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THE ROLE OF *KHODJAS* AND *MAHALLAS* IN UZBEKISTAN: TOOLS FOR SOCIAL STABILITY?

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Abstract:

Twenty-five years after its independence, Uzbekistan is looking for a new social model by integrating old traditions, Islam and Modernity. Following a series of interviews conducted among Uzbeks in areas of South Kazakhstan and in some regions of Uzbekistan, the authors offer an in-depth analysis of traditional social structures. After seventy years of the one-party system, “Western style” political parties are not as representative of social life as the *khodjas* are. Leadership in Uzbekistan is more social than political.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, social model, *Khodja*, *mahalla*, *aqsaqal*.

Título en Castellano: El papel de Khodjas y Mahallas en Uzbekistán: ¿Instrumentos para la estabilidad social?

Resumen:

Veinticinco años después de su independencia, Uzbekistán está buscando un nuevo modelo social integrando antiguas tradiciones, el islam y la modernidad. Después de una serie de entrevistas realizadas entre los uzbekos en zonas de Kazajistán del Sur y en algunas regiones de Uzbekistán, los autores ofrecen un análisis en profundidad de las estructuras sociales tradicionales. Después de setenta años del sistema de partido único, los partidos políticos al estilo occidental no son tan representativos de la vida social como son los *khodjas*. El liderazgo en Uzbekistán es más social que político.

Palabras clave: Uzbekistán, modelo social, *Khodja*, *mahalla*, *aqsaqal*.

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1. Introduction.

The year 1991 marked the beginning of the existence of statehood for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Of course, it is difficult to maintain statehood without nationhood, and so the “new” political elites in these countries revived old hymns, traditions, legends, poets, and heroes to keep these “new” nations united. Before the Russian invasion in the second half of the 19th century, people in Central Asia were aware of belonging to a wider empire. This is true not only of those who lived in dispersed tribes, but also of those who lived in the more complex and hierarchized societies found in the cities in the south.

For seventy years, the Soviet Empire tried to impose and implement its own policies in Central Asia, following a top-down as opposed to a bottom-up dynamic. The result was a society divorced from the political elite and uninterested in politics. As the Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco once said, “Do as I myself do, and do not intervene in politics”. In this way, statehood in these countries was built based on the political elite rather than on the interests and needs of ordinary people. In fact, at least in the case of Uzbekistan, the country has taken many steps towards democracy on a formal level – it has a bicameral parliament, four parties in the *Oliy Majlis*, and holds elections across the country with many candidates to choose from, and so on. However, these political parties do not accurately reflect the lines of political division in the country: rather than representing society’s cleavages, they merely constitute a way to legitimate the regime’s actions.

According to Schumpeter, “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble to carry out its will”³. In the Uzbek case, people choose political elites in a political realm without confrontation because there is no political fight; and, of course, it is impossible for society to take part in a political fight that does not exist. They can merely choose among political elites that agree on –almost— everything.

So, who, then, is representing Uzbek society? Political parties? Social structures? Are either of these compatible with the idea of democracy? Uzbekistan should combine old and new structures to become an improved democracy, in line with Western but also regional parameters.⁴

This article has three objectives. Firstly, it will try to explain the lines by which Uzbek society is divided. Secondly, it will explain what *mahalla* and other traditional institutions are and why they are so important for the development of society. Thirdly, this article comprises an analysis of a series of interviews conducted among Uzbek people in some areas of South Kazakhstan and in some regions of Uzbekistan, with the aim of determining how respected the *khodjas* and other traditional institutions are.

³ See Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1976): *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. London: Allen and Unwin, p. 250.

⁴ Behzad, Rasheed. “La estructura social en Afganistán,” *Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos*, Documento de Opinión 63/2011, September 7, 2011, <http://www.ieee.es>. See also Islam Karimov’s speech titled *The Concept of further deepening the democratic reforms and establishing the civil society in the country*, Address by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, at the joint session of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, November 12, 2010, <http://mfa.uz/eng>.



2. Some Traditional Institutions.

Since Islam's arrival in Central Asia until today, there have been two kinds of social model: Uzbek and Kazakh. The difference resides in the fact that the Uzbek people were less nomadic than the Kazakhs and in Kazakhstan Islam mixed with local traditions for centuries and this led to a new, specific societal model. The Tsarist Empire encountered this when it arrived at the boundaries of present-day Afghanistan in the late-nineteenth century and subjugated the two khanates of Kokand and Khiva, as well as the emirate of Bukhara. The Tsarist emperors tried to introduce some elements of economic-social modernization not only in Russia itself but also in their colonies; in fact, they considered these territories not as colonies but as part of their own territory.

The Soviet Union later behaved in a similar fashion, but in accordance with the viewpoint of the new regime. Under Brezhnev, as the case of Ibrahim Muminov shows, local elites achieved some degree of bureaucratic "autonomy" from Moscow; although it was in fact, very narrow.⁵ The end of the Cold War saw the victory of the western-liberal model over the communist one, marking the start of a new era for the region in almost every domain, including politics, economics, and society.

Throughout History, the Uzbek people have accumulated grievances against their rulers. Sometimes they were successful in their claims, but at other times they were not, as not every model provides suitable channels to express such grievances. Following the system theory of David Easton⁶, if input from the people does not find a proper answer from the decision makers, the final outcome may well be undesirable or even unpleasant for the rulers. This seems to be the case of the rage against the system that spread around the world, especially in Western countries. Another example could be the so-called Arab Spring, where, in different countries, many people have taken to the streets against dictators since 2011.

According to Lipset and Rokkan, the modern (and Western) party systems were frozen along the cleavage lines of the 1920's. The theory of cleavages is very interesting as it explains that party systems are strongly influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. The consequences of both events and processes divided societies according to four lines. It is possible to find two opposite items along each line: urban vs. rural, workers vs. owners, secularist vs. confessional state and, finally, centre vs. periphery. Many political parties arose in Western countries in line with these cleavages. However, this is not the case in Uzbekistan and other former Soviet Union countries, where the Industrial Revolution is relatively recent and where the impact of the French Revolution is almost imperceptible. In short, there were two main political parties (centre-left and centre-right) in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, the United States, etc each with a clear and definite ideology, until the Soviet Union collapsed. After that, it is difficult to say how political parties have evolved, but it is possible in these countries to identify the heirs of these original parties as well as others following the same lines, together with new social movement parties that have transformed into political parties. In all Central Asian countries, there is one official party (heir of the Communist Party, in legitimacy and modus operandi but not in

⁵ Weinerman, Eli. "The Polemics between Moscow and Central Asians on the Decline of Central Asia and Tsarist Russia's Role in the History of the Region," in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 71, n° 3, July 1993, p. 471. See also Norling, Nicklas: "Party Problems and Factionalism in Soviet Uzbekistan: Evidence from the Communist Party Archives", *Silk Road Paper*, 2017, p. 90.

⁶ See Easton, David (1953): *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf. See also Easton, David (1965): *A Framework for Political Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall. And, finally, see Easton, David (1965): *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York, John Wiley and Sons.



ideology) and other little and innocuous ones. Here things are very different to Jeffersonian democracies.

On the other hand, there is another definition of democracy. Joseph Alois Schumpeter explained in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, first published in 1942, that “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”⁷. Here, the main problem is not how political parties channel the people’s needs but how people themselves are striving for the common good and how they struggle to obtain or build it. Briefly, political parties are not so crucial for political life. In Central Asia, for example, social institutions have been more important than political parties to this end.

