



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Peoples' internationalism

*Central Asian modernisers, Soviet Oriental studies and cultural revolution in the East (1936-1977)*

Jansen, H.E.

**Publication date**  
2020

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Jansen, H. E. (2020). *Peoples' internationalism: Central Asian modernisers, Soviet Oriental studies and cultural revolution in the East (1936-1977)*.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# **INTRODUCTION.**

---

In 1992, UNESCO published the first volume of a multivolume book-project, entitled *History of Central Asian Civilizations*. Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO, wrote the introduction. In comparison with prevailing notions of the region today, Mayor's definition of Central Asia was surprisingly broad. It encompasses, he wrote:

*"[T]he civilizations of Afghanistan, north-eastern Iran, Pakistan, northern India, western China, Mongolia and the Soviet Central Asian republics. The appellation 'Central Asia', as employed in this History, refers to this area, which corresponds to a clearly discernible cultural and historical reality.<sup>[1]</sup>*

This definition did not simply trace a shifting geographical conception of the region, however: UNESCO's expansive understanding of the region was already controversial and contested when the *History* was published. Indeed, Mayor had to emphasise explicitly that "topology alone does not prescribe clear boundaries" and point out that "[t]he systole and diastole of population movements down the ages add to the difficulty of delimiting a region".

For all its complexity and depth, this definition failed to establish itself among a broad public in the years to follow. Whereas Mayor conceived of the region as an expansive geographical and cultural manifold with impermanent, permeable borders, today "Central Asia" is commonly taken to mean Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia, and Kazakhstan. In the space between these definitions, a dynamic regional consciousness has been reduced to five static states with distinct ethno-national identities. In this imagination of centralised states, whose sturdy boundaries stake out the limits of not just territories but cultures too, there is little scope for mapping complexity, ambiguity, and

---

[1] Mayor, Federico. "Preface," in *History of civilizations of Central Asia. Volume 1. The dawn of civilization: earliest times to 700 B. C.*, edited by A. H. Dani and V. M. Masson, (Paris: UNESCO Publishers, 1992): 6-8.

ephemerality - no recognition of the transcultural exchanges and substate flows that make up so much of the region's history.

And yet, this was not always the case. This thesis shows how a distinct way of thinking about the history of Central Asia developed during the twentieth century in the Soviet Union that was strongly entangled with a novel way of conceptualizing world history; a vision I shall term "peoples' internationalism" throughout this thesis.

By imposing my own neologism on the past, I aim capture the essential features of peoples' internationalism as a form of historical thought that emphasizes the "non-territorial" (cultural, spiritual and intellectual) unity of mankind while simultaneously trying to do justice to the inherent diversity of experiences of the world's inhabitants. Peoples' internationalism should thus be perceived through the same historiographical prism as cultural nationalism.<sup>[2]</sup> Its historical method is interdisciplinary and its focus and cultural-historical: it aims to illuminate the trans- and sub-national cultural patterns connecting individuals and groups across assumed political, territorial ("material") boundaries, stresses the relative autonomy of culture as a force of historical development. Historically, this historical vision found broad support among anti-colonial activists who sought to revise imperial narratives of the past while relativizing statist historical narratives that saw the construction of a standardized ethno-centric culture as a necessary asset of modern state building. Despite historians giving it different forms and emphases, the term peoples' internationalism is nevertheless apt for drawing attention away from the nation-state: emphasizing the agency of peoples rather than states, demanding an international orientation that transcends rather than affirms the nation-state.<sup>[3]</sup>

---

[2] For a transnational or "cross-national comparative" approach to cultural nationalism see the work of Joep Leerssen, especially Joep Leerssen "The Cultivation of Culture: Towards a Definition of Romantic Nationalism in Europe," in *Working Papers European Studies Amsterdam* 2 (2005). Leerssen reminds us that the developments in the cultural sphere that are generally regarded as expressions of cultural nationalism should not be approached as the "forerunners of something else" (p. 13), emphasizing that we run the risk of anachronism if we analyze cultural nationalism through the prism of "national categories that... later result from its activities" (p.14). For how this plays out in a European context, see Joep Leerssen, *National thought in Europe: a cultural history* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.)

[3] While the scholars taking central stage in this thesis researched non-state phenomena in their local, translocal or transnational settings and would now perhaps be named transnational historians, peoples' internationalism should not be regarded as a historical methodology. Rather, peoples' internationalism represents an approach to history that is intuitive, heartfelt and that inspired an "internationalist"

In the historical context that is outlined in this thesis, peoples' internationalism was united by a central vision of culture and history that consisted of a few key elements. Firstly, it expressed a distinct anti-colonial agenda, seeking to both emphasize the different experience of the non-West, as well as its role as an agent of an expansive dynamic humanism and modernity. Crystallized in the decade after World War II, the objectives of peoples' internationalism were twofold. On the one hand its aim was to fissure open Eurocentric narratives of civilisation granting the East a rightful place in world culture. On the other hand it reframed narratives of nationalism: invoking a global vision that allowed to situate the modern nation-state in a larger, inherently pluralistic, 'one world' context. Armed with the insight of critical 19th century humanities scholars who emphasized the inherent heterogeneity of world culture, peoples' internationalism illuminated the non-territorial solidarities and belonging that overlapped and intersected with modern secular and territorialized identities that took shape within the modern national framework. On the local level it served to preserve the multi-layered cultural and spiritual solidarities of local groups and individuals that, in the transition to modern statehood, threatened to fall outside of the state's social and political institutions. In the USSR, peoples' internationalism supported the argument that in the East historical processes bypassed the rise of the capitalist nation state. At the global scale, peoples' internationalism relativized the centrality of the Eurocentric, Westphalian nation-state as prime agent of modernity thus resisting the equation of modernity with the secular West.

Secondly, peoples' internationalism drew from local sources. Whereas dominant international discourses and projects, from Trotsky's socialist internationalism to globalisation rhetorics today, have been grounded in Western cultural traditions, peoples' internationalism put forth an intellectual tradition and worldview that were in a large part indigenously "Eastern."<sup>[4]</sup> As a global vision it tapped into myriad traditions

---

worldview that was the oppositional counterpart to the "realist" state-based internationalism that dominated the UN from the mid-1960s onwards. For this realist brand of internationalism, see Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For other varieties of internationalism see Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, (Eds.), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[4] For Western global visions, see Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in*

that animated the “internationalist moment” in early twentieth-century in Europe and Asia. It amalgamated disparate intellectual traditions including Muslim modernism, Asian regionalism, Soviet socialism, Russian cultural philosophy, pacifism, and radical humanism.<sup>[5]</sup> By emphasizing the formative roles of local religious, intellectual or “spiritual” practices and solidarities, peoples’ internationalism undermined the Eurocentric notion that presented non-territorial identities as somehow inimical to the modern condition, thus disassociating modernity from the West.<sup>[6]</sup>

A third characteristic of peoples’ internationalism was that its approach of culture as a relatively autonomous force in history endorsed the “spiritual” or non-territorial sphere of the mind as a space where societal change could be negotiated. Cutting across assumed divisions between peoples and states, this historical perspective emphasizes the transcending potential of inner experiences - highlighting human affinity and spiritual recognition beyond class-boundaries or geographical locales.

It could be argued that in emphasizing the global, peoples’ internationalism risked perpetuating precisely the imperial narratives of civilisation it sought to amend, along with the fundamental inequalities they concealed. Yet while postcolonial scholarship has tended to represent the “global” as a foreign (and Eurocentric) category opposed to (and oppressive of) local, vernacular, or authentic cultures, peoples’ internationalism activated an alternative anti-colonialism that preserved a ‘one world’ consciousness as a space of Revolutionary activism.<sup>[7]</sup>

---

*the Western Imagination* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), also see Simon Ferdinand, “I Map Therefore I Am Modern: Cartography and Global Modernity in the Visual Arts,” PhD Diss., University of Amsterdam, 2017.

[5] For a collection of essays that seeks to situate interwar Asian and European activist movements in the context of a wider “internationalist moment”, see Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (Eds.), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917-1939* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014).

[6] In recent years humanities scholars have been searching to acknowledge local and non-Western voices in the construction of global cultural and historical narratives and concepts. For literature, see Gould, Rebecca. “Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out: Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics,” in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 1 (2018): 170-180. For Oriental studies, see Jean-Claude Vatin, “After Orientalism: Returning the Orient to the Orientals,” in *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-appropriations*, edited by François Poullion and Jean-Claude Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 272–277 For global intellectual history, see Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), especially the introduction.

