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Screening the Tajik Nation: Tajik Film Studios, 1956-1965

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"Tajik national cinematography cannot develop without its own national playwriting…film screenwriting of the national republics should reflect national character…it is unacceptable to continue to accept screen plays… in which the heroes which wear Georgian costumes today, then tomorrow put on Tajik national costumes, without any change in the plot." (N. Islomov, Director of Tajik Film Studios, 1958)[1]

"An important means for the ideological education of the people is cinematic art. Because of its ability to affect both feelings *and* the minds of the people…nothing can compare with cinematic art." (Jabbor Rasulov, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, 1963)[2]

Much like the national writers, dancers, playwrights, singers, musicians, theatrical actors, and poets that preceded them, the Khrushchev-era film producers of the non-Russian Soviet national republics, with few exceptions, were supposed to use their artistic medium to demonstrate their national identity for local, pan-Soviet, and (sometimes) global audiences. As the quotes by Islomov and Rasulov (provided above) demonstrate, national cinema was particularly well suited to promote certain visions of national identity ("reflect national character") while engaging the masses through logos and pathos. By incorporating a study of these films into the larger context of the Khrushchev Thaw *and* the unique conditions surrounding the formation of the Tajik SSR and its national intelligentsia, I will demonstrate how film produced gradually moved towards a territory-based conception of Tajik national identity and a new understanding of Tajik space.

This work is indebted to the rich contributions to our understanding of the questions regarding national identity formation, Soviet Nationalities Policy and the non-ethnic Russian populations of the Soviet Union.[3] Responding to the close resemblance between the borders of the

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[1] Central State Archives of the Republic of Tajikistan (TsGART), fond 1505, opis 1, delo 131, 27. I am grateful and appreciate to Dr. Artemy Kalinovsky for sharing materials from the Central State Archives and the Archives of the Communist Party of Tajikistan.

[2] Archives of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (ACPT), fond 3, opis 185, delo 30, 6.

[3] This includes scholars like Francine Hirsch, Yuri Slezkine, Ronald Suny, Terry Martin, Adrienne Edgar, Adeeb Khalid, and others. See: Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations; Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53.2 (1994), 414-452; Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed.

former Soviet national republics and the new political boundaries between the independent states of the former Soviet Union, these scholars reinvestigated the Cold-War-inspired notion of the Soviet Union as a "breaker of nations" and found that the newly opened archives told quite a different story, showing Soviet promotion of national identities. Even among the national Republics in Central Asia, the case in Tajikistan was unique because the creation of Tajik borders predated the Tajik nation-building project.[4] In order to create the symbols, language, and historical narratives of nationhood, the Soviet Union recruited the help of politicians, ethnographers, writers, poets, journalists, teachers, academics, and others in order to develop a consumable official national identity, simultaneously Tajik and Soviet.[5]

While the scholars of the 1990s focused overwhelmingly on the immediate post-revolutionary period through the 1930s, my work attempts to understand the development of official national identity in Soviet Tajikistan in the mid-1950s and 1960s. This period is crucial for understanding how broader trends in Soviet history are linked to changes and development of State/Party-sponsored national identities. The period in question was one of immense institutional

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(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

[4] See Chapter 9, "Tajik as a Residual Category" in Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

[5] In a recent dissertation, Flora Roberts explores the Tajik intellectuals brought to Dushanbe/Stalinabad in the early 1930s, primarily through the memoir of Jalol Ikromi. Flora Roberts, "Old Elites under Communism: Soviet Rule in Leninobod," (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2016); Further work needs to be done to fully understand the national identity among 'the masses' in Tajikistan with the Soviet state and the nation-building project. While they do not directly deal with issues of national identity and identification with the state, work by Botakoz Kassymbekova and Patryk Reid at least demonstrate the localized (and often individualized, as opposed to institutionalized) operations of the Soviet state in the early period of Soviet rule in Tajikistan. It seems likely that this process of fomenting a national consciousness among Soviet-Tajik citizens was longer and more drawn out. Some scholars, including Artemy Kalinovsky, have looked at this process in late-Soviet period, by comprehensive work in the 1940s-1960s remains to be done. Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); Patryk Reid, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundations of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917-1937" (Phd Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016); Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Finally, Rico Issacs' recent work on Kazakh Cinema was important for thinking about comparisons between Kazakh Cinema and Tajik Cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. Rico Issacs, *Film and Identity in Kazakhstan: Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture in Central Asia* (I.B. Tauris, 2018).

changes following the death of Stalin in 1953, Khrushchev's famous 20th Party Congress "secret speech," and the ensuing "Soviet Thaw" in cultural production.[6]

