opposition was split between the two rivals Eshon Turajonzoda, who came from a religious lineage and in 1991 held an official position as *qozi kalon* and Said Abdullo Nuri who was more politically motivated (Mullojonov 2001).

43. Already during the demonstrations of 1992, when the first young men had been killed, the religious leaders introduced terms such *jihad* (religiously motivated war) and *shahid* (martyr) to the demonstrators and thus translated violent confrontation into religious terminology (Hetmanek 1993). While we do find the terminology among certain groups as far back as the 1970s (Babadjanov, Muminov, Kügelgen 2007; Rahnamo 2009) and in reports on the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s, my research indicates that for ordinary people these terms only acquired a concrete meaning in 1992.

44. For further descriptions see Mikul'skij 1996.

groups obtained recognition and weapons,⁴⁵ it was a symbolic act registered by the violent actors as an elevation of opposition actors to military grades. After the opposition had retreated to Afghanistan, religious propaganda became more important and eventually books appeared and were distributed among combatants that taught militant terms of Islam and notions of brotherhood (*barodari*) as a crosscutting value.⁴⁶

With *ustod-shogird* and *barodar*, we have a more qualitative view of the relations that were possible between a commander and his followers in the opposition and a social relation that lasted long after the conflict, mainly because it was not solely linked to violence. This does not exclude the possibility that many combatants may have joined the conflict out of personal ambition.⁴⁷ Yet many of the combatant groups of the opposition continued to exist long after the conflict on the basis of moral values, shared combatant experience and economic dependencies. Although few combatants became integrated into the state structure, they maintained their network through various types of link, including religious networks (lineage and educational) and distribution of resources. However, since 2008 many of these groups, in Qarategin as well as in the south, have been isolated and eliminated in various operations.⁴⁸

The story of Ali Bedaki (Alowiddin Davlatov from the village Bedak) is a case in point: Ali Bedaki was a young man when his elder brother, a doctor, was tortured and killed by pro-government militias. He became a commander to revenge his brother and later turned into a religious authority, a defender of *shariat* and the owner of a garden⁴⁹ and large herd, the most precious resources in the Gharm area. In this way he was able to maintain a network of *shogird* and became an influential person in the region. Until 2010, youth from all over the area came to study under him and he sponsored mosques and *madrasas*. He and a set of other commanders divided the Qarategin area into influence zones, and hence their rule continued far beyond the peace process until it was ended in a military conflict in 2010. Until about the mid-2000s they more or less maintained a religious regime outside of state law, but their influence has since decreased, not least due to the many young people working in Russia whose interest in material success is often greater than the wish for a religious regime.

Whereas the examples of violence specialists outlined suggest that they were able to mobilise cultural capital and transform their violent or physical strength

45. According to informants, they would go to Tavildara, swear alliance and upon recognition, receive weapons.

46. Muhamadsaburi Bukhari (editor and interpreter) *Tushai Mujohid*, (Mujohid's Handbook, 1996, Centre of Islamic Culture 'Bukhoroi'); Alavon, Abdulloh Noseh, 1997, *Barodarii Islomi*. Translation Centre Islam Heritage.

47. It is not possible to pinpoint all motivations for joining a conflict, as these may be multiple and changing and may certainly be different retrospectively. Yet certain aspects seem to be more persistent and valuable in the narratives of people, and these are the ones considered here.

48. Suhrob Langariev in 2008, Mirzo Ziyoev in 2009, Ali Bedaki in 2010, just to name a few. The black list of president Rakhmon, Ferghana News Agency, published in Ferghananews, <http://enews.Fergananews.com>.

49. Fruit gardens are the wealth of the area, as other agriculture yields poor harvests and land is scarce. Another lucrative investment is animal husbandry if the owner has access to pastures.

into military titles, once the war started we not only had various opportunists emerging out of a range of contexts, but also a more simple military approach to recruitment, namely that in times of war all men of fighting age must defend their country.⁵⁰ When I asked in villages who participated in the war, I usually received the answer 'boys born in 1975 and after.' Upon further investigation, I was told that this was the age group that was supposed to be recruited for military service in the 1990s. Thus, officially boys and men from the age of 17 upwards were recruited wherever a combatant group passed; in practice much younger boys were recruited, with some mothers claiming that children as young as 14 were taken. While these recruitment practices follow military rules and cannot be considered specifically Tajik, the relation between the commander and his followers deserves a more nuanced description. In the literature all commanders have been called warlords (Nourzanov 2005), patrons or elites, which is more a choice of category of analysis than a category of practice. While these terms suggest that the actors benefited from a personal network, they do not qualify the relationships. Instead, if we look at culturally-specific hierarchical relations, we obtain a more qualitative view of possible categories that endured well beyond the conflict.