[7] For a classic approach to postcolonial theory that prioritizes the local as vector of anti-colonial

In this thesis a close analysis of narratives of Tajik / Central Asian history attempts to tease out precisely such global visions. In focusing on Central Asian / Soviet discourse, this thesis brings to light a hitherto undisclosed and transnational archive that centers on the biography of one figure that was especially influential on peoples' internationalism: Bobodzhan Gafurovich Gafurov (b 1980 or 1909 - d. 1977). Gafurov was a Central Asian communist who, in the late 1950s, became an important figure in the Soviet Academy of Sciences when he was installed as head of the Institute of Oriental studies (IVAN) in Moscow in 1956. Prior to that he was a leading politician in the Tajik Republic, and a well-known propagandist and historian writing on Tajik cultural history.<sup>[8]</sup>

A complex, liminal figure in modern intellectual history, Gafurov's work was particularly representative of peoples' internationalism. As an Asian intellectual in Moscow, Gafurov's biography draws attention to the affinities that existed between Asian and European activists. On the one hand, Gafurov's involvement with UNESCO ties peoples' internationalism, and the historical projects it inspired, to Western Europe. And yet Gafurov's background as a Central Asian moderniser and activist connects people's internationalism with influences and concerns that lie beyond the borders of European intellectual history. Within the USSR, but also in international fora such as those provided by UNESCO-facilitated conferences and meetings, a diverse array of Asian and African anti-colonial activists, socialists as well as West European liberals and pacifists met and joined forces on account of a shared conviction that

---

activism see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

[8] In Tajikistan much has been written on Gafurov, who was declared a national hero of the Republic of Tajikistan in 1998 and who, in his home region Khujand, has a discipline of humanities scholarship and research named after him called "Garuvedenie". See for instance: Akhror Mukhtarov, Shavkat Sharipov, *Akademik Bobodzhan Gafurov* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1983); U. Gaffarov, *The Star of the East* (Khujand, 1998); A. Mukhtarov, *Akademik Ghafurov Bobojon Ghafurovich [in Tajik]* (Dushanbe, 1979); Shashi Bushan, *Academician Babajan Gafurov* (New Delhi: Progressive Peoples Sector Publications, 1997); Abdullo Gafurov and Kabilova Bakhrinniso (Eds.), *Akademik B. Gafurov - vydaiushchiisia issledovatel' istorii Tsentral'noi Azii / Akademik B. Ghafurov - muhaqqiqi barjastai ta'rikhi Osiioi Markazi* [Academician B. Ghafurov, a Prominent Researcher on the History of Central Asia] (Dushanbe: Akademiia nauk Respubliki Tasdzhikistan, Institut istorii, arkhologii i etnografii im. A. Donisha, 2009). As Stéphane Dudoignon asserts many of these biographies are of a polemical or hagiographical nature, see Stéphane A. Dudoignon, "Review of Gafurov, Abdullo and Kabilova Bakhrinniso, eds., *Akademik B. Gafurov - vydaiushchiisia issledovatel' istorii Tsentral'noi Azii* / Akademik B. Ghafurov - muhaqqiqi barjastai ta'rikhi Osiioi Markazi." In *Central Eurasian Reader 2* (2011).

postcolonial human society could not be reduced to a community of nations, separated along supposedly ethno-territorial lines.<sup>[9]</sup>

To show how peoples' internationalism emerged as a diverse synthesis of intellectual currents in Gafurov's work, and how it clashed and interacted with a variety of other agendas and approaches to world history, this thesis undertakes a set of close analytical and contextual studies of published historical narratives and other source material. Gafurov's life-trajectory as an intermediary provides an internally coherent interstitial archive of new or rarely used source material. In trying to disentangle the vision of peoples' internationalism, I have focused above all on Gafurov's historical writings, starting off from an in-depth analysis and comparison of the different editions of his influential book *The History of the Tajik People*.<sup>[10]</sup> Aiming to illuminate the way Gafurov's work resonated with much broader intellectual currents, I also situate Gafurov's work in relation to a wide variety of intertexts. These include publications on the history of Central Asia and Oriental studies derived from pre-revolutionary Russia, the Soviet Union, and UNESCO, as well as internal institutional documents from the archival and library-collections of the Russian and Tajik Institutes of Oriental Studies as well as various other archives and libraries in Dushanbe and Khujand (in the Republic of Tajikistan), Moscow and Kazan (in Russia), Amsterdam and Paris.

Documents preserved in the archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN) allowed me to hear Gafurov "speak" as an academic spokesperson among peers. But to grasp Gafurov's life trajectory as an international intermediary the Paris-based UNESCO archives proved an indispensable addition to the Moscow-based archives of RGANI and GARF - these allowed me to trace the affinities between anti-imperial activists

---

[9] For the contention that UNESCO and other UN-affiliated organizations served as an important arena for anti-colonial international activism, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York, The New Press: 2007). For the UN as a site of "competing universalisms" see the special issue of the *Journal of World History* edited by Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga including their introductory article, "New Histories of the United Nations," in *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 251-274.

[10] The book was published in three editions; in 1949; 1952 and 1955. Bobodzhan Gafurovich Gafurov, *Istoriia Tadzhijskogo naroda: v kratkom izlozhenii. S drevneishikh vremen do velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii 1917 g.* [The History of the Tajik People: A Handbook. From ancient times until the great October socialist revolution 1917] (Moscow: Gos. Izd'vo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1949).



across the ideological and international spectrum. The collections at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) substantiated such connections and situated them in a context of rival internationalisms.

Establishing my corpus of source material also entailed conducting extensive interviews. The personal recollections as well as private archives of friends and colleagues of Gafurov in Dushanbe, Khujand and Moscow, have framed my way of thinking, and pointed me toward the most defining aspects of Gafurov's life trajectory. As such they have had a diffuse but nevertheless profound influence on the narrative of this thesis and allowed me to situate the Soviet "East" in the wider landscape of anti-colonial forward-looking activism that inspired peoples' internationalism as a historical perspective.

Although Gafurov's life and biography provides this thesis with its central focus and temporal and spatial parameters, it is not intended as an intellectual biography. In fact, my specific aim is to chart the evolution of peoples' internationalism as it came to shape the historical narrative of Central Asia in the Soviet Union and UNESCO in the decades following Stalin's death. Accordingly, I situate this vision in relation to longer trajectories of cultural-historical thought in the Central Asian region; the ideological currents and constraints of working in the Soviet Union; and debates about the character and politics of world history in international institutions and among geopolitical allies. In each of these conjunctures, people's internationalism faced a variety of challenging intellectual responses and political barriers and biases.

This thesis begins from the premise that the content of internationalist narratives, like all human discourses, are profoundly shaped by the societal and intellectual circumstances in which they emerge and disseminate. Rather than analyzing the key texts of peoples' internationalism in isolation from their social context, they are approached through the prism of Gafurov's biography. Gafurov's life trajectory illuminates various different conjunctures that came to affect peoples' internationalism throughout the twentieth century. The concept was shaped and often constrained by a number of external forces, discourses, institutions, and circumstances, to which it had to adapt. As an official Soviet state representative, Gafurov traversed

several political and institutional contexts, and he reshaped his self-presentation in line with the current Soviet Party line. Adaptations in his public performance affected his narration of Central Asian history, reshaping peoples' internationalism at times beyond recognition. Nevertheless, Gafurov's self-styling was notoriously contradictory and ambiguous, and he used this ambiguity to continue supporting peoples' internationalism in practice.<sup>[11]</sup> For instance, when in the time of renewed political polarization and great state politics in the 1970s the language of peoples' internationalism disappeared from his public statements, he continued to work towards it in his role as an organizer of scholarship and academic networks in UNESCO. Gafurov's professional network, as such, allows us to trace the continuity in his approach at those moments when his public Soviet persona had to toe a political line contradicting peoples' internationalism.<sup>[12]</sup> His activities as an organizer of scholarship and academic intermediary show how, until Gafurov's death in 1977, peoples' internationalism remained central to Gafurov's work and career, inspiring a historical narrative of cultural heterogeneity and 'one world' transnational unity across the Euro-Asian landscape.

On the one hand this thesis contends that throughout the twentieth century peoples' internationalism was marginalized in orientalist discourse, challenged by the regionalized historical imagination that grew prominent in the Soviet humanities on the wings of modern area studies. On the other hand, it also suggests that peoples' internationalism was preserved in a human-centric approach of history that emphasizes both the local roots of culture and its global entanglement.<sup>[13]</sup>

---

[11] In emphasizing performativity I build on the work of literature scholars who draw attention to the way literary poetics may be used to reassert multi-layered identities that cut across national or imperial boundaries, see for instance Rebecca Gould, "Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out: Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 1 (2018): 170-180; Katarina Clark, *Moscow the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Harvard UP, 2011); Harsha Ram, "Review of Crucifying the Orient: Russian Orientalism and the Decolonization of the Caucasus and Central Asia, by Kalpana Sahni," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 3 (1998), 860-862.

[12] A focus on networks is advocated by Moyn and Sartori who suggest that network-study may play a crucial role in the global history of concepts for allowing to trace their circulation. See Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[13] In drawing attention to the manifestation of "peoples' internationalism" in cultural-historical scholarship this thesis aims to contribute to the reappraisal of transnational trends in humanities scholarship. For a call to acknowledge also the transnational (or "cross-regional") context of the so-called

\*

My analysis of Gafurov's biography supports the argument that in the immediate post-war period peoples' internationalism inspired an internally variegated, loosely entangled movement of anti-colonial thinkers and activists across the globe. The historical vision provided a counter-weight to ethno- and state-centric nationalism. For Central Asians like Gafurov concepts of world culture or civilisation were no distant, superimposed phenomena repressing the lived experiences of local groups. Rather than serving as an abstract notion oppressing local communities and their way of life the "global" served as an arena where the often multi-layered and multi-lingual life experiences and solidarities of Central Asian individuals and groups could be preserved and nourished. Far from being imperialist, the global project of peoples' internationalism provided an alternative to the culturally homogenizing trends of the centralized nation states and state-centric institutions.<sup>[14]</sup>