This paper also contributes to a smaller subsection of the literature which focuses on issues of national identity and film in Central Asia. Chronologically, it moves beyond the period of question in Cloé Drieu's narrative of Uzbek film in the 1920s-30s, a period which ended in Moscow's renewed domination in the film sphere.[7] Rico Issacs' work on film in Kazakhstan, though encompassing Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakh film, includes a section on the Soviet 1950s-1960s; here Issacs looks at how Kazkah national identity was portrayed through a series of routine images associated with traditional rustic life -in contrast with Soviet identity, which was typically demonstrated through revolutionary change and/or Russified modernization schemes.[8] Finally, this paper builds upon Sadullo Rakhimov's writing on Tajik Cinema, albeit with more focus on the transformations within Tajik film *during* the late 1950s and 1960s.[9] In particular, I aim to demonstrate how the producers of a set of Tajik films aimed to create a historical narrative of post-Revolutionary Tajikistan and the coming of Soviet power in Tajikistan.

By looking at four major films - *Dokhunda* (1956), *Man Changes His Skin* (*Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu,* 1959), *Zumrad* (1961), and *Khasan Arbakesh* (1965) - I aim to demonstrate the emergence of a more territorial-based conception of Tajik national identity over the period of the Khrushchev

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[6] For a classic treatment of the Thaw in Soviet Cinema, see the introduction in Josephine Woll: *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

[7] Cloe Drieu, Cinema, Nation, and Empire in Uzbekistan, 1919-1937 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019)

[8] This investigation of the "Kazakh" and "Soviet" worlds in Soviet-Kazakh film appears in chapter 2 of Rico Issacs, *Film and Identity in Kazakhstan* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 40-74.

[9] Sadullo Rakhimov, "Tajik Cinema at the End of the Soviet Era" in *Cinema in Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories* ed. Michael Rouland, Gulnara Abikeyeva, Birgit Beumers (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 118-120. Here explores briefly the issue of national identity in this period of film production. He explains how new film producers with a more national focus emerged in the period under question, but also explains that many of the films focused on the distant past. Examples include films by Kimiagarov, such as *The Fate of the Poet* (1959), *The Banner of the Blacksmith* (1961)*, The Legend of Rustam* (1970), *Rustam and Suhrab* (1971), and *The Legend of Siyavush*, (1976). In contrast, my own study here focuses on films which produce the history of the post-Revolutionary Soviet-Tajik past.

Thaw. *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin*, based on novels written in the late 1920s and early 1930s made little effort to demonstrate the mobility of Tajiks within a definitive Tajik space, and presented flat Tajik characters (even when compared to their non-Tajik counterparts) with little agency. In contrast, *Zumrad* and *Khasan Arbakesh* present their narrative parts in a bounded Tajik space, with a heavier focus on issues of contemporary concern.[10]

While this work focuses on the connection between film and national identity in a specific political and cultural space, it is important to address commonly misconceived notions surrounding the term "national film." In the introduction to *Theorizing National Cinema* Valentina Vitali and Paul Willelmen stress the constructed nature of "the nation," in national film production. They reject the notion that "national films" automatically result in the cinematic account of "the nation" as seen by dominant forces of capital and instead argues that state institutions - through taxation or other methods - "do not necessarily mobilize the available narrative stock in the directions preferred by the state."[11] While the Soviet Union's film production obviously operated within a model that ran counter to the logic of a market economy, these insights still work here. Particularly within the period of Khruschev's Thaw, the projection of national identity in Tajik national films changed drastically as its character and definition were contested by a range of new elites. By the early-to-mid 1960s, this resulted in the production of films like *Zumrad* and *Khasan Arbakesh*, which presented a territorial-based conception of national identity, but also allowed characters, in true post-colonial fashion, to ponder the potential drawbacks of Soviet modernization schemes.

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[10] Here I am reflecting on Benedict Anderson's emphasis on the importance of simultaneity in "homogeneous, empty time," which he sees as important for the ability of individuals to identify with fellow members of their "imagined community" or nation. The latter films, as we will see below were important because it was easy to imagine the events taking place in the context of a bounded space (the Tajik SSR). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 25.

[11] Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, "Introduction" in *Theorizing National Cinema* ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 7-8.