2.1 Mahalla.

In industrialized societies, some cities are just commuter towns, places to sleep after work but not places for people to interrelate and connect with each other. In contrast, present-day Uzbek rulers rely heavily on the social structure of the neighbourhood, or *mahalla*. Although *mahalla* is not this article’s main focus, it is important to say that all aspects of the Uzbek people’s lives pass through this institution; indeed, the head of the *mahalla* is a kind of family boss who knows everyone living there well, provides work, and allocates several types of governmental subsidies. Nothing happens in the district without being observed sooner or later⁸.

In this very traditional societal structure, the district is at the centre of social life, just like shopping malls in the USA, or the park or the square in Europe are. As said above, this structure is used to organize the distribution of aid as well as to channel political messages, such as the need for gender equality or democracy, advice on which leader to support, and so on.

Many *mahallas* were composed of members of the same national community, meaning that, nowadays, they enjoy a high grade of ethnic homogeneity. Other *mahallas* were built upon the basis of the same profession (bakers, blacksmiths, tanners...).

There are three main approaches towards the *mahalla*’s role in Uzbek society. Some researchers say that *mahalla* is a tool of repression and helps political rulers to keep the entire population under control⁹. Other scholars affirm that *mahalla* helps society to channel their grievances and to articulate their demands to the powers-that-be, while at the same time, *mahalla* would be a social structure responsible for delivering state aid, or helping the state to identify their requirements more easily¹⁰. The third and largest group of intellectuals says that

⁷ Schumpeter, Joseph (1942): *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. New York, Harper, p. 250.

⁸ Suda, Masaru. “The Politics of Civil Society, Mahalla and NGOs Uzbekistan,” in *SRC Slavic Eurasian Studies*, No. 10, 2006, <http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp>.

⁹ See Massicard, Elise and Trevisani, Tommaso: “The Uzbek Mahalla: Between State and Society”, in Everett-Heath, Tom (ed.) (2003): *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*. London and New York: Routledge and Curzon, 205-218. See also Luong, Pauline Jones (2002): *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Very critical, Sievers, E.W.: “Uzbekistan’s Mahalla: From Soviet to Absolutist Residential Community Associations”, *The Journal of International and Comparative Law at Chicago-Kent* 2, 2002, pp. 91-158. See also, Kassymbekova, Botagoz: “Uzbekistan’s Mahalla: A Democratic Tool for Authoritarian Rule”, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, 19 November 2003. Finally, see Fane, Daria: “Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan: Maintaining Stability through Authoritarian Control.” In Drobizheva, Leokadia; Gottemoeller, Rose; McArdle Kelleher, Catherine and Walker, Lee (eds) (1996): *Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Soviet World: Case Studies and Analysis*. Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 271-302.

¹⁰ See Dadabaev, Timur: “Between State and Society: The Position of the Mahalla in Uzbekistan”, in Dadabaev, Timur; Ismailov, Murod and Tsujinaka, Yutaka (eds.) (2017): *Social Capital Construction and Governance in Central Asia: Communities and NGOs in post-Soviet Uzbekistan*. London, Palgrave, pp. 77-95. See also,



mahalla plays a positive role in the civil society of Uzbekistan but warns that it should not be manipulated by the government¹¹.

In any case, most of them underline the “need for both more contextual empirical research and better theorizing that explores the role of informality in the welfare provision in the Eastern part of the post-socialist realm” because, although there are some analytical frameworks including informal welfare practices, such as the “informal security regime” or the “welfare pentagon” they are solely focused on the developing world and they “do not take into account the specific institutional legacy of socialist welfare states”¹².

Each *mahalla* has a leader, an *aqsaqal*, which literally means “white beard”, *id est*, an elder male, supposedly a wise community leader. These *aqsaqal* (also written as *aksakal*¹³) were used by Soviet authorities because they “were keen observers of both the Party directives and local sentiment, and they adapted flexibly to the changing political atmosphere of the Stalinist era”¹⁴. It could be said that these informal networks and structures facilitated the work of the authorities, but they also eased the life of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants as they could both perform the government’s will and address the population’s aims and the idiosyncrasy of the population. They were real bridges between state power and society, which is the role attributed to political parties in Western countries. *Mahalla* is not only a place, a part of the city, an administrative division of a town, but also the institution which acts as an intermediary between state and society, either Soviet or post-Soviet.

Under the Soviet regime, there were both official and unofficial mahallas, although they differed in legitimacy and modus operandi. While official mahallas were supposed to be a conveyor belt of Soviet propaganda and control of the population, unofficial ones were based upon confidence and family-like bonds among the members of a district. In other communist countries, soviet authorities tried to detach people from religion and tradition¹⁵, but here, in Uzbekistan, they were smarter and tried to manipulate old social structures to achieve their goals. In any case, during the Soviet era, living standards were higher than after

Urinbojev, Rustamjon: “Law, Social Norms and Welfare as Means of Public Administration: Case Study of Mahalla Institutions in Uzbekistan”, *The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, vol. 4, nº. 1 (2011) pp. 33-57. Also, Dadabaev, Timur: “Community life, memory and a changing nature of mahalla identity in Uzbekistan”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 4, Issue 2 (July 2013) pp. 181–196. Also, Masaru, Suda: “The Politics of Civil Society, Mahalla and NGOs: Uzbekistan”, in Osamu, Leda and Tomohiko, Uyama (eds) (2006): “Reconstruction and Interaction of Slavic Eurasia and Its Neighbouring Worlds”, *Slavic Eurasian Studies*. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, pp. 335-370.

¹¹ See Hanks, Reuel R.: “Islamization and civil society in central asia: religion as substrate in conflict management and social stability”, in Ziegler, Charles E. (ed.) (2015): *Civil Society and Politics in Central Asia*. Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky, pp. 69-70. See also Freezer, Sabine: “Bridging the divide between neoliberal and communal civil society in Tajikistan”, in Ziegler, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-298. See also Kukeyeva, Fatima and Shkapyak, Oxana: “Central Asia’s Transition to Democracy”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, nº. 81 (2013), pp. 79–83.

¹² See Sayfutdinova, Leyla: “Negotiating welfare with the informalizing state: Formal and informal practices among engineers in post-Soviet Azerbaijan”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, nº. 6 (2015), p. 27. See also Gugushvili, Alexi: “Towards a welfare research framework in the countries of Eastern Partnership Initiative”, *Journal of East-European and Asian Studies*, vol. 1, nº 3 (May 2010) pp.349-377.

¹³ In Uzbek, the plural for *oqsoqol* is *oqsoqollar*. See Khalid, Adeeb: “Culture and Power in Colonial Turkestan”, *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale*, No. 17/18 (2009), pp. 413-447. See also, Akiner, Shirin: “The Struggle for Identity”, in Snyder, Jed C. (ed.) (1995): *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia*. Washington, National Defense University Press, p. 12. See also Keller, Shoshana: “Histories of Central Asia”, *ASIANetwork Exchange*, vol. 16, nº 2 (Spring 2009) p. 46.

¹⁴ See Shin, Boram: “Reviewed work(s): Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan. Ali Iqmen. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012, pp. ix + 236”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 7 (2016) p. 106.

¹⁵ This is the case of Nowa Iuta, a completely new city for workers, where there was no room for a church as the “new man”, the socialist man, doesn’t need God.



it; of course, people had less things but there was more solidarity among the members of the same district, they knew each other better, they spent more time together, they even shared their own homes and the gates of their houses were always open. In Western countries, this change has happened with the transition from rural to urban towns and cities due to the Industrial Revolution. For instance, in Spain, there was a massive emigration from the countryside to the big cities during the '60s and '70s; people from little towns in Andalusia, Castilla La Mancha, Castilla León, Extremadura, and Galicia went to work in Madrid, Barcelona or Bilbao as they were the most industrialized cities in the country at that time. Soon after, they sent for their families and together moved to neighbourhoods where a high percentage of the population came from the same region. These new arrivals founded the so-called "houses"¹⁶ in these big cities, a kind of association to maintain their traditions, folklore, etc. The bonds among members of such associations were extremely strong.