By situating Gafurov's biography in an international movement of anti-colonial historical revisionism, this thesis thus also hopes to contribute to a broader historical debate on the place of the "global" in the world decolonization movement. Most importantly, perhaps, it attempts to recover Gafurov's role, and that of Soviet Asian intermediaries like him, as creators of shared 'world community' that existed with and beyond the nation-state. On the one the hand, narratives of civilisation function prominently in this thesis. Indeed, peoples' internationalism rested on a similar set of Enlightenment assumptions about the equality of men that had also rationalized colonialism, slavery and the imperial *mission civilisatrice*. At the same time, the orientalist, archaeologists and literature scholars that formed Gafurov's close circle of colleagues

---

field of Area studies, see the introductory chapter by Matthias Middell, "Elements for a Cross-regional History of Area Studies - Introductory Remarks," in *In Search of Other Worlds: Essays towards a Cross-Regional History of Area Studies*, edited by Katja Naumann, Torsten Loschke, Steffi Marung and Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2018): 7-22. For the attempt to retrieve a transnational and potentially global approach to the history of the humanities, see Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[14] For this being part of the logic of modern state building see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

actively attempted to revise and adjust essentialist notions of cultural regions and distinct civilisations. Peoples' internationalism aimed to show how civilisations were dynamic, internally heterogeneous and rooted in everyday life experiences that did not comply with state boundaries. Perceived in this way, narratives of civilisation allowed to recognize the "fuzzy" identities of non-state communities that intersected and transcended the territorialized borders separating modern nations and states. Moreover, Gafurov's life trajectory provides the emancipatory agenda of peoples' internationalism with local roots: showing how it was inspired by local traditions of Muslim modernism and the experience of cultural revolution in Central Asia. For Gafurov as a multilingual Soviet Tajik educated in Islam, peoples' internationalism promised to preserve a sense of history, legitimacy and belonging that transcended the borders of nation-states.

By showing how the concept of peoples' internationalism adapted to different demands and contexts while continuing to inspire a disparate group of activists and thinkers from across the globe, this thesis also attempts to investigate the global as a colonial category. Gafurov's approach to Central Asian history emerged as part of a polyphonous debate on world history and culture that cut across the colonial axis, involving activists in the East and West. In emphasizing affinities between scholars, intellectuals and propagandists such as Gafurov, this thesis tries to add to a burgeoning literature that highlights a significant transnational manifestation of anti-colonial commitment within the world decolonization movement.<sup>[15]</sup> Gafurov's internationalism carved

---

[15] Historians have argued for the need to redirect attention from social and political movements towards the activities of non-state actors and movements in the study of Cold War and decolonization. See the introduction to the special issue on Afro-Asian Networks in the *Journal of World History* by Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, "Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War," in *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1 (2019): 1-19. Also see the introduction to Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake (Eds.) *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) Also see the manifesto of the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, "Manifesto: Networks of Deolonization in Asia and Africa," in *Radical History Review*, no. 131 (2018): 176-182. Also see the editorial board's "Mission Statement," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 2 (2013); as well as the introduction to Christopher J. Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio Universtity Press, 2010) and the special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* on inter-Asian non-governmental connections by Tim Harper and Sunil S. Amrith, including their introductory article "Sites of Asian Interaction: An introduction," in *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2012): 249-257..

out an infrastructure for anticolonial ‘world making’ that cut across a seemingly fragmented landscape. As such, it transcended both national and territorial borders and the axes of Cold War and colonization. This complicates the impression that decolonization as nation-state building proceeded self-evidently to the liberation of native subjectivities, and their formation as distinct territorialized institutions or states.<sup>[16]</sup>

Anti-colonial scholars and modernisers like Gafurov provided Western global visions of world humanism or civilisation with new meanings; investing them with local experiences and characteristics. In this sense, this thesis agrees with Sam Moyn and Andrew Sartori who claimed that if “the globe has been an actor’s category, it has not only been one for the colonizers.”<sup>[17]</sup> The work of Gafurov and his Central Asian colleagues emphasized the productive force of cultural, religious or non-territorial solidarities in world history, and the potential of cultural or spiritual knowledge to unite people across ethnic, religious and national traditions. Focusing on the activities of cultural or religious intermediaries in the Central Asian past, Gafurov’s historical work offers a holistic world view, where the boundaries between states and nations were vague, permeable and subject to change.

## CONJUNCTURES

In tracing Gafurov’s biography this thesis ties together disparate socio-political and intellectual conjunctures that were of influence on Gafurov’s life and the way he positioned himself intellectually throughout his career. Some of these informed and influenced peoples’

---

[16] In emphasizing the transnational (in this thesis also mentioned as “international” “internationalist”) features of anti-colonial thinking in Soviet Central Asia this thesis builds on previous works addressing the non-nationalist forms anti-colonial thinking in the East, global South or Third World initially took. For the anti-colonial project of global south elites active within the UN as framed by an “internationalist ethos” and as a form of “internationalist nationalism,” see Prasad, *The Darker Nations*: 12. For a similar argument that focuses on Indian freedom fighters, see Harald Fischer-Tiné, Indian Nationalism and the “world forces”: transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War,” in *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 325-344. For an article observing a contrast between a state-based nation-centric and a rights-based internationalist narrative of decolonization, see Sunil S. Amrith, “Asian internationalism: Bandung’s echo in a colonial metropolis,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (2005): 557-569.

[17] As quoted from Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*, 19.

internationalism; others criticised and sought to contain it. Although I go on to unpack peoples' internationalism's relation to these contexts at length in the dissertation, I lay them out here in introducing the actors and institutions that take central stage in this thesis.

First, as said, this thesis situates Gafurov's written work in an international moment of Muslim modernism and anti-Eurocentric activism. In the early twentieth century, agendas of Muslim modernism that were negotiated and debated among Central Asian intellectuals as well as circles of revolutionaries and internationalists drawn to the region in interwar period by the promise of change, reform and Revolution.<sup>[18]</sup> Across the wider Euro-Asian terrain, revolutionaries and reformers articulated vision of internationalism that were aimed to transcend the state-based visions of international community prominent in Western Europe and the US to the experiences of non-Western elites in (formerly) colonized or semi-colonized countries. Historians have argued that the internationalist visions of people like Nehru effectively marginalized other, vernacular forms of emancipatory struggle and the same may be said for Gafurov's vision of peoples' internationalism.<sup>[19]</sup> Nevertheless, Gafurov's holistic approach to world history, as this thesis shows, had strong local origins and was entangled with his experience as a bilingual Muslim moderniser and revolutionary in Central Asia. Around the globe, Muslim modernisers were confronted with Western racialized narratives of modernity and civilization. As a counter-narrative they often embraced an essentialized vision of their own heritage, which failed to recognize the varieties of Muslim vernacular life and lived experience.<sup>[20]</sup> But for Gafurov, this thesis argues, the essentialized vision of Central Asia's shared cultural heritage did more: it also restored a lived sense of non-state belonging and transnationalism symbolized by the multi-layered and multi-lingual

---

[18] For networks of reformers or revolutionaries passing through Central Asia, see Manjapra, M.N. Roy, 45-56; Raza, Roy and Zachariah (Eds.) *The Internationalist Moment*, especially the chapters by Carolien Stolte and Ali Raza. Also see Carolien Stolte, "Orienting India: Interwar Internationalism in and Asian Inflection, 1917-1937," PhD Dissertation. Leiden University, 8 October 2013, in particular chapter four.

[19] For this critique see Sudipta Kaviraj, "On State, Society and discourse in India," in *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*, edited by Sudipta Kaviraj (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 33.

[20] See Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), in particular the conclusion.

heritage of the Islamic, Turco-Mongolian heritage of the Timurid dynasty.<sup>[21]</sup> For Central Asian elites educated in Islam, and in particular those who traced their lineage to descendants of the Turco-Mongol rulers, Soviet state building had brought not just modernity but potential partition: to carve out separate ethnocentric Republics might break apart a lived, shared, multi-layered culture and the personal networks this shared sense of culture sustained.<sup>[22]</sup>

A second anti-Eurocentric influence on Gafurov's thinking in this earliest stage of his career as a spokesperson for Tajik history was the intellectual heritage of Soviet Oriental studies.<sup>[23]</sup> The intellectual affinities uniting European and Eastern reformers, modernisers and anti-colonial revolutionaries have been granted attention in literature in the past years.<sup>[24]</sup> This chapter adds to this literature, showing how Gafurov built significantly on the intellectual legacy of a critical school

[21] For the centrality of the Timurids in the self-identification of Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses," in *Journal of World History* 13, no 1 (2002): 1-25.

[22] For more on cultured networks in early Soviet Tajikistan see Flora Roberts, "Old Elites Under Communism: Soviet Rule In Leninobod," PhD Diss., The University Of Chicago, 2016.