Feudal Lords and Foreign Engineers: Early Thaw in Tajik Film through the films *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin*

In creating the new films of the post-Stalin era, the film producers of Tajikistan were dependent on the literary figures of the 1930s and the works they created. As Maria Belodubrokskaya has noted, it was common in Soviet filmmaking in the 1930s for film studios to utilize Soviet writers in order to alleviate a shortage of suitable screenplays.[12] Given that in the late 1950s and early 1960s writers in the Soviet Writers' Union continued to complain about the lack of capable screenwriters in Tajikistan, it should come as no surprise that the literary works of the 1930s became some of the first films in the mid-to-late 1950s. Yet, this impacted the way early "revolutionary-era" films ultimately conceptualized Tajik national identity in an emerging space. In Kimiagarov's *Dokhunda* (based on Sadriddin Aini's earlier novel), viewers found the legacy of Aini's conception of the Tajik nation and, as such, the geographical imagination of the Tajik nation corresponds more to the former Bukharan Emirate and less to the 1929 borders that established the Tajik SSR. Later on, when director Rafail Perelshtein adopted a novel which focused on development within the confines of the Tajik SSR, the film did not prompt viewers to imagine the events of the film happening simultaneously within a broader nation; rather, unlike later films of this era, the actions of *Man Changes his Skin* were self-contained to a specific place without any specific attempts to create a bounded national space.

In the Tajik context, film producers created new films during the 1950s and the 1960s in line with larger trends in film production across the Soviet Union. Across the Soviet Union, the reorganization of the film industry prepared the film studios of the various republics for increased productivity both quantitatively and qualitatively. The new investment in the film industry brought

[12] Maria Belodubrovskaya "The Literary Scenario and the Soviet Screenwriting Tradition in *A Companion to Russian Cinema* ed. Birgit Beumers (Malden: John Wiley & Sons Inc.), 2018.

about a huge increase in film production. According to Larissa Zakharova, the number of films produced across the Soviet Union in the year 1951 was only about 9; by 1956, it was 104 films a year and by 1969 it had reached 150 per year.[13] In the Tajik SSR, the productive capacity of the Stalinabad Film Studio (the national film studio for Tadzhikfilm) reportedly doubled and the staff of the film studio increased from only 77 individuals in 1953 to 313 in 1958.[14] The new investment of finance and human capital in the film studios had profound impacts on the types of films being produced by the film studio, which, by 1955 had not produced and released a serious feature length film in nearly two decades.[15]

The Thaw in Tajikistan indeed brought significant changes, but it is important to understand the many limits still placed on film makers, who themselves usually maintained membership in the Communist Party and were loyal to the party State. In an interview in the 1990s, the late actor and director Tohir Sobirov (rus. Takhir Sabirov), who played the main role of Yodgor in Kimayagarov's 1956 *Dokhunda,* called the post-World War II period of film production "basically a dead period," but stated that the 1960s saw new changes:

> In the 1960s, it was as if a man had been hungry for a long time and finally he could eat. But things did not ease up at all. It was a period of persecution of film-makers. We could make some films, but then were hit on the head and this went on until *perestroika*.[16]

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[13] Larissa Zakharova, "Cine-weathers: Soviet Thaw Cinema in the International Context," *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* in ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 440.

[14] These individuals were still a majority of non-natives. According to a Soviet study of cultural production in Tajikistan from 1972, 8 of the 77 individuals in 1953 were of a "local nationality," with an increase to 62 (out of 313) in 1958, an increase of 10 percent. *Iz istorii kul'turnovogo stroitel'stva v Tadzhikistane 1941-1960 gg.. tom 2* ed. B. A. Anonenko, M. K. Karimova, et al. Dushanbe: Irfon, 1972, 398

[15] This narrative about the renaissance of Tajik film became canonized in the work of Soviet Tajik film studies scholars. It is true that the studios in Tajikistan had not created a film for nearly two decades and, therefore, *Dokhunda* felt like a huge step forward. Shaforat Arabova, *Istoriya Tadzhikskogo Kinematografa* (Dushanbe: Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajiksitan, 2014), 54; 57.

[16] Gönül Dönmez-Colin, *Cinemas of the Other: A Personal Journey with Film-Makers from Central Asia* (Chicago: Intellect, 2012), 108.

Similarly, the Tajik film critic Ato Akhrorov explained that the end of *Malokartin'ya (*"Few Pictures"), the period of little-to-no major film production in the last years of Stalin's life, ended with the creation of *Dokhunda* and similar films, which adopted "national themes" and again reflected the "everyday life" of people in Tajikistan.[17]

The role of theatrical life in the creation of these and other films is important to the story for another reason: for many contemporary cultural elites in Tajikistan, it was the force that made Tajik cinema "national." Actors who become huge figures in Tajik Cinema, such as Asli Burkhanov, Gurminj Zavqibekov, Makhmudzhan Vakhidov, and Sofia Tuybaeva, actively participated in the cinematic and theatrical life of the Republic. Even as numerous non-Tajikistani Soviet actors and directors contributed to the production of films in Tajikistan, these figures became staple figures in the film industry.[18] In the Tajik Writer's Union, the leadership acknowledged the potential for the Republic's theatrical workers to contribute to the development of the film industry. At a meeting in which members discussed the need for more screenwriters, for example, it was suggested that individuals like Burkhanov, who "used to write plays" could do better to rekindle ties with the Writer's Union in pursuit of producing local screenplays.[19] Thus, it should come as no surprise that the film *Dokhunda* featured both VGIK graduates, but also local actors like Asli Burkhanov from the national theatrical stage.