At this point, it is important to remember two contributions from Sociology. Firstly, the Tönnies theory about community and secondly, the theory about the community-based counterterrorism fight. Ferdinand Tönnies suggested the difference between society and community¹⁷, where, although society offers a wide range of relationships, these tend to be more superficial and based on shared interests (utilitarian relationship); indeed, in urban areas, you can live in an apartment building without knowing everyone there. This is not possible in rural areas, where houses tend to be single storey, people frequently share a lot of time outdoors and people know each other very well.

The Community-based counterterrorism fight theories¹⁸ suggest that the Community has a responsibility to detect who is being radicalised. Proximity to such fellow members of the Community can be an advantage in the fight against terrorism, as they can be reported by their relatives or neighbours in time, before attacking¹⁹. This is the model the United Kingdom is trying to implement through Governmental plans:

Bringing it Home argues that we need to put communities at the heart of our approaches to counter-terrorism. First, communities offer important sources of information and intelligence; they are our own in-built early warning system. Second, communities picking up these signs are best placed to act pre-emptively to divert their young people from extremism: the self-policing society. Third, while the state must also play a role, communities must take the lead in tackling problems that either create grievances or hinder their ability to organise [...] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the police and Security Service cannot act without the consent of the communities they are there to protect²⁰.

Both contributions from Sociology mutually enrich each other when they are understood together. First, industrialised societies are more urbanised, and their communal life has almost disappeared, so bonds between their citizens are more rational, colder, wider and more superficial, while community members enjoy closer, deeper and more sincere links albeit with less people. Secondly, there are many groups between the individual and the State: family, relatives, friends, classmates, workmates, neighbours ... It is possible to build a State based

¹⁶ House of Andalusia, House of Galicia, and so on.

¹⁷ See Tönnies, Ferdinand (2001): *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ See Spalek, Basia (ed.) (2012): *Counter-Terrorism: Community-Based Approaches to Preventing Terror Crime*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan.

¹⁹ The case against Dias Kadyrbaev, the Kazakh who covered up Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the convicted Boston Marathon terrorist, proves that the cooperation of the community is crucial in the fight against terrorism. See Martínez, Michael: "Friend of Boston Marathon bomber Tsarnaev sentenced to 6 years", *CNN*, 2 June 2015, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/02/us/boston-marathon-bombing-dzhokhar-tsarnaev>.

²⁰ See Briggs, Rachel; Fieschi, Catherine and Lownsbrough, Hannah (2006): *Bringing it Home Community-based approaches to counter-terrorism*. London, Demos, p. 58.



on societies as described by Tönnies, but building a nation is a more complex issue requiring a strong emotional involvement and an *acquis communautaire*.

Coming back to unofficial mahallas under the Soviet regime, they were a place that allowed people to learn traditional values and they acted as a channel for solidarity among neighbours in both pleasant events (e.g. weddings) and unpleasant ones (e.g. funerals, rebuilding of houses). Three instruments were utilized to forge closer links among members of the mahalla: the “*gap*”, the “*guzar*” and the “*chaikhona*”²¹. These tools show the huge importance in Uzbek culture of sharing food and drink to talk together, to spend time with family, friends, neighbours or even foreign guests. “*Gap*” literally means “word, talking” and here it means talking while having dinner agreeably, “*guzar*” is a meeting place at the mahalla committee building, and the “*chaikhona*” is the place to have a cup of tea without looking at the time and without worrying about other issues. The environment of these places would be quiet, with a river or a fountain, everything inviting a sense of calm and an opportunity to share thoughts, feelings and experiences as well.

On the other hand, official mahallas were less well considered as they were used as a tool of the totalitarian state. Some institutions and bodies helped the *mahalla* committee to control the villagers. For instance, there was *mahalla posbonlari*, which means unofficial community policing, neighbours who voluntarily watched the district. This resembled the old *druzhina*, the personal bodyguard of leaders, later transformed into the “People’s Volunteer Squads”. These were backed up by the “Soviet comrades’ courts”, a special form of collective justice (like the revolutionary courts during the French Revolution)²².

After independence, Uzbekistan was aware of the importance of using these institutions as a tool to prevent terrorist attacks. Consequently, they were transformed from strictly civil society institutions into near-governmental bodies, which were not always well-paid, meaning they were open to bribes and corruption. In any case, they were found to be very useful in the fight against terrorism, especially after the Tashkent bombings in 1999. They have also been used for “addressing and stabilising issues that arose immediately after the establishment of Uzbekistan’s independence, including the tensions that existed between different ethnic groups, declines in standards of living, dissatisfactions and anxiety in the society”²³. According to Dadabaev “the passage of time, ideological changes and increases in living standards have caused interviewees to gradually shift their understanding of the mahalla from a structure that involves “family-like bonding” to “just another institution of public administration”²⁴. Sometimes, this function of intermediation between the public and the private, between the citizen and the state resembles the role of the *cacique* under Spanish administration, both in America and in 19th century Spain. It is also worth noting that certain problems can arise such as overlapping of purview or bribes and corruption as they have no clear authority on given issues, which are at times shared with local authorities, they are underbudgeted and a small group of people has a big capacity of decision in the allocation of public funds.

To sum up, *mahalla* was an institution based around the neighbourhood iman and mosque before the arrival of the Russians. With the Soviet Empire, it was transformed into a kind of instrument for vigilance and the propagation of socialist propaganda. After independence, it became an early warning tool, not only for economic conditions but also in the prevention of radicalism and terrorism. Nowadays it is widely considered as a job (upon

²¹ See Dadabaev, “Community life...”, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²² See Gorlizki, Yoram: “Delegalization in Russia: Soviet Comrades’ Courts in Retrospect”, *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, vol. 46, n^o. 3 (Summer, 1998), pp. 403-425.

²³ See Dadabaev, “Community life...”, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.



official appointment and not well-paid, open to bribery and corruption) while previously it was intended to be an honourable task fulfilled for free.

2.2 Khodja.

It is important to note that, according to Sengupta, “the relationship between politics and cultural symbols/“images”, became particularly relevant for states that emerged in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Central Asia”²⁵. That is why studying this term is important from a political point of view. In Sengupta’s opinion, 25 years ago the newly independent states started projecting themselves both to a domestic audience and to the international community in the following ways. Kazakhstan envisaged itself as the “Heart of Eurasia”, Kyrgyzstan as the “Island of Democracy” and Uzbekistan as an “ancient state at the crossroads of civilization”.