[23] The historiography on Soviet Oriental Studies has expanded in recent years. For an important reminder of the transatlantic context in which the discipline developed, see S. Marung and K. Naumann, "The Making of Oriental Studies: Its Transnational and Transatlantic Past," in Rens Bod, Jaap Maat and Thijs Weststeijn (Eds.), *The Making of the Humanities. Volume III: The Modern Humanities* (Amsterdam University Press, 2014): 415-429. Also see Stéphane A. Dudoignon, "Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientalology," in *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Reappropriations*, edited by François Pouillion and Jean-Claude Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 121-133; as well as the special issue devoted to Soviet Iranology edited by Stephanie Cronin and Edmund Herzig, including the introductory article by Cronin, "Introduction: Edward Said, Russian Orientalism and Soviet Iranology," in *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2015): 647-662; M. Kemper and A.M. Kalinovsky (Eds.), *Reassessing Orientalism: Interlocking Orientalologies during the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2015); M. Kemper and S. Conermann (Eds.), *The heritage of Soviet Oriental studies* (London: Routledge, 2011); Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford University Press, 2011). Many works have also appeared in Russia; for an excellent recent survey of the history of Soviet Indology see L.B. Aleav, *Istoriografiia Istorii Indii* (Moscow: Institut Vostokovedeniia RAN, 2013) and Vladimir Bobrovnikov's discussion of the response to Edward Said's Orientalism in Russia: "Pochemu my marginalny? (Zametki na poliakh Russkogo perevoda "Orientalizma" Edvarda Saida)," in *Ab Imperio*, 2 (2008): 325-344. for classic surveys see N.A. Kuznetsova and L. M. Kulagina, (Eds.), *Iz istorii sovetskogo vostokovedeniia 1917-1967* (Moscow: NAUKA, 1970); A.P. Baziiants (Ed.). *Vostokovednye Tsentry V SSSR*, Two Vols. (Moscow, 1989).

[24] For affinities between activists in the colonial world and critical antimaterialistic thinkers in Western Europe, see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Kris Manjapra, "The impossible intimacies of M.N. Roy," in *Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 2 (2013): 169-184; Manjapra, M. N. Roy. For connections between antimaterialistic or "esoteric" Western thinkers and what Sedgwick calls Muslim modernizing "traditionalists," see Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of pre-revolutionary Russian Orientology. Scholars that greatly influenced his writing, such as Vasily Barthold and Alexander Semenov, defied the Eurocentric teleological assumptions of West European Oriental studies, including the insistence on Islamic backwardness and the tendency to present East and West as incommensurable civilizational blocs.<sup>[25]</sup>

A third context that influenced Gafurov's approach to internationalism was historical materialism, and in this thesis I focus in particular on the Stalinist and Maoist interpretation of the historical approach. Gafurov began to publish broadly on questions of Tajik history in Russian after the Second World War - the period of High Stalinism. Under Stalin, the rise of the modern nation-state had been canonized as part of the *piatichlenka*; the five-staged path Stalin had outlined that comprised the universal path of human historical development.<sup>[26]</sup> As Stalin embraced the nation-state as a necessary by-product of modernization, the spatial consequence of this was that the modern world was perceived as, necessarily, a community of nations.<sup>[27]</sup> In part, Gafurov's subversiveness as a post-war Soviet historian is evidenced by his consistent attempts to emphasize the value of nonmaterial conditions, and cultural or spiritual solidarities and connections as stepping-stones for community building bypassing the nation state. At the height of Stalinism, as we will see in chapter two, the *piatichlenka* left room for the idea that culture and played a relatively autonomous transformative role in the pre-historic past, but not

---

[25] In this sense, this thesis builds in particular on the work of Vera Tolz who identified a critical current of thought among Russian imperial orientalists, see Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*; also see Vera Tolz, "European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 53-81. For the anti-Eurocentric and antimaterialistic tradition of German Orientalism that may have inspired these Russian thinkers see Suzanne Marchand, "German Orientalism and the Decline of the West," in *Proceedings Of The American Philosophical Society* 145, no. 4 (2001): 465-473; to situate this in the larger context of German orientalist scholarship, see Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[26] For the *piatichlenka* and its effects on historiography see David Brandenberger and Mikhail V. Zelenov, "Stalin's Answer to the National Question: A Case Study on the Editing of the 1938 Short Course," in *Slavic Review* 73, no. 4 (2014): 859-880.

[27] For Stalin's politics of modernization as nation-formation, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations And Nationalism In The Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2005). In my focus on the spatial effects in Tajik historiography my analysis also builds on the work of Alfred Rieber who argued that Stalinism produced a particular regionally spatialized imagination of state-based development, see Alfred Rieber, "Stalin, Man of the Borderlands," in *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (2001): 1651-1691.



in later periods, when such solidarities were thought to have developed through the prisms of historical materialism and socialist statecraft.<sup>[28]</sup>

A fourth conjuncture that influenced Gafurov's historical work was the cultural and intellectual thaw in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death, and more particularly the way this opened new opportunities to engage with decolonizing elites and activists in Africa and Asia. Gafurov was installed as director of the Institute for Oriental Studies in Moscow in 1956. This was a time when the new Soviet leadership sought to construct allies in the decolonizing world and this had a profound effect on Gafurov's career.<sup>[29]</sup> As an expert on "Asian" (Tajik) history and director of a prestigious academic institute, Gafurov acquired seats on the Soviet Committee for Solidarity with the Countries of Asia and Africa (SKSSAA) at the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and the Soviet Committee at the UNESCO Major Project for Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Values (East West Project).<sup>[30]</sup> His activities

---

[28] While Stalin's approach of history was not crudely materialistic, it did prioritize an understanding of national culture as rooted, vernacular and local. For Stalin's vision of national culture, see Erik van Ree, "Heroes and Merchants: Stalin's understanding of National Character," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 1 (2007): 41-65. For how the development of a Stalinist culture as social conduct and etiquette was interconnected with processes of state centralization see Vadim Volkov, "The concept of kul'turnost': notes on the Stalinist civilizing process," in *Stalinism New Directions*, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick, 210-230 (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[29] In recent years historians have been drawing attention to the way destalinization heralded a new phase in Soviet and Eastern European relations with the decolonizing world, greatly enhancing the visibility of "Asians" in the Soviet system. For works emphasizing how Soviet "Eastern" representatives from the Caucasus and Central Asia played important roles as cultural intermediaries, even already in Stalin's time, see See James Pickett, "Soviet Civilization through a Persian lens: Iranian Intellectuals, Cultural Diplomacy and Socialist Modernity 1941-55," in *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 5 (September 2015): 805-826; Eren Tasar, "Soviet Politics towards Islam: Domestic and International Considerations," in *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012): 168-169 [158-181]; Artemy Kalinovsky, "Not some British Colony in Africa: The Politics of Decolonization and Modernization in Soviet Central Asia, 1955-1964," in *Ab Imperio* 2 (2013): 191-222; Mascha Kirasirova, "'Sons of Muslims' in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian mediators to the Foreign East, 1955-1962," in *Ab Imperio* 4 (2011): 106-132; Hanna Jansen, "Negotiating Russian Imperial Aryanism? Soviet Oriental Studies in the Cold War," in *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, edited by Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015): 145-166.

[30] For recent work on the AAPSO as a space for international engagement, see the special issue of the *Journal of World History* edited by Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, including their introductory article "Other Bandungs"; and Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Nada Boškova (Eds.) *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade*. (New York: Routledge, 2014). For a focus on the Afro-Asian Writers Association see Rossen Djagalov, "The People's Republic of Letters: Towards a Media History of Twentieth-Century Socialist Internationalism," PhD diss., Yale University, 2011. For the UNESCO East-West Project, see Laura Wong, "Relocating East and West: UNESCO's Major Project on the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values," in *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008):

within these organizations brought him in touch with the cultural and intellectual elites of decolonizing states. Gafurov was able to rally Soviet resources and influence in support of an international project of historical revisionism supported by leading figures in the decolonizing world, above all the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Finding a foothold in UNESCO, these figures aimed to establish an alternative narrative of Afro-Asian history and humanism that served to correct Western Eurocentric models of humanism and civilization as well as ethnocentric nation-state-building.<sup>[31]</sup>

Soviet and Asian diplomacy had successfully opened UNESCO's doors to a historical revisionist project that emphasized peoples' internationalism on a global scale. While the mid-1950s can therefore be seen as a crystallizing moment for peoples' internationalism in world historical practice, its initial success did not spread. On the one hand, a changing mindset in the socialist camp abated support for it on the side of the Soviets. Fears of revisionism were fanned in the Chinese Peoples' Republic as well as Eastern European Satellite States and in the late 1950s Gafurov was forced to abandon much of the revisionist cultural-historical research agenda at the Institute for Oriental Studies.<sup>[32]</sup> At the same time in UNESCO a similarly materialistic state-based national and regional mindset was on the rise. In the 1960s a Parsonian development paradigm

---

349-374; as well as Laura Wong, "Cultural Agency: UNESCO's Major Project on the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Values, 1957-1966," PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2006.

[31] For the activities of former colonials in international organizations, see the excellent special issue of *Comparativ* edited by Klaas Dykmann and Katja Naumann, including their introductory article "Changes from the 'Margins'. Non-European Actors, Ideas, and Strategies in International Organizations: Introduction," in *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 23, no. 4-5 (2013): 9-20. For a focus on UNESCO, see Chloe Maurel, "Internationalization and Decentering of UNESCO: Representation and Influence of 'Non-Western' Countries, 1945-1987," in *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 23, no. 4-5 (2013): 68-117. In recent years attention for the activities of Asian and African actors in international organizations has been growing. See also the recently published volume, Poul Duehahl (Ed.), *History of UNESCO: Global Actions and Impacts* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), with chapter five and twelve focusing on Japanese actors, chapter 11 on Mexican, chapter 13 on Egyptian, and chapter fifteen on Chinese actors. For Soviet Central Asian anti-colonial and internationalist activism in UNESCO, see Hanna Jansen, "Soviet 'Afro-Asians' in UNESCO: Reorienting World History.," in *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1 (2019): 193-221.