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[17] Ato Akhrorov, *Tadzhikskoe Kino, 1929-1969* (Donish, 1971), 87-94. This is consistent with what was happening throughout Central Asia and the Soviet Union. In the introduction to *Cinema in Central Asia*, Michael Rouland explains that the 1950s were an era of "film famine," but the 1960s saw a huge boom in film production. Michael Rouland, "An Historical Introduction," in *Cinema in Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 14-15.

[18] It is notable that major figures in Tajik film also included non-Tajikistanis. For instance, the main characters of *Zumrad* (Tamara Kokova) and Hasan Arbakesh (Bimbulat Vatayev) both were born in the RSFSR and were respectively Kabarday and Ossetian. This highlights a tendency in Republican film studios to use a pan-soviet, multi-ethnic base of actors. It also shows that a film could be "national" even as the hero was not from a respective national group.

[19] Central State Archives of the Republic of Tajikistan (TsGART), fond 1505, op 1, delo 131, 66.

When the film *Dokhunda* was finally released in Tajikistan, audiences were likely already familiar with the story.[20] As mentioned above, Aini's novel (upon which the film was based) was first published in the late 1920s and quickly canonized as a crucial text in the modern Tajik-Soviet literary canon. There were also attempts to make the story into a film in the 1930s, but this failed for a number of reasons.[21] Finally, the story had been performed as a theatrical play in several versions prior to the adaptation on screen. The 1956 film, however, finally saw Aini's vision of a Tajik national identity realized on screen. This vision of national identity, centered in the former Bukharan Emirate, tells a story of exploitation at the hands of feudal money-lending landlords, which is quickly followed by revolution, achieved with the help and guidance of brotherly Russians. To contemporary observers, both on the Union level and within the Tajik Republic, the charge that the film served as an honest attempt to tell the story of the nation was repeated again and again. In Union-level newspapers, Tajik national representatives explained that the importance of this groundbreaking national film rested in its portrayal of the Tajik people prior to the revolution, by following a "poor mountain dweller" (*bednyak-gorets*).[22] Local newspapers in Stalinobod (Dushanbe) went further to explain the significance of the film. First, it was the "first work of screenplay on the union level" after such a long period of inactivity. Secondly, it was meaningful in its portrayal of the "struggle of the nation for freedom" and in its portrayal of the Communist Party and the Russians in bringing aid to the Tajik people.[23]

The film's relationship to the past life of the Tajik nation is geographic; in the film, Bukhara comes to represent the history of the former oppression of the Tajiks. As contemporary observers

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[20] My thanks to my instructor of Tajik, Muhabbat Yakubova, who not only worked with me on my Tajik, but also helped me in my transliteration of the Tajiki version of *Dokhunda*.

[21] The earlier production of *Dokhunda* that was ultimately not released has been described by Lev Kuleshov and others. See for example, Lev Kuleshov, *50 Let v Kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975).

[22] "Muvaffaqiyati Navi Kinematografiyai Tojik, (New Successes in Tajik Cinematography)" *Tojikiston Soveti*, June 3, 1956, 3.

[23] "Muvaffaqiyati Navi Kinematografiyai Tojik, (New Successes in Tajik Cinematography)" *Tojikiston Soveti*, June 3, 1956,

noted, the film was notable for its portrayal of the "wide and multifaceted" depiction of Tajik life, which included both mountain life, but also life in the city, alongside the architecture of Bukhara, with its madrasas (Islamic educational centers) and manors. In the film itself, the majority of the scenes, whether one looks at setting, dialogue, or costumes, are meant to demonstrate the suffering of the peasantry under the Bukharan Emirate prior to the revolution.