The term “*Khodja*” originates in the Ottoman Empire and means “scribe, clerk, copyist, literate, private tutor”²⁶ and “sorcerer,”²⁷ but it also refers to a person who works in a *madrassa*, or more exactly in a *zouia*.²⁸ Nonetheless, nowadays “*khodja*” is usually used to refer to *Khodja* Ahmet Yesevi, founder of the *Yeseviye* Sufi School, the first Turkic *tariqah* (order).²⁹ In this article, however, the term will be used to refer to a lineage, to a social class in Central Asia that is linked to Yesevi.³⁰ More generally, the term *Khodja* is further associated with the term “imam”—thus *Imam Khodja*—that is to say *Ulema*, as explained in the following text:

Those inhabitants of Crimea who were unable to escape have been exposed to a continuance of insupportable miseries. The principal aim of our oppressors is to root us out. The following are some of the means employed to affect this object: — Our *Ulemas*, as is well known, are doctors whose office is to preach the law in our Mosques, and teach to all, and especially to our children, the duties they owe to their creed. In order to diminish the number of these pillars of our faith, the Russian Government has assumed the right to limit the privilege of furnishing *Ulemas* to our entire nation to a single family of the Dohomi; to the end that (this family being far from numerous) religious instruction should be always inadequate, and that the nation should be without leading men. No *Imam Khodja*, or *Ulema*, is tolerated who is not conversant with Russian; and all students, aspirants to these degrees, must speak Russian in order to be admitted to the education prepared for them by the Russian Government—nay, in all the schools, even those founded and supported by Mussulmans, professors are forced on us, and placed over us to teach the Russian language to all the students, with or without the consent of the parents. The Mussulmans pay these professors liberally. Should any inhabitant be incapable of paying his contribution, all that

²⁵ See Sengupta, Anita: “Introduction: Image, Influence and Legacy”, in Sengupta, Anita (2017): *Symbols and the Image of the State in Eurasia*. Kolkata, Springer, p. 2.

²⁶ Houtsma, M. Th; Arnold, T.W.; Basset, R. and Hartmann, R. (eds.) *E. J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936*, vol. 4. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1938, p. 865. See also Nys, Ernest: “The Development and Formation of International Law,” in *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 6, n° 1, January 1912, p. 25.

²⁷ Millingen, Frederick. “The Circassian Slaves and the Sultan's Harem,” in *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 8, 1870-1871, p. cxiv.

²⁸ A “*zaouia*” or “*zawiya*” (Arabic for “group” or “assembly”) is an Islamic religious school or monastery. The term is Maghrebi and West African, and roughly corresponds to the Eastern term *madrassa*. A *zawiya* often contains a pool, and sometimes a fountain. In the Arab world, the term *zawiya* can also refer to a Sufi lodge, similar to the Persian term *khanqah*, and can also be linked to the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. See Nadir, Ahmed. “La fortune d'un ordre religieux algérien vers la fin du XIXe siècle,” in *Le Mouvement social*, No. 89 (October-December 1974) p. 78.

²⁹ Kirwan, Lucile Vartanian. “Armenian Stories of Hodja,” in *California Folklore Quarterly*, vol. 2, n° 1, (January 1943) pp. 27-29.

³⁰ DeWeese, Devin. “The Politics of Sacred Lineages in Nineteenth-Century Central Asia: Descent Groups Linked to Khwaja Ahmad Yasavi in Shrine Documents and Genealogical Charters,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 31, n° 4 (November 1999) pp. 507-530.



he possesses is sold; and this is the penalty imposed in respect of the other very heavy taxes by which we are ground down. If the party rendered liable has no possession, or if he dies, his neighbours are compelled to pay for him. Every child that studies the Russian tongue is, as foresaid, driven by the nature of the books placed in his hands and by his teachers, chosen expressly from among orthodox fanatics, to scorn the religion of his parents, and relinquish it for the Christian religion.³¹

An analysis of scientific research from the Soviet period into the social, cultural, religious, and ethnic processes in play in Central Asia concerning Uzbekistan, shows an absence of due attention paid to studying the special socio-cultural group of people with religious titles. Apart from some mentions to this subject in encyclopaedic collections, only a few scientific publications considering this issue exist. Having said that, it is worth noting that after the invasion of the Uzbek khanates by the Russian empire some Russian scientists and officials made some effort to study the issues of origin and social status of those who belonged to the higher religious classes and held religious titles.

The formation of these specific social classes in the local conditions of Central Asia began with Islam's expansion into its territory, along with the development of Muslim culture among the local population. As was common to all people in these regions, there were members of separate, disadvantaged social groups who actively participated in the wide-scale dissemination of Islamic ideology; they were encouraged by the ideologists of Islam and awarded high social status. Having such status meant that they could strengthen their social standing and acquire additional rights as well. Crucially, thanks to special decrees and resolutions, this social status could be passed down as an unofficial title from generation to generation (*tamga*).³² Later it became clear that if a family had this status, it gave its bearers great opportunities, enabling them significant leverage in the political, economic, and social spheres. Bearers of such titles were distinguished as a social-cultural group representing a social status.

Because of the peculiar stratification among local populations from a religious-social standpoint some people began to stand out as being distinguished and claimed to have the title of "white bone" (*oq suyaklar*). The representatives of the socio-cultural group belonging to this class were referred to as *sayyid*, *khodja*, *ishan*, *amir*, *tura*, *khajib*, *makhdum* (often *makhzum*), *mirza*, *musa*, or *sho* (or *shokh*). Ordinary people were called *koracha* ("black people"), citizen ("ordinary people"), *khalkiya* ("people of the nation"), *avom* and *raiyyat* ("crowd", "mass of people"). Basically, in Central Asia, people adapted to community life, the groups that have arisen because of stratification were treated as "*kavm*", "*toifa*", "*Avlod*", "*Urug*".

People belonging to the highest social and religious stratum considered themselves descendants either of the Prophet Mohammed, his four righteous caliphs, or of fellows of the Prophet (*askhob*). As Ashirbek Kurbanovich Muminov states, "It is known that in the early years of Islam 'accepting Islam' meant 'becoming Arab', the integration of neophytes into the tribal structure of Arabs. That is why the local inhabitants of the first regional group in Central Asia to accept Islam became known as the *mavals* (clients) of famous Arabs or Arab

³¹ Colquhoun, Patrick: "Russian despotism and ruthlessness, as disclosed in authentic documents," *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection*, 1877, pp. 18-19.

³² As Paksoy writes, "The term *tamga*, originally referring to the 'seal' of a given group, was later borrowed by Russians to designate customs levies (Russian: *tamozhnia*). The *tamga* was embroidered on Central Asian tents, incorporated into rugs, filigreed into jewelry, struck into coins, and used as a cattle brand. A list of early *tamgas* is found in Kashgarli Mahmut's eleventh century work the *Diwan Lugat at Türk*. It provides, in part, the visual identification component of the membership in the polity." In H.B. Paksoy: "Identity Markers: Uran, Tamga, Dastan," *Transoxiana*, vol. 8 (June 2004), at <http://www.transoxiana.com.ar>.



tribes living in this territory. The Islamization of the distant urban and mountainous regions of Mavarunnakhr³³ took place in an altogether different way.”³⁴

For his part, Evgeny Belyaev argues that “neomuslims who became famous by the name *maula*, or *mavla* (in plural *mavlas*) were people from the local population that accepted Islam. But acceptance of Islam, religion of the conquerors, could not put them on an equal footing with Arab-Muslims.”³⁵ Thus, after the Islamic campaign the non-Arabic populations of conquered regions came to be called *mavalo* and were formally under the protection of Arabs³⁶.

In contrast with the nomadic population, the process of social-religious stratification among the settled population was not so simple and happened in a unique way. For instance, to the question, “Who are you?” (*Siz kimsiz?*), representatives of this group usually answered, “We are from *sayyids*” (*Biz sayyidlardanmiz*), or “We are the descendants of *khodjas*” (*Biz khujalar avlodidanmiz*), and so on. This question is posed differently within the nomadic population of Central Asia and reads, “What kin are you from?” (*Siz qaysi urugdansiz?*). It may be answered as follows: “I am from the kin of *naymans*,” or “I am from the kin of *kangli*” (*Men nayman urugidan bulaman*). Among the sedentary population, the question is presented differently again: “Where are you from?” or “What place are you from?” (*Siz asli qayerliksiz?*), to which the answer is, “I am from Margelan” (*Asli Margilonlik bulamiz*), “I was born in Bukhara” (*Bukhoroda tavallud topganmiz*), or “he is considered to be pure by origin” (*nasl-nasabi toza kishilardan sanaladi*), “he is of humble origin” (*asl zoti past avlodan*), “people from his kin had features of holiness” (*bu qavmdan utgan odamlar avliyo sifatlarga ega bulganlar*), “honourable and great people were in our kin” (*bizning ajdodlarimiz elug va buyuk kishilar utgan*).

