Adeeb Khalid’s *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* offers a rich account of the creation of Uzbekistan, presented as a nation-making narrative in the early twentieth century. The work, a product of fifteen years of research, demonstrates his command of the linguistic, archival, and analytical skills required to take on such a large project. A consistent trope in the work is the narrative of the creation of Uzbekistan as a project of Central Asian Muslim elites entangled within a larger Soviet nation-building vision, that predated and continued after the 1917 Russian Revolution. The aftermath of the First World War, and with that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, created a space for “cultural radicalism,” which for Muslim elites was a project intertwining the nation, revolution, and anticolonialism. The path to Uzbek nationhood, crystallized in the 1924 delimitation of Central Asia, brought together two competing projects of modernity: the Jadidist and Bolshevik. The former, pushing for a path focused on the nation and authenticity, was propagated by the Jadids, a prerevolutionary intelligentsia of Turkestan and Bukhara catalyzed by the events of 1917. The Bolshevik vision, on the other hand, sought to foment revolutionary change through notions of class, masked under anticolonial rhetoric. Utilizing Soviet-created institutions as a space, Khalid traces these two streams and explores how they utilized each other but were also contested throughout various points. Furthermore, the Muslim intelligentsia was not uniform in thought and agenda, and thus he attempts to untangle the various competing ideologies through a focus on main actors, which included political, literary, cultural, and religious leaders. What results is a narrative focusing on revolution from below and in the larger sense, a narrative of the Soviet Union from the perspective of the Central Asian periphery.

Khalid begins his work with an introductory section that defines and contextualizes the major groups and actors within the prerevolutionary history of Central Asia. The Jadid nation-making project was born in the 1860s and 1870s, with proponents of the project arguing that only progress and civilization could offer a true understanding of Islam. He defines and describes some of the re-imaginings of the Uzbek nation; the Jadids propagated an altered Timurid model. The introduction offers a larger glimpse into the 1917 to 1930s history, highlighting collectivization and the expansion of cotton, which tied the region more closely to the Soviet economy and solidified Uzbekistan’s Soviet path. He makes the case that in the early stages of the nation-building project, many local elites maintained a sense of agency within
Soviet institutions.

The first chapter discusses the position of Central Asia during the Russian Empire, which was colonial but allowed religious autonomy, mainly manifested through the maintenance of the ulama and shariat law. In this prerevolutionary period, Khalid exposes the tension between Jadids and Muslim communities. The former were seen negatively by the boyar class, who saw the Jadids as corrupt and wanting to imitate the Russians. Khalid fleshes out Jadid discourses surrounding ethnicity and identity. For them nations were based on language and common history, while “Muslims” categorized the sedentary population. This point is later illustrated more clearly with the creation of Tajikistan, as the nomadic “other” of Uzbekistan. One of the most important elements Khalid stresses in this part is that no primordial agent existed: “Turkestan was quite literally a creation of the conquer, and it encompassed no unity” (p. 46).

The following chapter exposes Central Asia during the aftermath of the First World War as an “arena of multifaceted conflict” within Muslim society (p. 89). This contention was manifested in public debates as well as more violent points of conflict. Definitions of “liberation,” resulting from the Russian Revolution, acquired varied meanings for different groups within the Muslim elite. From one side, the traditionalists, which included the ulama and boyars, supported religious rule over all matters. On the other hand, the Jadids hoped that the provisional government would offer support for what they hoped would be a reform and “reawakening” of Islam. Nevertheless, this debate was not merely one between conservatives and modernists, as many Jadids came from a background similar to that of the conservatives. Khalid illustrates these intricacies through his exposé of various individuals involved in the discourse. This section also discusses the declaration and the short-lived attempt at autonomy in Kokand, and it discusses the Basmachi insurgency which would incite civil war between Muslim groups.

Chapter 3 teases out the two competing visions of the revolution: as a class conflict versus as a national and race conflict. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and with that the last existing Muslim state, the Jadids were more keen to develop an agenda. The earlier plan promoted a future of Turkestan as Muslim, national, and revolutionary. The biggest challenge was pushing forth the notion of an anticolonial revolution using Bolshevik language. Unification and a revolution against oppression and colonialism was the only way that Muslims could understand Bolshevism. Language surrounding issues of class and Marxism therefore had to be altered in order to have resonance. According to Khalid, Bolshevik interest in Turkestan rested on a desire to continue Soviet rule throughout the previously governed territories of the Russian Empire. One of the driving reasons was for the extraction of cotton. The issue of continuity and discontinuity between the Russian Empire and Bolsheviks is an important one that would have benefited from more attention.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Bukhara and its existence as a Soviet republic. This section most concretely demonstrates how the Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic was a competing space for the Young Bukharans and Bolsheviks. The former sought to modernize and nationalize Bukhara by trying to establish diplomatic and trade contacts with other states (Germany and Afghanistan) and by attempting to join the Comintern independently, rather than as a satellite of the Russian Communist Party. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, sought to better control the Bukharan region in order to extract cotton more efficiently. The turning point for the Bukharan experiment, and for Central Asia as a whole, came in 1923 with the purge of the Bukharan cabinet, the failure of the Central Bureau of Muslim Communist organizations of Turkestan (Musburo), and the weakening of the Basmachi insurgency.