Though most of the film takes place in the urban centers and the nearby agricultural lands of the former Emirate of Bukhara, the temporary shift to the mountains in Eastern Bukhara (much of which became the Tajik SSR) represent a refuge for the oppressed peasant. This includes scenes such as the old madrasa where the illiterate Mullah physically punishes the children, as well as the scene of Yodgor's mother dying on a platform pulled by a tilling ox. We also see how certain flat characters – such as the villain landlord Azimshoh – become part and parcel of the scenery. For example, when Yodgor's father Bozor is lying on his deathbed, Azimshoh arrives and, adding to the specter hanging over the scene, demands that Yodgor take the burden of his father's unfulfilled debts. In another scene, we see how Azimshoh, in apparent collaboration with the new regime of

Image 1 Scene of Bozor (Yodgor's Father) on his deathbed, moments before the imposing figure of Azimshoh demands Yodgor take on the debts of his father. "Dokhunda Tadzhikfil'm Tojikfilm fil'my Azii" Youtube Video, 1:13:33. Posted [August 2015] https://youtu.be/cgybp3ybNZo

the Russian Tsars, deliberately uses the lending system to his advantage, significantly underpaying peasants for their cotton harvests.

Following his father's death, Yodgor finds refuge in the mountains of Eastern Bukhara (later what became the Tajik SSR), which stands in stark contrast to the dark and oppressive image of Western Bukhara. In addition to a noticeable difference in the camera lighting, the characters Yodgor finds are welcoming representatives of the Tajik nation. For a brief time, the mountainous regions come to represent a temporary utopia for Yodgor – he quickly meets his love interest (Gulnor), whose family quickly accepts Yodgor. They spend happy moments frolicking, singing love songs (for example, *Shohdukhtor*), before eventually Yodgor and Gulnor are quickly pulled back into the oppressive events happening in the center of the Emirate, which eventually leads to the death of Azimshoh and their participation in the Revolution.

Image 2 Scene in which Yodgor and Gulnor first meet upon Yodgor's arrival to the mountain pass. Notice the difference in lighting between these scenes and the scenes with Azimshoh. "Dokhunda Tadzhikfil'm Tojikfilm fil'my Azii" Youtube Video, 1:13:33. Posted [August 2015] https://youtu.be/cgybp3ybNZo

Image 3 Another scene with Gulnor and Yodgor, where they sing the most-famous song (duet) from the film – "Shohdukhtor."

"Dokhunda Tadzhikfil'm Tojikfilm fil'my Azii" Youtube Video, 1:13:33. Posted [August 2015] https://youtu.be/cgybp3ybNZo

Much like *Dokhunda* the film *Man Changes His Skin*, produced and released four years later, is indebted to the 1930s novel by Bruno Jasienski upon which it was based.[24] Unlike *Dokhunda*, the film takes place primarily in the context of Tajikistan of the 1930s. Similar to *Dokhunda*, the film depicts the socialist transformation of Tajikistan in the 1930s, showing how the construction of the Vakhsh Irrigation Project had transformed the region. Contemporary newspapers praised the film for its demonstration of the revolutionary power of Soviet labor to transform the land.[25] This attitude, apparently, was widespread among the elite, and probably served as motivation for making the film in the first place. At the 1959 Congress of Tajik Writers, the poet, Chairman of Tajik Writer's Union

[24] For more info on Jasienski and his novel, see: "Man Changes His Skin and the Industrial Novel," in Nina Kolesnikoff, *Bruno Jasiénski: His Evolution from Futurism to Socialist Realism*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982).
[25] "Dar Rohi Ejod Namudani Dostoni Qahramoni, (On the path to creating heroic stories)" *Tojikiston Soveti*, February 16, 1960, 4.

(and also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan) Mirzo Tursonzoda put the matter more succinctly:

> Let's turn to the first years of building of socialism. There is the Vakhsh valley. Today it is valley of happiness, a valley of innovators. In those years, it was empty, overgrown with weeds and swamps, snakes and scorpions, heat and malaria. When the party decided to build the Vakhsh canal, it was a very difficult process. And then the Russian Writer Bruno Jasienski wrote the novel 'Man Changes His Skin.' Now we are filming a film based on the novel.[26]

While the geographical shift between *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin* demonstrates an attempt to focus on the borders of the post-1929 Tajik SSR, the film does not encourage the reader to consider the action of the film occurring in a larger "homogenous empty time."[27] In other words, the action of the film is not portrayed in such a way for the viewers to consider these actions occurring alongside other similar or related events unfolding in a Tajik space. This stands in contrast to the films discussed later in the paper, which used the mobility of characters within a specifically bounded Tajik national space (which corresponded to the Tajik SSR's borders) and therefore presented a new territorial-based conception of Tajik national identity. Rather than representing a space where Tajiks possess the agency to respond to changes and impact their own national space, the Tajik SSR of *Man Changes His Skin* is not meaningfully situated within the context of a recognizable national space and it is primarily foreigners - Russians and even American and British Engineers - who are facilitating the organization of large-scale change in the Republic.