Generally, a person’s belonging to these elite strata bore, in addition to a feeling of pride in early times, certain responsibilities, which were necessary to protect this status. Examples of this could be seen in choosing the name of the child, choosing his or her friends, teaching the child the rules of behaviour, in raising awareness of one’s place and status, in the receiving of religious knowledge, and in the learning of the canons of Islam. The kin that were able to preserve the purity of traditions and values had a right to be proud of this status. This explains why from the moment of perception by the child of his “I”, the kin would instill the child with feelings such as “recognizing the kin”, “respecting the holy traditions of the kin”, and maintaining “faithfulness to one’s kin”. The essence of all these ideas is that the bearer has a status of great spiritual and moral responsibility, because every action and deed done by any member of the genus is considered from the perspective of the honour and dignity of “saints”, of the forefathers. How “good” or “bad” the person belonging to a kin is depends on the level of perfection achieved by him through education. Hence, from the moment the child emerges into the light of day, members of the kin will regularly discuss in

³³ Southeast of the Aral Sea, Mavarannahr is understood to have been between the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya. Arab geographers (8th and 9th centuries) called “Mawarah-al-nahr” the region at the northern part of Amu Darya, “the place beyond the river”. See Abazov, R. (2008): *Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 51

³⁴ See Kurbanovich Muminov, Ashirbek: “Un document genealogique (nasab-nama) d’une famille de hwaja yasawi dans le Khanat de Kokand (XIXe S.)”, *Eurasian Studies*, n° 1 (2002) pp. 1-35.

³⁵ See Aleksandrovich Belyaev, Evgeniy (1966): *Arabs, Islam and the Arab Khilafat at the Early Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., Moscow, Nauka [in Russian], p. 141.

³⁶ It should be noted that “Actually, this inequality was caused by the persistence of the Arab. A tribal organization in which the non-Arab could not enter as an equal member. In addition, Arab conquerors would have sought to protect themselves from confusion with the conquered population, for fear of dissolving into his mass. Therefore, the marriage of *Maula* (as well as any another foreigner, the Arabs) was considered a crime sometimes punishable by death”. *Ibidem*, p. 193.



their meetings the wide spectrum of questions regarding the respectable upbringing of the child. These might even include the peculiarities of breastfeeding, giving him a worthy name, and so on. Later, with age, the child begins to acquire knowledge not only about the rules of conduct, ethics or dress code, but also about how to combine universal values and state regulations harmoniously.

The reader may well object to this last point, but the viewpoint follows the traditions of historical practice, in which the members of the higher religious strata were repressed by the ruling systems after a change of political authorities or in the dominant ideology. The October Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing repression by the Bolsheviks can serve as a striking example of this. Leafing through the tragic pages of history, we can find evidence that these social groups and social communities have been victims of spiritual trauma in the recent past. For this reason, the representatives of this class, thanks to the high moral features instilled in them through their developed system of education, could adapt to practically any ideology or political system. This feature was considered to be the most important for survival and saving the kin.

Over the course of time, this received status was, because of social-biological processes, passed down from generation to generation, and came to be a fixed status in the evaluation of the social status of a family member. For instance, if a child was born into the family of *khodja*, and if he is of Uzbek ethnic origin, then he is considered an *Uzbek khodja* (*Uzbek khojalaridan*). If he is from the family of *khodja* and belongs to *boy tupi*, he is *boy tupi khodja* (*boy tupi khojilaridan*). If his ancestors are from the Prophet—i.e., if a genealogical document exists and it can thus be proven—then he is considered to be from the generation of the Prophet. If he is from some area (e.g. *yassaviy*), or from some other place, then he receives the name of the corresponding *khodja*, e.g. *Juybarski khodja*, *Salavot khodja*, *Khodjикent khodja*, *Turkestan khodja*, *Shakhimardan khodja*.

It is worth noting that those who belonged to the higher strata, including *khodjas*, tried to prove their status within the Muslim world by using genealogical documents, or *shajara*, *nasabnoma* (“family tree” or “pedigree”).

Such pedigrees link its owner to his ancestors going as far back as seven generations, and this tradition is widespread to the present day. It can be viewed as one of the elements of a person’s self-knowledge. It is notable that the composition of such genealogical tables among wide strata of the population was carried out according to the principle of *Yetti yot begona* (“After the seventh kin, the next is a stranger”). The schema of this principle can be presented as follows:

1. Parents (<i>ota-ona</i>)	5. Great-great-grandson (<i>evara</i>)
2. Son (<i>farzand</i>)	6. Greatest-grandson (<i>dubora</i>)
3. Grandson (<i>nevara</i>)	7. Greatest-great-grandson (<i>novora</i>)
4. Great-grandson (<i>chevara</i>)	8. Stranger (<i>begona</i>)

The importance of this principle, in the opinion of several respondents, resides in the fact that it plays a significant role in conjugal-congener relations, because it prohibits all conjugal contact between people who have common relatives, i.e. it regulates conjugal relations in the kin or social group. However, strict adherence to this principle cannot be observed today, especially among the representatives of social-religious classes.



However, not all the *khodjas* or *ishans* had documents to prove their pedigree. Based on collected data and information given by respondents, we created a table of existing stereotypes prevailing among a wide section of the population regarding the representatives of each social group belonging to a social-religious caste.

2.3 Stereotypes of the *Khodja*.

How does the Uzbek population perceive this institution? Somewhat curiously, Uzbek people use various terms for very similar realities, as presented in the following table:

Stereotypes formed in local population about the “sayyids”, “ishans” and “khodjas”

<i>Sayyids</i>	<i>Ishans</i>	<i>Khodjas</i>
Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad	Descendants of “holy” people	Descendants of “holy” people
Descendants of Arabian conquerors	Descendants of Arabian conquerors	Descendants of Arabian conquerors
-----	Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad	Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad
-----	Descendants of the closest fellows of the Prophet Muhammad	Descendants of “holy” persons from the local population
-----	Descendants of “holy” persons from Maveraunnakhr	Descendants of well-known and intelligent people from the local population
Ranked among the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and named in some regions as: “ <i>tura</i> ”, “ <i>ishan</i> ”, “ <i>kh’adja</i> ”, “ <i>habib</i> ”, “ <i>sharif</i> ”.	Title obtained by improving one’s religious point of view. In some regions, such individuals are also called: “ <i>khodjas</i> ”, “ <i>shaykh</i> ”, “ <i>makhdum</i> ”.	Title obtained by working in an important administrative position. In some regions, such individuals are also called: “ <i>kh’adja</i> ”, “ <i>ishan</i> ”.
Notable for their great religiosity	Notable for their great religiosity	Highly intelligent and very bright people
Notable for their elevated level of education and culture	Notable for their elevated level of education and culture	Notable for their elevated level of education and culture
Recognized as having improved their religious knowledge	Recognized as having improved their religious knowledge	Recognized as having improved their religious knowledge
Regarded for combining religious and modern knowledge	Regarded for combining religious and modern knowledge	Regarded for combining religious and modern knowledge
Faithful to the traditions and values of ancestors	Faithful to the traditions and values of ancestors	Faithful to the traditions and values of ancestors
-----	-----	Gradually deviating from some customs and values of ancestors
Highly regarded social origin	Highly regarded social origin	Highly regarded social origin



Although the number of given stereotypes in this table can be increased, in our opinion, the given facts reveal the key features of social groups belonging to this social-religious class.