The fifth and sixth chapters discuss the path to Soviet control as well as the revolutionary cultural landscape that developed in the early 1920s. The Bolsheviks’ biggest challenge was to build a Communist Party from scratch. The korenizatsia, or indigenization, program was launched in 1923, but failed as non-Central Asians dominated the political landscape. The process was not cost-efficient as the regime had to hire more people to work as translators and teachers who would teach Europeans the local languages. Furthermore, korenizatsia actually incited more racism toward Central Asians. While the measures provoked much disillusionment from the Jadids, they did see education as a Soviet space they could utilize. Pedagogical institutions became weapons they used to combat traditional Muslim institutions and practices. The issue of women’s “liberation” is well explained by Khalid, who demonstrates the deprivation and confusion regarding the issue of women. While unveiling was a visible form of what they saw as “liberation,” women would not be financially liberated from their husbands. Furthermore, Muslim Communists themselves had to take it upon themselves to “liberate” their own wives. This leads to following section, chap-
Chapter 7, which Khalid utilizes to discuss how “reform” and “revolution” became difficult to delineate, especially in matters of Islam.

The issue of national delimitation in Central Asia comes to the forefront in chapters 8 and 9, which discuss the creation of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Chakhatayist project, representing the cultural legacy of the O’zbek nation, survived in this Soviet environment. This project was Turkic in nature, yet this still left a lot of debate for linguists and politicians. In opposition to this, the Persian-speaking and predominantly rural population of the mountainous region of eastern Bukhara became the Tajik Autonomous Oblast, yet without a Tajik National Committee, or even proper representation. As such, it became a space because it was unwanted in Uzbekistan. Both cases demonstrate that the delimitation process was one that was politically driven from the top, without preexisting conditions on the ground below.

The remaining three chapters outline the increased Sovietization of Central Asia. Nationalism became the enemy and a direct enemy of Soviet rule. The main drivers of the purging of such enemies was the OGPU, which had been “immune to indigenization” (p. 318). Condemnation of the prerevolutionary intelligentsia occurred from the late 1920s to 1932, which included attacks on the ulama, qazi courts, waqf properties, and mosques. Groups of supposed nationalists were arrested and sent to Moscow, and the final blow came in 1937-38 with the purge of the alleged “bloc of Rights and Trotskyites.”

Despite his focus on Uzbekistan, Khalid’s work contributes to our understanding of Central Asian nations, some of which made their debut as a distinct group during the creation of Uzbekistan. This project of ethnogenesis, built on a primordial vision of the nation, forced the delineation of groups who had previously coexisted. With the creation of Uzbekistan in 1924, the Tajiks were created as a separate entity. This narrative commenced from an order to create nation-state from the top down, followed by cultural nationalization of groups once they had been categorized by Soviets and Muslim elites.

For scholars of the Soviet Union, Khalid’s focus on Uzbekistan offers many parallels to experiences shared by other nations, including collectivization, purging of the indigenous elite, and the terror in 1937-38. Furthermore, his nuanced analysis demonstrates how locals also participated in the latter incidents. Although the work is pregnant with source material, at times it becomes difficult to follow the narrative that strings everything together. While plenty of cultural, literary, and artistic examples illustrate many of Khalid’s points, it is also easy to get lost in the detail.

This work is a much-needed contribution, as literature on Uzbekistan has been meager in the West. In Uzbek historiography, debates about this time period have highlighted the violent Soviet extirpation of the Muslim nationalist project in the early 1920s, while foregoing a more nuanced analysis of conflict and tension among Muslim elites. Khalid’s focus on the latter, as opposed to larger Muslim communities, unsettles the static “Muslim society” versus “Bolshevik” narrative, by demonstrating the complexity of competing ideas in Central Asia. This work is a worthy attempt at braiding together these competing projects, narratives, and actors, offering a more comprehensive history of this region, which continues to have resonance today.

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