[32] For the growing rivalry between the PRC and USSR in the second half of the 1950s, see Austin Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance: an International History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: the Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

challenged the view that modern processes of human integration might be achieved through practices of cultural reform and revisionism on a non-state basis.<sup>[33]</sup> As it turned out, both socialist and capitalist worlds ended up championing a “realist” worldview skeptical towards the idea of internationalism beyond the nation-state. Focusing on Gafurov’s activities in UNESCO, we will see how new functionaries in the 1960s and 1970s served to reassert an imagination of the global as a territorialized community of nations carved up by their particular spheres of influence, thus facilitating the marginalization of peoples’ internationalism and its near disappearance from the archive of universal history.<sup>[34]</sup>

## GAFUROV: A SHORT INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

Having briefly traced the content of peoples’ internationalism, as well as outlined the different conjunctures that constitute the case-studies in this research, the remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. In order to situate peoples’ internationalism in its original context, the following section offers a brief genealogy of Gafurov’s life and work on Tajik history, tracing the shifts in his intellectual biography and acknowledging how they responded to the particular intellectual and political climate of the time. This will be followed by a section situating peoples’ internationalism in a context of rival internationalisms. A

---

[33] For the growing influence of a development model based on the thinking of Talcott Parsons on American foreign politics in the 1960s, see Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy administration*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2000): esp. 30-39. For this model growing dominant within the UN, see for instance Sandrine Kott, “Cold War Internationalism,” in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, edited by G. Sluga and P. Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 340-362.

[34] This trend towards the territorial compartmentalization of culture was part of a broad shift in the world social sciences, see Timothy Mitchell, “The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science.” In *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, edited by David Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 74-118. For social scientists getting involved with the UNESCO’s East-West Project’s programming, see Laura Wong, “Cultural Agency,” 133-135. For historical accounts emphasizing the difficulty of retrieving the internationalist imagination of historical movements after their institutionalization, see internationalist character of historical movements were lost from the historical archive due to their institutionalization see, Raza, Roy and Zachariah (Eds.) *The Internationalist Moment*. For this argument focused on the example of the socialist internationalist imagination, see Patrizia Dorligiani, “The Fate of Socialist and Twentieth-Century Internationalism,” in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, edited by G. Sluga and P. Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 38-60.

third section elaborates the tension between the model of modernity that inspired peoples internationalism and the one that inspired Soviet state-building efforts. Finally, a fourth section focuses on the broad significance of the peoples' internationalism as an approach to world history and its politicization in the era of Cold War.

All of the chapters in this thesis focus to different degrees on Gafurov's life and work. In my analysis of Gafurov's biography I have focused on his role as a public educator and spokesperson for peoples' internationalism rather than that of Party leader or NKVD informer.<sup>[35]</sup> He performed this role in various societal contexts: as Tajik Party leader, Tajik historian, Soviet Party propagandist, director of a central academic institute in Moscow, and as Soviet representative at the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization and UNESCO.

While Gafurov's biography will be treated in greater detail in the chapters of this thesis, I will focus my attention here on why Gafurov's writings are best understood, not as simply resisting or complying with Soviet modernization efforts, but within a broader context of multiple overlapping conversations that extended across and beyond the Soviet Union, contributing to an agenda of anti-colonial world making.<sup>[36]</sup> It is this thesis' contention that Gafurov was part of a wider, internally variegated movement of anti-colonial activists who presented the emancipation of non-Western peoples as beneficial for world culture and modernity as a whole. This section teases out the continuities in Gafurov's writings and public performances. While Gafurov's self-presentation and language changed profoundly at times, there was a surprising consistency to his practical work on the whole. Despite the reversals I have indicated above, within the context of Gafurov's biography peoples' internationalism

[35] For glimpses into this more hidden part of Gafurov's life, see for instance Dudoignon, "Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientology"; as well as Dudoignon, "Review of Gafurov, Abdullo and Kabilova Bakhrinniso."

[36] I thus depart from the dominant perspective within Central Asian historiography that tends to analyse the history of the region through the prism of Russian / Soviet empire. Historians of the former communist space have begun to draw attention the central historical roles played by regions that have traditionally been regarded as peripheral; on the edge of empire. Kalinovsky, for instance, emphasizes the global contexts in which Central Asian / Tajik planners and economists moved, see Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*. Ithaca; London Cornell University Press, 2018. For an excellent work re-situating Eastern Europe into a global context, see James Mark, Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobia Rupprecht, Ljubica Skaskovska, 1989: *A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

managed to circumvent the ebb and flow of the Soviet ideological climate.

Gafurov began his career in cultural education (in Soviet rhetoric "enlightenment") in the mid 1920s. At the time, the Tajik Republic was still a part of the larger Republic of Uzbekistan, due to the mixed historical and cultural (Islamic) ancestry of the Uzbeks and Tajiks.<sup>[37]</sup> In 1929 the independent Tajik Republic was set up and Gafurov moved to the capital of republic, where he soon became one of the central figures in Soviet Party propaganda and agitation circles. He rose through the ranks of the Tajik Party and by the mid-1940s he was installed as First Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party.

As this thesis highlights, this was a period of international optimism: the war had ended, and in Asia anti-colonial activists felt that change was underway in the British Empire. In Europe, meanwhile, anticolonial and pacifist activists came together and began to negotiate agendas of culture rejuvenation aimed to avoid the horrors of war for the future. Soviet scholars trained in the academic field of Orientalology / Oriental studies (or: orientalists, the term I use consistently throughout this thesis to denote scholars of Asian, North African and Middle Eastern history and culture) participated in transnational conversations with these groups.<sup>[38]</sup> Academically trained orientalists became important

---

[37] For an excellent recent contribution to the body of literature investigating efforts at Central Asian nation-building in the region of what is now Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, see Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, And Revolution In The Early USSR* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2015). For a recent account analysing processes of Central Asian statebuilding through the prism of Uzbek cinematography see Cloé Drieu, *Cinema, Nation and Empire in Uzbekistan, 1919-1937*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018). For classical works addressing Tajik nation-building, see Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: the Case of Tadzhikistan* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); Lutz Rzehak, *Vom Persischen Zum Tadschikischen. Sprachliches Handeln und Sprachplanung in Transoxanien zwischen Tradition, Moderne und Sowjetmacht (1900-1956)* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2001); Reinhard Eisener, "Some Problems of Research Concerning the National Delimitation of Soviet Central Asia in 1924," in *Bamberger Mittelasienstudien*, edited by Bert Fragner (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1994): 109-117.

[38] The creation of cross-border spaces was part of a distinct Soviet policy to allow transmitting knowledge on Soviet nationality to the outside world, as well as showcasing the successes of Soviet nationality politics. For the first approach, see Gilles Riaux, *Ethnicité et nationalisme en Iran: La cause azerbaïdjanaise* (Paris: Karthala (Meydan), 2012), 76-89. For the second, see Terry Martin, "Borders and Ethnic Conflict: The Soviet Experiment in Ethno-Territorial Proliferation," in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47, no. 4 (1999): 538-555. A note on terminology: in English the word "Vostok" may be translated both as "Orient" and "East". Following the example of M. Kemper and S.A. Dudoignon I distinguish my use of the term "Oriental studies" as describing a specific academic discipline from Edward Said's use of the term "Orientalism" as indicating processes of subjectivization and essentialization through the reproduction of Imperial hierarchies in scholarly and cultural

intermediaries connecting Gafurov's personal and professional networks in Tajikistan with these circles of anti-colonial activist circles abroad. While the focus of this thesis is on discourses of peoples' internationalism rather than professional and institutional networks, the thesis does, nevertheless, situate Gafurov in a larger pool of like-minded colleagues and friends who pursued similar agendas of international unity through world cultural reform and modernization and the emancipation of marginalized groups and traditions. By 1947 Gafurov published the first edition of the officially endorsed Soviet Tajik history for a broad audience. This book and the many editions that followed it, I contend, was centrally animated by a vision of peoples' internationalism that also inspired the agendas of various anti-colonial, pacifist circles in Europe and Asia.

When the USSR experienced a period of intellectual and cultural thaw after Stalin's death, Soviet orientalists had the chance to rekindle their relations with internationalist circles abroad. In this period, Gafurov was installed as director of the IVAN, a move at least partly inspired by the USSR's new diplomatic mission toward the decolonizing world. In Nikita Khrushchev's "Break to the East," India played an important role, and in the mid-1950s Soviet orientalists threw their weight behind Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's international agenda of decolonization and solidarity in the mid-1940s. Soviet academics and political intermediaries played an important role in advancing an anti-Eurocentric turn in UNESCO, initiated by Asian states such as Japan and India in pursuit of their own agendas. This reorientation opened up space for Asian and African states to kick-start a project of anti-colonial history-writing on a global scale. As director of the prestigious academic Institute for Oriental Studies, Gafurov was able to participate in these negotiations and to emphasize a Soviet perspective on the place of Central Asia in world history. The internationalist element in the vision overlapped with that of

---

representations of the Orient, see Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Again in line with Kemper and Dudoignon I use the term Oriental Studies for describing the Soviet tradition of academic scholarship on the countries of the East, and the term Orientology for the Russian and European Imperial traditions, see the description of the international research project "The Legacy of Soviet Oriental Studies: Networks, Institutions, Discourses", directed by M. Kemper and S.A. Dudoignon and funded by the NWO (The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research), project number: 360-52-110.

state leaders in the East, such as Nehru, who sought the emancipation of the Third World in politics as well as world civilization, while ultimately supporting a universalist worldview.