Generally speaking, *khodja* in Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages means a kind of class or community. This term was even used in the times of the *Huns* to refer to noble and rich people. *Khodja* in Persian, written as *kh^vodja*, means “Sir, Mister, Monsieur.”³⁷ In the early years of the Arabic conquest (in the 8th century) the word was *khuzayna* (“master” or “lord” – *khujayin*), becoming *khodja* in the literature of the late period. Moreover, in the encyclopaedic dictionary titled *Islam* (1991), the term is given the following definition:

1. In the states of the Samanids (9th to 10th centuries) and the Ghaznavids (10th to 13th centuries) great (*buzurg*) *khodjas* was the title given to a minister. However, in the Ottoman Empire, the term *khodja* came to be used to designate the tutor of a sultan, a guardian of the library in the palace, and a eunuch. In modern Turkish, *khodjas* refers to people who deal professionally with religion and is a form used to address a teacher. In several modern Arab countries, *khavadja* (*khuvadja*) means merchants, chiefly, non-Muslim ones, and is also the polite form for addressing non-Muslims.

2. Up until the beginning of 20th century, in Central Asia *khodjas* was an honourable nickname for people claiming to originate from the four “righteous” caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar (mainly), Usman, and Ali (except for the last descendants of the marriage to the daughter of Muhammad, Fatima). It is the same case for the title *Shaikh*³⁸.

3. *Khodjagon* (*kh^vadjagon*) was the term used to refer to a member of the Sufi brotherhood established by Abd al-Khalik al-Ghyzduvani, and later (up until the 19th century), the several dynasties of emperors genetically related to this brotherhood.

In the Bukhara and Khiva khanates this title was used to refer to the representatives of the higher religious class, *imam khatibs*, as well as to administrators of religious organizations, and members of authoritative religious dynasties who enjoyed various state privileges, including that of tax immunity. As an example of tax immunity, it is worth mentioning the Decree (label) of the khan of Khiva Mukhammad Abulgozi V (end of the 17th century), which granted the family of the *khodja* exemption from all types of taxes. This document is kept in the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and was kindly lent to me and translated by a history colleague of mine, Abdurasulov Ulfatbek. In this document, the khan stipulates that *khodjas* (their names are listed) ought to be exempt from all types of taxes and obligations in their work (these are also listed in the document). These privileges are also extended to their children and brothers. The document further mentions that all *khodjas* have genealogical documents (*nasabnoma*) showing their descent from the Prophet. Furthermore, khan only reaffirms the decree that had already been adopted by previous emperors. This system of granting tax immunity to the families of the representatives of social-religious classes was widespread in Central Asia during the Early and Late Middle Ages. Considering all this, it is worth noting that the title of *khodjas* was also used to designate people related to a noble family, saints or descendants of saints.

As mentioned above, some researchers consider that *khodjas* lived in the territory of Central Asia as descendants of the *chariyors* (the four righteous caliphs), and classify them in terms of origin into the following groups:

1) Descendants of Caliph Abu Bakr Siddik, called *Siddik khodjas* (*siddiqiy khujalr*). Ancestors of this kin group came to Maverannakhr in the 12th century under the leadership

³⁷ See Houtsma, M. Th and Others: *E. J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam...*, *Ibidem*.

³⁸ See Defremery, Charles (1854): *Memoires D'Histoire Orientale*, Part 2. Whitefish, Kessinger Publishing, p. 407. See also Malcolm, John (1888): *History of Persia*. Lahore, Civil and Military Gazette Press, p. 86.



of Umar Kurayshin, whose identity, according to respondents, was later named as sacral Arslanbab³⁹. Subsequently his descendants lived mainly in the Fergana Valley and in the territory of modern-day Tashkent.

2) The other kin group of the *khodjas* takes its pedigree from the Khazrat Umar bin al-Khattab, called *farug khodjas* (*forug khujalar* or *miyon*, which means “middle class”). The Russian orientalist Neil Lykoshin used the term *miyon* in relation to *ishans* as well. Today, descendants of the *miyon khujalar* live in the territory of the Chirakchi district in the Kashkadarya region and in the Samarkand and Navoi regions. The famous spiritual leader, Imam Rabbaniy, also claims to be from this kin group.

3) Descendants of Khazrati Usman bin Affon are called *zunnur khodjas* (*zunnuriy khujalar*). A source from the end of the 19th century, *Manokib-I Dukchi Eshon*, stated that, after his marriage to two daughters of Muhammad—Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum—caliph Uthman got the nickname *Zun-Nurayn* (or *Dhun Nurayn*), which means “owner of two Pharos”⁴⁰.

4) Descendants of Ali ibn Abu Talib—with the exception of the descendants from his wife Bibi Fotimai Zakhro—are called *Shakhimardan khodjas* (*Shokhimardon khujalari*). Most of them have lived in Tashkent, Margelan, and Shakhimardan.

In addition to this division of *khodjas* into kinship groups, respondents to our questions from Tashkent and South Kazakhstan made a further division of *khodjas* based on origin (*lhodjas*); their being descendants of *Arslanbab*, descendants of *Lochinbobo*, descendants of *Kargabobo*, or descendants of *Kiskichbobo*. Thus, they connected the founders of their kin groups with the cult of animals popular among the nomadic populations of the deserts: *Arslan* (lion), *Lochin* (falcon), *Karga* (raven), and *Kiskich* (lobster).

During the research, attention was paid to the titles by which *khodjas* and other strata of the population referred to this or that kin group of *khodjas*. For instance, one interviewee from the Balikchi district of the Andijan region called his kin group *kora khodjas* (“black *khodjas*”). Furthermore, he cited the fact that *oppoq khujalar* (“white *khodjas*”) and *malla khodjas* (“yellow *khodjas*”) already existed. Further facts set forth by respondents made it possible to conclude that *khodjas* played an influential role in propagating Islam among the nomadic tribes and the ordinary population. This is why when *khodjas* moved to a new place with missionary intent they tended to become founders of a new generation or kin of *khodjas*. Some of these *khodjas* had copies of the main pedigree document, which stated who they were and where they were from.

However, in other parts of the region no such documents existed among the kin groups of *khodjas*. In this case, the main proof of their being *khodjas* was to be seen in their behaviour and in a letter of attorney issued by one of the local emperors. This explains why, when the local population did not know to what kin group the new *khodjas* coming to them belonged, they would often call them by nicknames based on their actions, behaviour, or type of activity, such as, *khurmacha khujalar* (“*khodjas* making jars”), *sariqpustin khujalar* (“*khodjas* wearing yellow robes”), *qilich khujalar* (“*khodjas* with swords”), and *devona khujalar* (“strange *khodjas*”).

Families of *sayyids* tended to live in areas with some predominantly sedentary population and kin of *khodjas* were active among both the settled and the nomadic population.

³⁹ Present-day Arslanbob is a city in the Ferghana and Chatkal mountains, in Ferghana Valley.

⁴⁰ Babadzhanov, B. M. (2004): *Manāqib-i Dūkchī īshān (Anonim zhitija Dūkchī Ishāna – predvoditelja Andizhanskogo vosstaniya 1898 goda)* [Manāqib-i Dūkchī īshān: Anonymous Stories of Dukchi Ishan, the Leader of the Andijan Uprising]. Almaty, Daik-Press, p. 68.