In contrast to later films, the action in *Man Changes his Skin* is not properly contextualized within homogeneous empty time unfolding in a national space. In other words, the construction of the Vakhsh Canal and the conspiratorial attempt to sabotage this construction are not presented

[26] Central State Archie of the Republic of Tajikistan (TsGART), fond 1505, opis 1, delo 148, 10.
[27] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

alongside simultaneous activities and campaigns happening throughout Tajikistan or the USSR more broadly. Instead, the main indicator of the passing of time is the construction of the dam itself. And while the film shows the participation of Tajik labor in the 'outsider' plans to transform the region, the film does not call on viewers to imagine these events grounded in the everyday life of the Republic. The construction efforts are crude realizations of the more abstract ideas of Soviet ideas about the transformation of the environment.[28] As such, the characters of the film are as grandiose as the construction plans they enact; even the national hero Urtabaev, a devout Tajik Communist committed to the completion of the Vakhsh Canal and the building of socialism, is more of an ideal of what the masses should strive to be and less of an individual with internal dilemmas that he must overcome. The unbounded nature of space in *Man Changes His Skin* is exacerbated by the fact that a series of foreigners (Russian, British, American) who have decision-making power to alter or shape the transformation of the Republic.[29]

Image 4 Construction scene from the building of the Vakhsh Canal in Man Changes His Skin. As mentioned, the film's focus is less on the transformation of the lives of Tajiks living in the Republic and more on transformation of the physical environment.

"Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

[28] Maya Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 299-301.
[29] Peterson, *Pipe Dreams*, 299-301.

Image 5 Builders of the canal. The majority of individuals shown in the film are the nameless workers building the Vakhsh Canal.

"Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

While the majority of the film is focused on the large-scale transformation of the environment and less on the individual experiences of Tajiks in a bounded Tajik space, the film shares one major commonality with *Dokhunda* in its reference to the national home of the Tajiks in the city of Bukhara, a city which again represents pre-revolutionary backwardness. We first see this in an interaction between the British Mr. Murray and a nameless elderly bearded Bukharan peasant-worker who gifts the former a *piyola* (a handleless cup for drinking tea) made from Bukhara. In the interaction, the Bukharan explains that he is from Bukhara (not Samarqand, as Murray asks) in Persian. While Murray's English is simultaneously dubbed into Russian, the Tajiki Persian of the Bukharan is left undubbed and untranslated to demonstrate his apparent illiteracy. Later, we find out that this character does indeed speak Russian and is part of a conspiracy to falsely accuse Urtabaev of murdering another Bukharan revolutionary in 1917.

Image 6 The Bukharan peasant-worker who gifts Mr. Murray the Bukharan piyola *and later conspires against Urtabaev. His character represents the anti-Soviet backwardness of Bukhara.*

"Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

Image 7 Mr. Murray after receiving the gift from the unnamed Bukharan. Several shots contrast these two characters to highlight the appearance of the latter.

"Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

Finally, in the second part of the film, when the false accusations of Urtabaev are investigated, the revolutionary-era city of Bukhara is revisited and we see how it plays into the historical narrative of the Tajiks, again as a place of oppression and even danger. The scenes from Bukhara itself include low-angle shots that exaggerate the height of the city's old buildings, making them feel more imposing, as Urtabaev escapes the conservative mob trying to find him. The distance between the two worlds - of old Bukhara and contemporary Tajikistan - is felt most when Urtabaev finishes his narrative and we see him transform from the turban-wearing Bukharan to the 1930s Communist, dressed in decidedly more European clothing.

Image 8 Scene from Urtabaev's flashback to 1917 Bukhara. Here we see the mob searching for Urtabaev for his political activities. In the back, we see the imposing figure of a Bukharan Minaret, meant to symbolize the old order under the Emir.

"Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

Image 9

Image 10

Image 11 These three images (9 through 11) show a match cut between Urtabaev in 1917 and Urtabaev in the 1930s. While the match cut coincides with the end of his flashback, it is also meant to demonstrate how the change in physical appearance from his time in Bukhara to the present. Of course, we are only given limited details about his journey from Bukhara to Tajikistan. "*Rezhisser: Rafail Perel'shteyn – Chelovek Menyaet Kozhu*" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [November 2017] https://youtu.be/xH61OkFAvOo

Each of the films discussed in this section - *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin* - represent an era of early films during Tajik Film Studio's period of significant growth in the late 1950s. As I have shown, these films were particularly crude in their abstract treatment of the process of revolution in the lives of Tajiks. In both films, Bukhara plays an important role in the Tajik national experience, but the city (and the former Emirate) represent the past oppression of Tajiks. In both films, escape from Bukhara offered opportunity to evade this oppression. Nonetheless, these films differ from later Tajik films because they do not produce a recognizably national space that corresponds to the post-1929 borders of the Tajik SSR. Even as *Man Changes His Skin* is set in the

Tajik SSR, the film does not compel the viewer to contextualize the socialist transformation of the Vakhsh valley alongside related events happening elsewhere within a Tajik national space. The question of agency - particularly the agency of Tajiks - is important too; rather than presenting a narrative in which the viewer becomes intimate with interwoven stories of Tajiks and their lives during this period of socialist transformation, the fate of Tajikistan as presented in the film, is mostly in the hands of 'outsiders' who use their expertise and knowledge to act on Tajikistan's physical environment.