As indicated above, to present Gafurov's oeuvre as inspired by peoples' internationalism goes against the grain of most of the English-language works on his life and work, and on the life and work of Soviet Central Asian state figures. Gafurov has often been portrayed as an ardent Stalinist, and for much of the postwar period historiography on Soviet nationalities policy has tended to present him first and foremost as a representative of the Soviet or Tajik state. While some appreciate how his intermediary activities served the interests of the Tajik Republic vis-à-vis Moscow (or the other Central Asian Republics, notably Uzbekistan), others note how they contributed to Soviet objectives as a neocolonial empire or to his own objectives as a careerist. This thesis adopts, perhaps, a more generous approach to Gafurov's activities. On the one hand, it presents Gafurov as a cultural nationalist working towards the cultural emancipation of Central Asians. In the 1920s, he was active in circles of cultural education and propaganda and in these years of radical and almost giddy experimentation, most radical activists in Central Asia rallied around an idea of emancipation within the context of nation states.<sup>[39]</sup> His idea of the nation, however, was ambiguous. Within the anti-colonial conversations of the interwar period, the question of what constituted a nation was still open to debate and did not yet exclude a notion of non-territorial solidarity based on a Muslim identity and international consciousness - both basic elements that defined Gafurov's historical perspective.<sup>[40]</sup> This thesis defines Gafurov's work as famed by an internationalist agenda first. In his public roles as an educator he consistently emphasized how local and national enlightenment contributed to a larger goal of community building beyond the state. Similarly in his historical work he consistently situated Tajik history in a

---

[39] Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*.

[40] For a recent project researching the ambiguous and international dimensions of the visions of early Bengali anti-colonial nationalists, see the oral history project *Oral Histories of Decolonisation: Bengali Intellectuals, Memory and the Archive*, directed by Kris Manjappa, Nellesh Bose and Iftekhar Iqbal, in particular the introductory article to a special issue devoted to the project by Kris Manjappa, "Third World Humanities from South Asian Perspectives: An Oral History Approach, South Asia," in *Journal of South Asian Studies* 41, no 4, (2018): 828-845.

broad context of overlapping traditions, seeing Tajik culture as a segment of a larger world civilisation or humanism.

In his influential essay on the Soviet model of modernity, Terry Martin suggested that in the construction of the Stalinist state, Soviet modernisers celebrated the ethno-cultural traditions of Soviet peoples in order to construct a sense of shared identity for the Soviet population and forestall the threat of nationalism.<sup>[41]</sup> Gafurov's writings follow a different path: while Stalin celebrated the rooted ethnic traditions that did not conflict with Soviet state-centrism, Gafurov's writings emphasize precisely the "spiritual" or non-territorial heritage of the Central Asian Tajiks - presenting the territorialized traditions of local communities in a larger context of transformative cultural solidarities that bypassed the nation-state.<sup>[42]</sup> While some of Gafurov's writings emphasize how ethnic cultural traditions transcend political divisions, his primary concern was on acknowledging Islamic cultural heritages as a source of world making. For him, and the academics and ideologues he worked with, national differences were balanced by a non-territorial as well as international (or: transnational) conception of world entanglement. It was this approach to culture as heterogeneous and multi-layered that inspired the historical vision and interdisciplinary research method of peoples' internationalism.

Alongside highlighting the subversiveness of Gafurov's historical approach within the context of Soviet historiography and state-centric narratives of nationalism, this thesis shows how Gafurov's attempts at non-territorial world making formed part of an international historical moment and movement. His commitment to spiritual transcendence fed into a larger critique of Western modernity that inspired many anti-colonial intellectual elites across the Euro-Asian terrain. Soviet

---

[41] Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," in Sheila Fitzpatrick (Ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 348-367

[42] Masha Kirasirova's observation that the same was the case for the writing of the Iranian emigre poet Abdulqasim Lahuti suggests that this was customary throughout the Popular Front period. While Kirasirova productively shows that on the policy level Gafurov had to actively reject such approaches in the period of late Stalinism, this thesis' analysis of his writing illustrates that he never completely abandoned this approach and continued to perpetuate it throughout the height of Stalin's anti-cosmopolitan campaign. See Masha Kirasirova, "My Enemy's Enemy: Consequences of the CIA Operation against Abulqasim Lahuti," 1953-54;" in *Iranian Studies* 50, no. 3: 439-465,



Eurocentric approaches of the modern reproduced a teleological concept of historical development that took the emergence of the nation-state as a prerequisite for modernity.<sup>[43]</sup> Gafurov, by contrast, emphasized the role of non-territorial solidarities in the creation of community; both in the past and in the present. Awareness of one's cultural and spiritual history and heritage could serve to construct solidarities on a new, transnational basis and allow communities to pass by the stage of modern capitalist nation-state formation. From this perspective, Gafurov's insistence on non-territorial or religious solidarities and traditions served to also disassociate modernity from Westernization and in particular, from the Westphalian model of the nation-state.

To recapitulate, Gafurov's biography places him at the center of a revisionist attempt to rewrite world history in the spirit of peoples' internationalism. Destalinization allowed Soviet orientalist to activate an international project of historical revisionism that emphasized the role of formerly colonized peoples in the creation of world civilization and modernity. It was through Gafurov's dual role as representative to UNESCO and director that the IVAN that Moscow became a central node on the map of peoples' internationalism, which recognized the value of non-territorial solidarities and commitments in the modern era.

## RIVAL INTERNATIONALISMS

The previous section focussed on Gafurov's biography and vision of peoples' internationalism. While harbouring roots in the pre-Revolutionary interwar period, peoples' internationalism was activated on a global scale after World War Two: a period in which visions of transitional/global affiliations proliferated. Its historical significance emerges, not when seen in isolation, but from its interaction with the variety of other internationalisms. The purpose of this section, then, is to situate Gafurov's internationalist agenda in relation to other forms of internationalism - its European liberal and communist equivalents (or adversaries) in particular.

Firstly, Gafurov being a Soviet citizen, this section serves to explain

[43] Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism?"

how peoples' internationalism departed from socialist internationalism. In the USSR and wider socialist bloc, narratives of peoples' internationalism had a powerful competitor in proletarian internationalisms that regarded solidarities based on culture or spirituality as superstructural; the mere byproduct of fundamental socio-economic processes. In this comparison, the adjective "peoples" might raise some confusion, as often in historiography the term "people" is used as a popular denominator of the working class (aka: people's press). Throughout the thesis I will therefore use the term proletarian internationalism for socialist / Marxist visions of internationalism. Nevertheless, the two internationalisms sometimes overlapped. One point of convergence, obviously, being that both peoples' internationalism and proletarian internationalism rejected the nation as a meaningful category in the world historical progress, and aimed to ultimately deconstruct the boundaries separating nations and races. While in the interwar period both drew support from the same networks of Comintern-circulating individuals it is useful to distinguish between the two types of internationalisms for the sake of analysis. These distinctions become clearer if we approach proletarian internationalism through its post-Leninist incarnations of Stalinism and Maoism.

One basic point on which Stalinism (and later Maoism) could not agree with peoples' internationalism was the latter's emphasis on an inner revolution or a revolution of the mind. In its aim to revolutionize society, peoples' internationalism insisted on the revolutionary qualities of culture; most specifically the imagination. It counted on the ability of cultural and intellectual elites to activate a revolution of the mind through education or artistic inspiration. Stalinism, by contrast, aimed to transform society at its material base; a cultural revolution was to take place through society and its institutions first. A revolution of the mind should follow from more concrete societal changes or it would encourage a false consciousness, as had been the case with the Imperial *mission civilisatrice*.

Another point on which the Stalinist incarnation of proletarian internationalism disagreed with peoples' internationalism was the latter's implicit holism. In the view of the cultural historians, philologists and humanists supporting this historical vantage point human values and creative abilities were universal. While cultural trends and values differed

across time and place, they also overlapped and were potentially global in scope. Stalin however aimed to further revolutionize society through processes of communist state development based on rational planning.<sup>[44]</sup> This demanded the categorization of Soviet society into separate ethno-national constituencies.<sup>[45]</sup> As evidenced by Stalin's politics of socialism in one country (1924-1926) and the "anti-cosmopolitan campaigns" of the late 1940s this process of compartmentalization brought on new power hierarchies. Stalin's vision of the USSR as a Russocentric multinational state with firm territorial and cultural borders stood in sharp contrast with peoples' internationalisms defiant rejection of mechanisms of ethnic, cultural, or spiritual compartmentalization.

In its emphasis on non-territoriality, peoples' internationalism was also distinct from dominant forms of international thinking in the capitalist world. The liberal internationalism that grew dominant within the UN from the late 1950s onwards presented the modern, rationally organized nation-state as a stable foundation of world international relations.<sup>[46]</sup> To envision internationalism as the interaction and exchange of particular nation-states left little room for an internationalism based on the liminal experience of multi-layered, multilingual identities of non-state communities and groups. Under the influence of the UN, a functionalist development paradigm soon eclipsed other forms of anti-colonial activism in the Third World.<sup>[47]</sup> In UNESCO, this served to marginalize a program of peoples' internationalism that aimed to create change through cultural historical education and research.

---

[44] For Stalin never completely rejecting the role of culture in history, see Erik van Ree, "Stalin and the National Question," in *Revolutionary Russia* 7 No. 2 (1994): 229 [215-238].

[45] For how Central Asian historical narratives were meant to fit the national mould; Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan* (2015)

[46] Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*.

[47] Kaviraj, "On State, Society and Discourse in India."