Therefore, we meet representatives of the first group mainly among Uzbeks and Tajiks, and representatives of the second equally among all Muslim peoples of Central Asia. It seems that representatives of the kin groups of *khodjas* that belong to the descendants of Akhmad Yassaviy live in the territory of modern Kazakhstan, as well as in some regions of Uzbekistan and of Kyrgyzstan. As the Kazakhstani researcher Zikiriya Zhandarbek states, they consider themselves to be from the origin of the son of the fourth righteous caliphs Ali ibn Abu Talib Mohammed ibn al-Hanafi⁴¹. The *khodjas* from Akkurgan, Duvan, Kharasan, and Karakhan all belong to these kin. All representatives of the listed kin of *khodjas* were considered the hereditary spiritual mentors of kin-tribe unions. In every Kazakh village, there were several houses where *khodjas* lived and engaged in enlightening and religious activities. *Khodjas*, as Jandarbek states, did not—and could never—constitute a separate ethnic group, nor did they distinguish themselves from the people amongst whom they lived in ethnic terms. This explains the old Kazakh proverb according to which *Khodja jilip el bolmas*, or “gathering together *khodjas* will not make up a nation.” At the same time, it is worth mentioning that *khodjas* always were and will forever remain a peculiar socio-cultural group among the nomadic population.

2.4 The Term *khvadja*.

In addition, it is necessary to explain in detail the meaning of the terms *khodjas* and *khvadja*. Nowadays, a respectable number of specialists are studying the social-religious kin groups of Central Asia. Different opinions exist as to the meaning of the term *khodjas* among them. The term *khodjas* is given in many scientific works, including monographs, books, and articles. As aforementioned, the term *khvodja* (*khvoja*) was used to refer to descendants of the Prophet and his close fellows, as well as to famous and highly educated people. In this case the question arises as to why the local population uses the term *khodjas* (*khuja*) to refer to this social group. Is it a phonetic peculiarity of the Uzbek language? Some explanations exist based not on philological research but on the data stemming from sociological investigations.

In Central Asian territory *khodjas* comprise a majority in comparison with the representatives of other social-religious groups. As stated above, they were awarded this title because they belonged to a respectable and famous kin group, and were related to some holy person. One respondent, Turgun-khodja, who is originally a *khodjas* from the village Turbat in the region of South Kazakhstan and who worked for several years as *imam khatib* at a mosque called “*Ismoil ota*”, provided the following information about the local *khodjas*. He claimed that, together with the famous holy person (*avliyo*) Ismoil-ota (descendant of Akhmad Yassaviy) forty families arrived in Turbat. They began to settle there permanently and together with their teacher began “praying.” Later, the population began to call the representatives of these forty families *khodjas*, even though they had no documents proving their relation to this class. They were referred to in this way because they were fellows of a great holy person called Ismoil-ota.

It is interesting that Turgun-khodja used the term *khodjas* in relation to the descendants of Ismoil-ota and his fellows as well (e.g., Ergashkhodja, Azlarkhodja, etc.). This proves the above-made conjecture that not only did descendants of the Prophet and his fellows, famous, and educated people get the honour of being called *khodjas*, so too did ordinary people who were at the side of famous people, holy people, or historical figures involved in the propagation of Islam during certain periods.

⁴¹ See Zhandarbek, Z. Z.: “Yasaviya and ethnic history of the population Dasht- Kipchak (According to the Kazakh materials)”, in Abashin, S.N. and Bobrovnikov, V.O. (compilers) (2003): *Devotees of Islam: The cult of the saints, and Sufism in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. Moscow, Vost. lit., p. 333.



The scholar, Iakhia Guliamovich Guliamov (1908-1977) said the following in his work, “In the feudal system *khodjas* considered themselves to belong to the higher Islam kin group of Arab luminaries, and even recorded this fact in documents and certified it with the stamp of state powers. Most *khodjas* were exempt from all taxes, and according to the rules of Islam paid only part of them (one tenth)”⁴². Guliamov recalls a widespread expression that calls for respect to be paid to the *khodjas*: “*urib bolmas khujani, sukib bolmas khujani, khudo ursine khujani*” (meaning “don’t beat the *khodjas*, don’t swear at *khodjas*, let God punish them”).

Throughout their history, people belonging to this kin group played a significant role in the social, economic, political, legal, spiritual, and religious spheres of life, including the development of the systems of science and education on Central Asian territory⁴³. One of our interlocutors, considering himself a *sayyid Khamidulla* from Andijan, said the following: “In the families of *khodjas*, unlike in the families of *sayyids*, not only men but also women were attracted to the sphere of modern science and technology and administration. That is why we can find such last names as Khodjaeva, Fazilkhodjaeva, Sharifkhodjaeva in all spheres. Among *sayyids*, this is very rare.”⁴⁴ Proof of this was evident throughout the entire period of the current investigation. Families of *sayyids* tried to save century-old traditions and values and pass them on to the next generation. *Khodjas*, however, appear in this respect not to be as conservative.

In all the documents consulted, we encounter *khodjas* written as *khvodja*. Hence, in historical documents, a bearer of the title *khodja* was a representative of this higher religious class. But at the same time, when conversing, our respondents used the term *khodja* to refer to the same set of people. The term *khodjas* was used in relation to the people accomplishing *khadj* (e.g. *khodja-aka, khodja-bobo, khodja-ona*). Famous orientalists such as Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Ashirbek Kurbanovich Muminov recommend the term *khodja* be used in relation to the representatives of this religious class, which is to be read as *kh^vodja*⁴⁵.

Several elements of national folklore can be introduced here to help us understand the etymology of the word *khodja* to some degree. There are some popular expressions which include the title *khuja*, for example “*khujalar obeddan keyin ayniydi*” –which literally means, “*khodjas* lose their senses in the afternoon”—; or “*urib bolmas khujani, sukib bolmas khujani, khudo ursine khujani*” - literally, “don’t beat the *khodjas*, don’t swear at the *khodjas*, let God punish them”. After comparing the facts we had collected, we came to the following conclusion: the term *khodja* was used in relation to senior, rich people, and not everyone is happy with their opportunities. The reason for this is possibly that, among the population, the term *khodja* is associated with the term *khujayin*, i.e., master or owner. Further, the term

⁴² See Gulyamov, Iakhia Guliamovich (1957): *Istoriya orosheniya Khorezma s drevneyshikh vremen do nashikh dnei* [History of Irrigation in Khwarazm from Antiquity to the Present Day]. Tashkent, Fan.

⁴³ For example, Fayzullah Khodja Khodjaev. He was born in Bukhara in 1896 and was executed at the Communarka firing range, near Moscow, in 1938. He fought against the Amir’s regime of Bukhara and he opposed the Basmachi movement led by Enver Pasha (as they were counter-revolutionary). Enrolled in the Communist Party, he became the First Secretary General of the Peoples’ Soviet Republic of Bukhara (the origin of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1924. He played a fundamental role in dividing the territories of Central Asia by the Decree of 27th of October of 1924; Uzbek SSR was divided again by decree in 1929, establishing the Tajik SSR and the Uzbek SSR. His downfall came in 1937 when he was accused of plotting against the Soviet state for the independence of Turkmenistan, of secretly aiding the Basmachi movement and of being a British spy. Executed (and purged) in 1938, he was rehabilitated in 1966 on the 70th anniversary of his birth. See Wheeler, G. E.: “Khodjaev”, at Bosworth, C.E.; Donzel, E. van; Lewis, B. and Pellat, Ch. (eds.) (1979): *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Leiden, E. J. Brill, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Komil Kalanov interview in Ferghana Valley, 2003. Another conversation was conducted later with the respondent’s family on February 27th, 2004 around Balikchi Andijan region with the participation of researchers K. Kalanova and G. Babazhanovoy.