Zumrad and Hasan Arbakesh: Towards a New Territorial and Individualized Narrative of Recent Tajik History

As the development of Tajik Film Studios continued, the films produced for Tajik and Soviet audiences became significantly more sophisticated. In contrast to earlier films like *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin*, later films like *Zumrad* and *Hasan Arbakesh* demonstrate attempts to portray the complexity of individual characters and their internal dilemmas, while at the same time situating their experiences in a nationally bounded space. Importantly, Bukhara's place in the national-historical narrative of Tajiks disappears completely within the context of these films. These films likewise feature mobility of the main characters in a specifically Tajik national space which made specific and exclusive references to post-1929 Tajikistan (i.e. Bukhara disappears from the narratives) and show how their actions evolve within "homogenous empty time." In other words, because these characters are mobile, the film compels the viewer to imagine their activities happening alongside other members of the Tajik-Soviet nation, prompting viewers to "imagine" a national community of Tajik citizens experiencing similar realities in a bounded Tajik space. As a result, the focus on these mobile individuals moving throughout Tajik space and time reinforce a new territorial conception of Tajik national identity and narrative.

A few years after its release, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan Jabbor Rasulov praised the film *Zumrad* for its portrayal of the "best characteristics" of a contemporary woman in Tajikistan. In particular, he praised how the film portrayed the lead character, Zumrad, a "free woman, who [was] aware of her own human worth and [was willing] to fight for her rights."[30] As Rasulov's comments allude to, one major transformation in the films produced by Tadzhikfilm in the early 1960s was an increasing focus on the role of the individual amidst larger historical transformations. As a result of this new emphasis on the individual, the films of this era presented new complex Tajik characters, who demonstrated their agency to act within a territorially based Tajik national space.

The film *Zumrad*, released in 1961, tells the story of a young Tajik woman (Zumrad) living in a village with her mother. As the story progresses, the audience finds out that she is a single mother who, while a student in Dushanbe/Stalinobod fell in love with her professor, whom she later married, only to find out that he intended to force Zumrad to serve as a housewife, restricting her from leaving the home and entering the public sphere. In response to this surprising and forced demand, she takes their young child and returns to her home village, where she works as a cotton harvester and aims to one day continue her studies and become a teacher. Throughout the film, we slowly learn her back story as she recounts her travels to Dushanbe to study and how she ended up marrying the professor Kadyrov. The majority of the plot rests on the complicated relationship between Zumrad and Djamil, her first true love and the ensuing love triangle between Zumrad, Djamil, and Gul'chin, an agronomist from the capital city.

Unlike earlier films, the action of this film is confined to the boundaries of the Tajik SSR and the mobility of Zumrad between her home village and the capital of Stalinobod encourage the

[30] Archives of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (ACPT), fond 3, opis 185, delo 30, 23.

viewers to imagine these events happening within a larger context of national space and time. The focus on individuals and their stories as they move across space helped achieved this effect. For example, when she finally provides her full back story to Gul'chin, we see Zumrad leaving her friends (and other characters with different trajectories) for Stalinobod where she will start her studies to become a teacher. When she arrives, the audience sees the crowded streets of the capital, where they are compelled to imagine the daily life of many Tajiks unfolding both in the capital and throughout the country, which Zumrad has transversed in order to arrive. Unlike the previous films, we have multiple individual story lines happening in different places that allow us to imagine the community of Tajik-Soviet citizens. If contrast to *Man Changes his Skin,* where the transformation of individuals' lives in *Man Changes his Skin* was implied through flashbacks, Zumrad demonstrates how the process of transformation is occurring across time and space within the bounds of the Soviet-Tajik Republic and makes no references to the Persian(Tajik)-speaking cities which became part of the Uzbek SSR.

Image 12 Zumrad leaving her village as two other consequential characters, Sharif and Djamil, stay behind. Because we as viewers see these characters in the present after the events Zumrad is describing, we are compelled to imagine their continued working lives in the village happening as Zumrad spends time in the capital city.