## THE ROLE OF THE NATION-STATE IN WORLD HISTORY AND CULTURE

At the heart of my argument is the interplay between rhetorics and politics based on the modern state on the one hand, and a world vision as articulated in peoples' internationalism on the other. As set forth in the above, statism presented peoples' internationalism with challenges and set backs throughout its development: in the Stalinist USSR, in Soviet dealings with the PRC, and at UNESCO. In the works of historians and orientalists this tension was projected onto historical narrative: was it regional power centres (the state) or diffuse cultural exchanges (internationalism) that brought people together?

Despite the challenges and setbacks Gafurov continued to work to advance peoples' internationalism on a global scale until the end of his life. His personal commitment and drive suggests that peoples' internationalism was more than an abstract methodological question to him. Despite his internationally mobile lifestyle, this thesis regard his commitments as locally rooted; as strongly influenced by very close to home convictions and experiences. Highlighting those moments in Gafurov's intellectual biography where he actively rejected ethnic and racial divisions, this thesis suggests that his commitment was towards the cause of trans-ethnic community, a notion that cultural solidarities could not be reduced to ethno-centric or state based connections. His biography suggests that this commitment derived at least from a desire to preserve culture; an awareness that his multi-lingual identity was challenged by the rise of the Soviet nation-state, as well his sense of belonging as a member of a transnational cultured Muslim elite who derived much of its status and sense of place in the world from its regional Turco-Mongolian Islamic heritage.<sup>[48]</sup>

Below I will analyse how this focus on Gafurov's life experience as

---

[48] For continuities of Islamic lineages and solidarities in Central Asia in the Soviet period see the work of Stéphane Dudoignon, for instance Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Ariane Zevaco, "Sur le 'mail des rhapsodes': Sociabilités, traditionnelles, groupes de statut, ethnies minoritaires en Asie Centrale soviétique," in *Asiatischen Studien / Études Asiatiques* LXIII, no. 2 (2009): 273-321; also see the contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* on cultural change in Muslim Eurasia edited by Devin DeWeese, Paolo Sartori and Jeff Eden, including their introduction, "Moving Beyond Modernism: Rethinking Cultural Change in Muslim Eurasia (19th-20th Centuries)," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016): 1-36.

a multi-lingual and cultured Central Asian stood in tension with Soviet practices of statecraft. In seeking to recognize the local knowledge and life experience of living communities and groups this thesis hopes to accommodate the historiography of Soviet Central Asia and that of Soviet Orientology.<sup>[49]</sup> In the Soviet Union, as in Western Europe, modern statecraft rested on the rational categorization and ordering of society for the attainment of a optimally organized state, with a well-functioning redistributive system.<sup>[50]</sup> Historians have emphasized how the Soviet promise for affirmative action stimulated competition between Republican elites for the distribution of resources.<sup>[51]</sup> Terry Martin famously presented the USSR as an "affirmative action" empire.<sup>[52]</sup> Francine Hirsch illuminated in particular how Stalinist state was reorganized as a multi-national state system, categorizing its population according to ethnic groups based on language, territory, history, way of life - traced to patterns and trends in material culture.<sup>[53]</sup> Next to that, this thesis suggests, elites also sought for the recognition of multi-layered identities and local experiences that could not be compartmentalized in particular, territorially situated Republics.

While suggesting that the Soviet model of state-based modernization failed to accommodate local experience, this thesis foregrounds one experience in particular: that of a multilingualism elite that didn't identify according to ethnic lines (often being of mixed ethnic ancestry) and was formed by a Muslim consciousness as well as legitimating narrative that transcended the boundaries of nation-states. This element was specific for Gafurov's biography and converged on points with the life-world of many others populating his professional networks. For instance, Joseph Braginsky, Gafurov's mentor in the 1930s

---

[49] For the argument that state-based practices of high-modernism and revolutionary planning should be recognized as imperialist if failing to recognize the local knowledge and life experience of living communities and groups, see Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 1-11.

[50] Whether the Soviet project of modernity should be viewed as alternative to the Western, capitalist modernity project, has been the subject of some controversy in historiography. For a good overview of this debate, see Michael David-Fox, "Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History," in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54, no. 4 (2006): 535-555. The body of literature on Soviet state- and cultural engineering has been extensive. For a seminal work see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1995).

[51] Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development*.

[52] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

[53] Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.

was internationalist and cultural propagandist who sought to overcome vernacular communalisms by emphasizing cross-border links and connections in local and global (including, obviously, Russian) literatures. Similarly, the work of Boris Litvinsky, Tajik leading archaeologist and Gafurov's alleged ghostwriter of the late 1960s and 1970s, underscored how Central Asians had contributed to the evolution of an alternative "Oriental" civilisation.

Gafurov's writings consistently emphasized the richness of the multi-layered heritage of Turco-Mongol Timurid culture, which, as a Tajik, he was hardly in a position to cherish as part of his own cultural past. Narratives of internationalism beyond the state allowed him to embrace both a modern Tajik identity and a Turco-Mongolian Islamic heritage. In the logic of the Stalinist state's order, the multilingual ethnically inclusive identities of Central Asian cultured families were suddenly marginalized, or presented as a sign of conservative neo-traditionalism. Gafurov's writings on the Timurid cultural heritage, for instance, has been seen by historians as an act of appropriation; signalling the growing nationalist competition with the Uzbeks over a largely shared cultural heritage.<sup>[54]</sup> While nationalist competition did indeed arise, this thesis does not read Gafurov's biography accordingly. To do so would reassert precisely the anachronistic nation-state centric approach to culture that Gafurov strove to decenter in his work. Rather, by situating Gafurov's writings in a broader context of Muslim modernization and cultural revolution, this thesis suggests that his cultural nationalism fed into a larger polyphonic debate that aimed to reconcile transnational heritages and identities with practices of modern state building.

To recapitulate, Gafurov's academic pursuits in the area of peoples' internationalism drew upon the language of world civilization and supra-ethnic, supra-religious unity in the service of agendas closer to home. This does not mean that his internationalist agenda was necessarily anti-statist. Gafurov, for instance, seemed to take the potential use of

---

[54] Marlène Laruelle, "The Concept of Ethnogenesis in Central Asia: Political Context and Institutional Mediators (1940–50)," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 169-188. For how similar mechanisms played out among Turkic Republics in Central Asia, see Victor Shnirelman, "Aryans or Proto-Turks? Contested Ancestors in Contemporary Central Asia," in *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 5 (2009): 557-587.

a centrally governed redistributive welfare state for granted. However, this thesis contends, his activism was focused elsewhere: it aimed for the recognition, by the state and through the appeal to a higher order, of a particular local experiences of internationalism as transcendence. Gafurov's biography suggests, indeed, that peoples' internationalism allowed him, as a multi-layered and multi-lingual Central Asian local, to find a place of belonging beyond the ethno-centric nation state.

## THE ROLE OF CULTURE

Above I have argued that peoples' internationalism provided a space where local multi-layered (multi-lingual, supra-religious) identities could be recognized, bypassing the logic of enumeration and measurement that characterized the Soviet state building project. This perspective draws heavily from the work of historians of Southeast Asia. As Kris Manjapra, Benjamin Zachariah and Sunil Amrith suggest, for instance, anti-colonialism was not a univocal ideal, and many radical anti-colonial modernist, reformist or revolutionary activists in the decolonizing world were critical of nationalist interpretations of modernity for its failure to recognize other identities and solidarities. Scholars including Leela Gandhi, Ali Raza, and Carolien Stolte have also shown how anti-colonial activists from British India had strong affinity with the worldviews and imaginations of critical internationalists across the spatially and temporally divided terrain of Euro-Asia.

When perceived through the prism of Gafurov's biography peoples' internationalism had strong affinities with 'one world' efforts of the earliest generation of UNESCO functionaries.<sup>[55]</sup> This thesis highlights in particular the connections between Eastern and Western projects of historical revisionism aimed to reimagine world modernity and civilization on an equal, inclusive basis.<sup>[56]</sup> Soviet orientalist participated

---

[55] For such efforts, see Glenda Sluga, "UNESCO and the (One) World of Julian Huxley," in *Journal of World History*, 21, no. 3 (2010): 395.

[56] The project to rewrite world history on a non-national anti-colonial basis was central to the UNESCO post-war program. See for instance, Inés Dussel and Christian Ydese, "Unesco and the Improvement of History Textbooks in Mexico, 1945-1960," in *A History of UNESCO: Global Actions and*

in the India-initiated attempt too rewrite the history of Asia in UNESCO. They aimed to correct the historical approach of prominent UNESCO personalities such as Julian Huxley, the organisation's first Director-General, whose scientific humanism they criticized for failing to highlight the world's historical civilizations but failed to emphasize the agency of minority or oppressed communities.<sup>[57]</sup>

In the background of Gafurov's efforts to advance peoples' internationalism through the confines of UNESCO, thus, played out a broader discussion on the place of culture or humanism in history. Even historians believing in the value of cultural trends and tradition that transcended the nation state disagreed on how to define such traditions. For instance, as Cemil Aydin has recently pointed out, historians like Arnold Toynbee, tended to look at the world's civilizations as essentialized entities.<sup>[58]</sup> Such views were criticized by Marxist or left-leaning historians who approached culture as manmade and therefore historically dynamic. In order to speak to all of mankind, they argued, a larger humanist canon or civilisation should acknowledge the entanglement and dynamism of local experience. How to conceptualize global cultural or intellectual phenomena is still the object of debate in various disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. What this thesis adds is one particular historical case study that illustrates how in UNESCO of the 1970s a rising functionalist state-base mindset served to marginalize global approaches of history and culture.