⁴⁵ See Abashin and Bobrovnikov, *Devotees of Islam...*, *op. cit.*



khodja was firmly entrenched by representatives of this religious caste. Perhaps, these expressions are widespread among the people with good reason: the mood of the master regarding work and the people often changes. He can fail to keep his word because of new circumstances or a change in his mood. It is also worth mentioning the Kazakh expression: *Khodja jülip el bolmas* (“gathering together *khodjas* will not make up a nation”), which is interpreted by the people to mean, “when were the masters (owners) the friends of the people?” (*khujayinlar qachon odamg el bolgan?*).

A further explanation for the perception of the terms *khodja* and *khuja* lies in the considerable role played by the Soviet way of transcribing names in documents. Some last names, such as “Fazilkhodjaev,” “Fayzullakhodjaev,” and “Khodjaev” appeared at that time and later were changed to “Fayzullo Khodja,” “Fozil Khodja,” “Fayzullakhodja,” or “Fozilkhodja.” Moreover, the structure of some names changed, e.g. “Solikh Khodja” was changed to “Solikhuja,” “Azizlar Khodja” to “Azlarkhuja,” and “Rizkli Khodja” to “Rikhsikhuja”. The words *khodja* and *khuja* then merged and essentially began to mean one and the same thing. Because of such merging, the expressions *asil khuja* (“real *khodja*”), *chala khuja* (“dubious *khoja*”), and *aldmchi khuja* (“pretend *khoja*”) emerged.

2.5 Some Expressions About *Khodjas*.

Let us examine a few other aspects of the term *khodjas*. Some of the following expressions are often heard among the local populations about *khodjas*: *asl khujalar* (“real *khodja*”), *chala khuja* (“dubious *khoja*”), and *aldmchi khuja* (“pretend *khoja*”). Concerning them, one respondent, Ziyovutdin, made the following interesting claim, which he heard from his father: “...some people became *khodja* cutting the ox, some from becoming a *khakim* (mayor), and some from performing *khadj* in Mecca (*khoji*). In fact, real *khodjas* had a sign (*belgi*)”⁴⁶. Another respondent, named Ergashkhodja, expressed the same opinion. How should this “sign” be understood? Perhaps it is used to refer to one’s pedigree or adherence to some saint or ruler. Perhaps it signals the craving of *khodjas* for knowledge.

Most *khodjas* living in the Samarkand and Kashkadarya regions are supposed to be descendants of Daniyar-shaykh⁴⁷. Daniyar-shaykh lived in the modern village of Daniyar-shaykh in the Kitab district of Kashkadarya. Modern *khodjas* originated from the descendants of Daniyar-shaykh’s sons, Iskhak, Yusuf, and Madali. There was also a fourth son, the descendants of whom had no more than one son. According to the elderly, once upon a time, Daniyar *ata* asked his eldest son to come and bring him felled branches of a young tree. But the eldest son did not want to break the tree and gave this task to his younger brothers. At first his brothers also refused to carry out the task; however, soon the youngest brother, being young, cut the tree and consequently did not pass his father’s test. His father, angry, then cursed him with these words: “There will be no more than one son among your descendants” (*bitta novdang ikkita bolmasin*). He asked his elder sons to take care of the youngest brother and provide everything he might need. His sons carried out his will and provided for their brother, condemned to father only one son.⁴⁸

The family relations of *khodjas* often involve serious contradictions. Aziza, originally from Margelan, and currently resident in Tashkent, introduced herself as a descendant of a “real *khodja*” and told us the following: “*sayyids* and *khodjas* never married their daughters to people of the *halkiya* (i.e., ordinary people—in the Fergana Valley people of the ordinary class are called *halkiya*), which is why most of their daughters remained unmarried. They

⁴⁶ The conversation was conducted in the respondent's home June 20, 2002 in the Zangiota area of the Tashkent region with the participation of researchers and K. Kalanov and Sh. Gayupovoy.

⁴⁷ It is said that the prophet Daniel is buried in Samarkand.

⁴⁸ See Azim, Malikov. “The cult of saints and shrines in Samarqand province of Uzbekistan.” *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, vol. 3 (2010) pp. 116-124.



could marry only educated fellows.” There are varying and interesting opinions among the people regarding this. For instance, if a boy from the ordinary class marries a girl from *khodjas* or *sayyids*, then the groom must go to bed after the bride on their wedding night. In addition, he begins by lying at the end of the bed, as a sign that he accepts the superiority of his wife’s social status. Some respondents stated that this ceremony was obligatory throughout their married life. For instance, one interlocutor, a *khodjas* named Nazira, stated that her husband, who was from the class of “ordinary people” (*mening erim korachalardan*), followed this tradition every day. But at the same time, she said that in other families this ritual was performed formally on the first night only.

3. Conclusions.

Uzbekistan is looking to its future with hope. During the funerals for President Islam Karimov, it was possible to see how traditional Uzbek society is. The new President, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has inherited a stable country, which is the basis for development. In any case, Uzbekistan is looking for a better future, in search of new partners, without relinquishing its own institutions. It is very important to know how a society works so that it can stop radicalization and terrorism.

As stated throughout this article, there are some traditional institutions, which in the past have helped to tackle challenges and threats to the security and stability of the country. Furthermore, Central Asia is a region, a block, where borders did not exist thirty years ago. This means that there are numerous links among these countries: family ties, cultural and historical links, and economic relationships. Security is another issue that should be managed collectively.

For centuries, the inhabitants of present-day Uzbekistan have been able to manage their life together through social institutions that go beyond politics. The recognition of the *Khdoja* has been used to instill in the population a sense of obedience to elders and to the descendants of Muhammad, and a respect for a social hierarchy based on popular religiosity. The *mahalla* is another institution that has been useful to illustrate the way of being of a society that is used to living outdoors, not locked in their houses, sharing time with neighbors. This time and space serves to meet the real needs (not only economic) of the neighborhoods and to try to address them.

Without any doubt, these institutions serve as an escape valve, as a channel to express concerns and even to complain against public servants. Such is the importance of these institutions, that the Government of Uzbekistan devoted 2016 as the year to focus on the *mahalla*, to recognize that its work is fundamental to maintain stability in the country and to seek progress in the country.

It should not be forgotten that the *mahalla* has also proved to be an effective early warning instrument in the prompt detection of radicalization thus preventing further terrorist attacks.

As said above, Uzbek political culture is rooted in old traditions and social structures. Religion, more precisely Islam, is the only thing like an ideology that is embraced by all people in Central Asia, including in Uzbekistan. The same cannot be said of the new liberal democracies established in Western countries. To be sure, in Uzbekistan there are some groups of people who have been educated abroad and who call for some democratic reforms in the country, and some people inside the country who are clamouring for more rights, but most people remain as they are, content to support the leadership of their rulers. And it is plausible that the main reason for this is the long-standing tradition of ancestral devotion to the *khodjas*.



Thus, in conclusion it can be said that the *khodjas*, as an individual social group, have traditionally played a vital role in the social-cultural life of Central Asia. Despite efforts to isolate representatives of this class from the ordinary population, the number of bearers of this title has increased because of various social processes in the country. Due to the quantitative increase in members of this class, the term *khudja* expressing the descendants of the Prophet, his four caliphs, and fellows came to be mixed with the term *khodja*, initially used regarding famous people and people of high rank.

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