. "Zumrad 1961 Tadzhik-Fil'm" Youtube Video, *2:43:22*. Posted [*February* 2015] https://youtu.be/v5AEUyO4N3M

Image 13 One of many scenes demonstrating the busy streets of Dushanbe/Stalinobod. This happens against the backdrop of multiple characters' stories developing both in the Capital and in Zumrad's village, allowing viewers to imagine the many simultaneous activities of Tajiks happening in a bounded national space.

"Zumrad 1961 Tadzhik-Fil'm" Youtube Video, 2:43:22. Posted [February 2015] https://youtu.be/v5AEUyO4N3M

Like Zumrad, Khasan Arbakesh (1965) depicts a series of interrelated personal stories folding out within a nationally bound space amidst greater transformations happening in Soviet Tajikistan of the 1930s. The story, which follows the cart-driver Hasan, focuses on the character's frustrations with the erosion of his past life in the face of Soviet modernization. Hasan has a mixed relationship with the coming of Soviet power: On the one hand, he was able to have his horse Rakhsh because of Soviet policies of wealth redistribution; on the other hand, his livelihood and mobile lifestyle is threatened by the development of the rail system and the advent of automobiles in Tajikistan. This produces sometimes comical episodes in which Hasan tries to prove his horse's strength by trying to outride an automobile. Much of the film is concerned with his coming to terms with the new (and in his view, somewhat restrictive) modes of life brought about by Soviet modernization. As Zumrad struggled in a society that condemns her for being a single mother and against her oppressive husband, we see Hasan actively struggling against the assault on old ways of life, only to be ultimately overcome by these new changes.

Image 14 Hasan driving his cart of students as he attempts to outpace the automobile in an attempt to show the superiority of his horse Rakhsh.

"Khasan Arbakesh 1965 rezh Boris Kimyagarov", 1:31:51. Posted [November 2013] https://youtu.be/GyWvLBmZcnk

As was the case in *Zumrad*, the mobility of the main character in *Khasan Arbakesh* is important for portraying a nationally bound, territorial conception of the Tajik-Soviet experience. Because Hasan travels on his cart throughout the film, the audience become acquainted with a variety of characters in different locations and are again made to imagine many storylines happening within this bounded national space. Like Zumrad's experiences in Dushanbe/Stalinobod, the world of Hasan includes local hustle and bustle wherever he goes. For example, in one of the early scenes, we see a busy street with shops, where people familiar with Hasan converse and carry out their daily activities. At the same time, other secondary characters who appear sporadically throughout the film continue their daily lives and come in and out of Hasan's life, compelling the audience to imagine their lives being carried out alongside Hasan's adventures. Later on, Hasan takes a group of students to the edge of Tajikistan's borders where they then board a train and head for Tashkent to study. Across this and other journeys, Hasan passes through large construction sites and smaller villages where he meets individuals in the context of their daily life. Each of these individuals becomes connected through Hasan who transverses the Tajik countryside and occasionally even passes through important landmarks like Dushanbe/Stalinobod. Thus, the audience is again compelled to all these simultaneous actions occurring in relation to one another and, as a result, is compelled to conjure up the imagined community of Tajiks carrying out their daily lives amidst Soviet transformation of their lives.

Image 15 Hasan Arbakesh with his student-passengers as they pass through a railroad construction site.

"Khasan Arbakesh 1965 rezh Boris Kimyagarov", 1:31:51. Posted [November 2013] https://youtu.be/GyWvLBmZcnk

Conclusion

The changes in the 'revolutionary-era' films of Tajikistan explored in this paper demonstrate that ideas about the national imaginary and its relation to contemporary borders significantly shifted in the period of Khrushchev's Thaw. While earlier films like *Dokhunda* and *Man Changes His Skin* relied on earlier notions of a Tajik national identity with roots across Central Asia (and in particular in Bukhara) gave way to new conceptions (as shown in *Zumrad* and *Khasan Arbakesh*) which revolved around the post-1929 borders of the Tajik SSR. Given Sadriddin Aini's saint-like status in the world of Tajik-Soviet literature, this influence never fully disappeared; later films based on Aini's work continued to appear and the issue of Bukhara and Samarkand have again become part of the national conversation in Tajikistan. Nonetheless, this article points to the importance of looking at how conceptions of national identity in Central Asia evolved from their 1930s versions. Likewise, I have attempted to demonstrate the need for looking at how the Thaw period played out in regions

beyond Russia. In the case of Tajikistan, it is clear that intellectuals spent efforts making sense of experience of the national delimitations of the 1920s. Finally, while this work addressed official cultural production, future work will need to "go to the masses" and try to understand popular reception of these films.

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