Conclusion

Categories of analysis develop a genealogy of violent escalation and define the terminology through which the conflict and the actors are contextualised (e.g., ethnicity, warlord, regionalism). Categories of practice are less absolute since they are rooted in cultural practices, long-term political experience and immediate situations; it can even be argued that they are more effective than categories of analysis when it comes to conflict escalation and de-escalation. This is because categories of practice are applied for survival, and shape everyday realities, while categories of analysis do not claim relevance to ordinary people's lives. Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2009) have claimed that analytical categories limit our ability to explore what is really important to social actors. They therefore argue that if they focus on social actors and how these actors use categories to construct their own terms of reference, they will be able to reconceptualise analytical categories from categories of practice.

In this article I have suggested reviewing two categories of analysis – *mahall-garoi* and violent specialists – that were used to 'explain' the Tajik civil war. Using both descriptions of the conflict and accounts and observations collected in the field, I have illustrated that categories of analysis were developed within the urban political context, but missed out on the dynamics that transformed multiple and fluid groups into rigid group identifications. At the same time, cultural concepts of youth, neighbourhood and friendship made it possible for young

50. This information refers to opposition groups, who recruited and integrated people from all regions regardless of their regional origin. I am not sure whether pro-government militia acted in the same way, as they appear in oral accounts to have been more like executives who 'cleaned' the area of unwanted people such as migrants from the mountains.

combatants to be reintegrated into their own community. Hence, categories of practice today reflect the tension between, on the one hand, the group identities that resulted from the civil war and that are reinforced by political practices (security forces) as well as by direct aggression by individual young men (representatives of their community), and on the other hand, harmony discourses and cultural practices that allow the war to be seen as a disruptive moment rather than the end of inter-community relations.

The ruling party has carefully chosen the frame of representation of the conflict and the categories to do so in order to avoid political contestation of their legitimacy as 'the power that brought peace, security and stability to Tajikistan.' Thus, categories of representation of the civil war differ considerably from the categories of practice that have developed their own dynamic. National unity is believed to come from ethnicity, common culture and history. This culminates in the person of the president elevated to the status of His Holiness, the respected President Emomali Rahmon. The majority of the population look up to the president as a king (*podshoh*) in whose hands lie the past and the future of the country, its development or destruction.⁵¹

This Soviet approach to nationhood suggests that one people share one culture, language and history. While Soviet researchers identified the northern areas roughly between Panjakent and Khujand as the original Tajik culture, since a lineage from the Kulob district has taken over, the culture map has been re-centred. Kulob has been increasingly found to be among the oldest cities and main cultural centres, as if this were to better legitimate the current ruler. Culture in Tajikistan is a highly political issue; it is a category that the state claims to define and celebrate. Hence, harmony discourse uses cultural constructions to establish unity and ignores local specificities. This is done in countless rules that regulate clothing, ritual practices and representations, and establish the celebration of cultural and historical events (e.g., the 2500th anniversary of Kulob).

While culture is thus an important political tool for rebuilding Tajikistan after the civil war (some Tajiks claim that this new ideology replaces communism), it ignores local power struggles and the individualisation of young people, especially with regard to their religious identity. The discrepancies between categories of representation (which are here official categories of analysis) and categories of practice increase as well as diminish. Many pupils have absorbed official cultural representations and integrate them as their identity, while at the same time critical voices demand fair access to resources and power independently of political loyalty.

51. Development in Tajikistan remains the monopoly of the president, he gives roads, hospitals, schools, increases pensions, assists the poor etc. (people use the words 'gift of the president' to indicate infrastructural improvement). For instance, if the president-king (*podshoh*) is to visit a place the roads are asphalted overnight, flowers planted and new buildings opened. Many ordinary people feel emotionally attached to the *podshoh* and think that oppositional activities are activities against the state of Tajikistan. Against the background of this relation between the *podshoh* and ordinary people (*khalk*), one can understand that political change will hardly come from elections. A king cannot be replaced by democratic elections, he can only be overthrown by a group that holds military power.

A closer look at the violence specialists has shown that *mahallgaroi* was not necessarily their organising principle. Instead, they activated their personal cultural capital, which became overvalued as a military title that mobilised youth to enter the conflict. While categories of analysis see both political motivation and the activation of violence as necessarily congruent – leaders are said to have clear ideological agendas whether they are Islamic, ethnic, regional or communist, or some other category – the study of practices shows that these two phenomena are not necessarily a direct result of each other. Quite to the contrary, various local authorities have used the power vacuum as a means of pursuing their own agenda. In fact, many groups were already armed despite political efforts to create a government of National Reconciliation in 1992, so that, as one informant said, ‘they were ready for a war.’ A leader may well use his personal cultural capital independently of political categories in order to engage in a conflict and take position politically only in the course of the conflict. Categories are established to separate groups that are transformed in the course of conflict, with long-term cultural implications. Not only were violence specialists able to establish themselves as political actors and respected leaders – the president being the most successful of these – but they also managed to transform cultural capital into a political tool.

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