For Gafurov, literature studies in particular served to capture the non-territorial, multi-layered nature of modern processes of identity formation. The world republic of letters provided a space where multi-

---

*Impacts*, edited by Poul Duedahl (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016): 231-256; Thomas Nygren, "UNESCO Teaches History: Implementing International Understanding in Sweden," in *A History of UNESCO: Global Actions and Impacts*, edited by Poul Duedahl (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016): 201-230. For a focus on UNESCO's History of Mankind project, see Paul Betts, "Humanity's New Heritage: UNESCO and the Rewriting of World History," in *Past and Present*, no. 228 (August 2015): 249-285; Poul Duedahl, "Selling Mankind: UNESCO and the Invention of Global History, 1945-1976," in *Journal of World History*, 22, no. 1 (March 2011): 101-133.

[57] For more on Julian Huxley's worldview, see Sluga, "UNESCO and the (One) World of Julian Huxley."

[58] As Cemil Aydin has recently argued the rhetoric of cultural solidarity beyond the state often encouraged a cultural essentialism that lay at the basis of current geopolitical oppositions between the West and a variety of anti-Western "Asian," "Muslim," or "neo-traditional" worlds. See Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*.



layered identities and solidarities could be recognized. To approach literature as a space for anti-colonial activism provides political meaning to the current debate on the nature of world literature. The current tendency to view non-Western literatures almost exclusively from within their own “territorialized” units of national history or religious studies results from an ethical and anti-colonial incentive. Nevertheless, from the perspective of a multi-layered and multilingual groups whose cultural affinities stretch beyond such fixed compartmentalizations, this tendency seems to deny non-Western intellectuals a place in broader trends of traditions. Recently, Rebecca Gould, who is an expert on the notoriously multi-layered literary heritage of the South Caucasian proposed to focus on the “multilingual locals” in order to move beyond the “monolingual frames of reference” that have been central to European traditions of literary analysis.<sup>[59]</sup> Indeed, this thesis’ survey of Gafurov’s life trajectory as a multilingual actor of peoples’ internationalism hopes to circumvent the, in Gould’s words, “constraints imposed by a nation-state model that makes territory coterminous with linguistic and ethnic identity”<sup>[60]</sup> and to provide new insights to question the tools and timeframes of Eurocentric modernity.

## CHAPTERS

The chapters in this thesis are organized chronologically as well as thematically; and their sequence follows the successive conjunctures outlined above.

The first chapter situates Gafurov’s first Russian-language publications in a larger context of his experience growing up in a time of anti-colonial upheaval and radical modernism in Russian Turkestan. Gafurov came of age in a phase of radical cultural and societal Revolution and Stalinist state-building, including terror. We start following Gafurov’s writings in the 1930s, when he stood at the beginning of his career within the Tajik Communist Party. In the 1930s and 1940s, Central

---

[59] Rebecca Gould, “Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out: Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics,” in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 1 (2018): 172.

[60] Ibid.

Asian Revolutionaries were confronted with an aggressively advanced politics of nation-building, a top-down agenda that sought to construct primordialist identities for the Soviet Republics.<sup>[61]</sup> This chapter presents Gafurov as a multilingual local whose identity served to blur the ethnic, political and territorial divisions created by communist statecraft.<sup>[62]</sup> This identity was expansive and international; accommodating local, territorial as well as non-territorial elements that connected the Tajik people with communities beyond the borders of political states and ethnocentric nations. This international consciousness mixed elements of Islam, spiritualism and a Russian, 19th century approach to culture as fundamentally holistic, variegated and globally entangled. As this chapter shows, in Gafurov's writings of the 1930s a mode of thinking about Islam was revived that was strongly indebted to the heritage of pre-Revolutionary, academically trained orientalists. While these orientalists presented the world religions as essentially commensurable and as part of the larger interconnected world culture, for Gafurov such imagery served to preserve a local lived experience.

While the first chapter defines the distinct intellectual traditions and visions influencing Gafurov's perspective on, and attitude towards, *peoples' internationalism*, later chapters trace the agenda as conceptualized through Gafurov's biography, on its path through history and various political and institutional landscapes.

Chapter two shows the effects of Stalin's growing conservatism and étatism on Gafurov's work. It focuses its analysis on the first and second edition of *The History of the Tajik People*, published in 1949 and 1952 respectively, the first official popular history of the Soviet Tajik Republic. Most historians so far have approached *The History of the Tajik People* through the prism of Central Asian nationalism, showing how Stalin's agenda of Soviet étatism served an agenda of national self-aggrandizement on the Republican level.<sup>[63]</sup> This chapter, by contrast,

---

[61] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

[62] For Tajik academically trained orientalists functioning as internal intermediaries see Dudoignon, "Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientology." While Dudoignon does not mention Gafurov as one such intermediary, he does mention the Tajik Oriental scholar Abd al-Ghani Mirzayev (1908-1976), who collaborated with Gafurov on a UNESCO funded Central Asian Studies project in the 1970s and was an editor on the above mentioned volume on Central Asian history.

[63] Clark, *Moscow a Fourth Rome*.

aims to investigate how Stalinism affected the concept of peoples' internationalism as retrieved from Gafurov's historical writings. As such it investigates the spatial imagination of the Tajik past focusing its analysis on how the books placed the history of the Tajik in a cultural-historical context of international cultural and intellectual trends and traditions. In doing so, this chapter highlights how Stalinist étatism also encouraged a strongly state-based imaginary; the second edition no longer describing the Central Asian peoples as a brotherhood of peoples but a community of nations. In this way, Stalinist étatism encouraged the rise of a fragmented international imagery that viewed internationalism through the prism of modern states and their distinct spheres of influence. When friendly relations between the USSR and Chinese Peoples' Republic (PRC) were established, regional separations were added and rooted into the past. Doing justice to PRC's atheist and communist self-image, the Chinese role in the region was imagined exclusively in terms of political-diplomatic and military relations. As a consequence, the non-territorial, spiritual traditions that characterized the Tajik past were separated from Chinese historical traditions. As this chapter concludes, in this period of extreme state-centrism, historical narratives emphasized the autonomous role of non-territorial, cultural solidarities for the unification of people across state boundaries acquired subversive characteristics.

The third chapter situates Gafurov's *History of the Tajik People* in an international context of Afro-Asian Solidarity and Third World Unity that crystallized after the Second World War. After Stalin's death the new Soviet Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev tried to woo the decolonizing world for socialism. Gafurov was one of various Soviet Asians to acquire leading representative positions in Moscow, as a signal of socialism's successes in decolonization. A particularly important ally in this period was Nehruvian India. This chapter describes how Indian and Soviet scholars collaborated on a project to rewrite the history of Asia; a project that had strong affinity with the History of Mankind project launched by UNESCO's first director-general Julian Huxley. After partition, Nehru wanted to avoid alienation among India's minorities, most specifically Muslims and sought to construct a shared heritage to unify a pluralistic population by granting all peoples and communities in India a place in world history. When the USSR decided to back Nehru's

efforts this provided new opportunities for Gafurov to negotiate a shared vision of world culture and history as a counterweight to cultural compartmentalization.

Huxley's scientific humanism imagined world civilization or humanism as a scientifically retractable canon of human achievement. In the course of the 1960s in Europe this approach of culture as something stagnant and objectifiable, outside human experience became the object of stark criticism, especially within leftist intellectual circles. Chapter four shows how similar critiques were voiced within the Socialist Camp, in particular by Chairman Mao of the Chinese Peoples' Republic (PRC). As this chapter shows, Mao's critiques were at least partly inspired by political tensions close to home. Uprisings in Tibet fanned fears of US intentions in the region and the belief that discourses of transnational and non-territorial solidarity might undermine the state-centric historical narratives that legitimated PRC rule. Also the friendship between the USSR and India caused concern: Mao feared that in case of a conflict the PRC would be left in the cold.<sup>[64]</sup> As a consequence of Mao's critiques of Soviet narratives of shared cultural heritage and civilization Stalinist orthodoxies were rehabilitated to the research agenda of the Soviet Institute for Oriental Studies, reasserting the socio-political boundaries between ideological camps and state-centric continents.

In the final chapter peoples' internationalism is traced to UNESCO's project to write the history of wider Central Asia. Initiated by Gafurov in 1965, this project served to highlight the shared cultural-historical heritage of the Soviet Central Asian Republics and that of neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Iran. In the attempt to respond to UNESCO's leftist critics, efforts were made to root culture more firmly in its socio-historical and dynamic human contexts. By this time, however, a state-based mindset had risen within the organizations and UNESCO functionaries and member-states effectively prioritized economic development to cultural-historical knowledge and revisionism to counter world inequality, complicating Gafurov's mission to reorient world history in line with peoples' internationalism. By the early 1970s

---

[64] Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750* (London: The Bodley Head, 2012).

moreover, leftist responses to Eurocentric world order grew increasingly confrontational - the publication of Edward Said's famous *Orientalism* (1979) being a case in point. As the language of world non-territorial unity gave way to more regionalized conceptions, Chinese involvement in Central Asia project finally pushed the program into new directions that encouraged an approach of world cultural history as carved up as a conglomerate of heritages of particular state-centric regions. The final chapter of this thesis, then, suggests that despite Gafurov's life-long efforts, the UNESCO project that aimed to situate Central Asia in its wider context of world cultural and intellectual history remained marked by similar challenges as the world literature project described by Gould above.