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### **Understanding the Civil war in Tajikistan through the Lens of Localism<sup>\*</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

In late 1991 the USSR disintegrated into five Central Asian States. The states emerged as sovereign nation and suddenly came to the interest of the International Arena receiving international political and economic recognition from the outside world.

Although constrained by past development, at the beginning of their independence the Central Asian governments had a wide range of options to choose from regarding their political and economic directions. This freedom of decision, however, was mainly due from the fact that Russia, prostrated by the collapse of its soviet system, was not able to keep the states strong through the traditional soviet network of economic, military and social supports.

The common decision to move towards a free market economy and a democratic political structure, led the countries to significantly different policy and economic outcomes. These have been obviously affected by the geographical disposition of the country, by the social and ethnic background, the abundance of mineral resources, their infrastructures and a certain internal stability that could permit external investments.

While in four Central Asia states the political structure was able to maintain a certain degree of credibility both internal and external, in Tajikistan the lack of a centre of power due to a weak and corrupted government combined with a widespread sense of disillusionment and poverty brought the country to Civil war.

The Tajik civil war one of the most neglected wars in recent time was the bloodiest conflict to occur in the entire former Soviet era after the break-up of the USSR (Capisani 2000). The battle lines are still now extremely confused. While it is often portrayed as a conflict involving new-communists with ties to the former soviet regime against a coalition of new Islamist and national parties, many scholars assert that the conflict was at its root a power struggle among regional or local identity groups.

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The principal contention of this article aims to provide a more detailed discussion on the factions that participated the conflict and try to give a personal interpretation about such cruel conflict. The analysis is mainly focused more than an understanding of the causes, at an answer to why the complexity of the actors (political parties, Islamic groups, civil coalitions, etc) involved at different levels and grades in the civil war suddenly started to fight without any structured program, and without any visible coherent set of alliances; apparently only moved from the fact that the Russian force that for years has kept their strong, unexpectedly collapsed.

The lack of the sense of 'national identity' that characterises Tajikistan, and the fact that almost all Tajikistan's inhabitants are Muslims, has push me to move on from the most accredited hypothesis that the conflict was based on a confrontation between secular 'National,' and religious 'Islamic' parties. I find, however hard to accept the thesis that ascribe to 'Regionalism' and 'Localism' the cause of the conflict. 'Localism', as Roy (Roy 1998) points out, is when a group of people from different ethnicity, background and origin, identified itself by the geographic place where they are living; founding in the place, village or kolkhoz the unique common root that permits the social cohesion. Localism, as I explain in the article, is an artificial creation of a group that for different and various reasons are living in the same place; the relations between people are superficial, related to the needs of the moment, usually connected to the local market and the local policy, their relations are not so deeply and strong as the alliances based on ethnicity and familiar affiliations, and their common objectives are not so strong to justify an armed conflict.

In the attempt to clarify the complex panorama, some scholars had focused their attention on the structure of the fight factions that were visible ad clearly observable in the Tajikistan's civil war. The main warring factions were composed of political groups. These groups identified themselves by ideology (secular or religious, promoting Islamic values or referring at nationalistic secular ideologies) but in reality they were supported from a particular region.

This interpretation, however, miss to analyse the stratifications of the social structure of Tajikistan, that originally was based on ethnic groups that developed a system of allegiances, and loyalties that have lasted for centuries. The soviet period made huge changes in the Tajikistan's social structure. The artificial changed of the soviet period, created a new sub-social structure that was characterised by territoriality than by ancient ethnic historical legacies.

The new sub-social structure, however, met in the regions, villages, or kolkhoz, the previous social ethnic structure, that did not ceased to exist, but perpetuated their previous family allegiances and old relationship along their line.

I suppose that the encounter of these two social structures has created a third sub-structure with different basis, different relational structures and different achievements, but still and deeply co-related at the previous two.

In few worlds I think that the root of the conflict in Tajikistan should be found in this third sub- dimension those Elites manifest and obey at the ancient legacies but in the same time reflect the aspirations and the characteristic of the second. The conflict, I think was not the result of the clash of two social structures, but the clash of three sub-structures that lost their equilibrium that has permitted the construction of such complex, fragmented, unequal but stable society.

### **Tajikistan at the time of Soviet Union's collapse**

Tajikistan is located at the borders of Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It was one of the poorest states of the Soviet Central Asia Republics. It has poor economic resources; an economy that is primarily based on agriculture, and a not very developed industry.

Several months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan, like the other Central Asian states became independent from Moscow, but the independence was matched by huge economic crisis and social destabilization. Despite experiencing similar problems, the governments of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were able to retain a certain degree of credibility, but in Tajikistan the weak and corrupt government completely failed to achieve this credibility. The subsequent loss of legitimacy led the country into a brutal civil war that brought the state to the attention of the international arena.

Although it is not possible to give an exact or official start date to the Tajikistan conflict (particularly as the conflict was only the tip of the iceberg of a series of previous preconditions) it is generally recognised as being the 1st May 1992. At the beginning of this period the weak Tajik government had no means of enforcing law and order. In an attempt to dislodge the demonstrations in Dushanbe, the president called for the formation of a National Guard. The opposition, which was probably armed, responded to the intervention of the National Guard with the use of violence and fighting broke out between the two groups. The opposition was better organized and soon captured a number of strategic sites.

The preconditions that pushed the country into such a situation however, had been present for years prior to this incident. Furthermore it is likely that the real roots of the conflict lay in the 'National' formation and consolidation of soviet Tajikistan. An overview of the factors that have been thought fundamental to the conflict and a brief historical background of the country together

with all of Central Asia area are essential to gaining an understanding of the complex political, social and economical situation of Tajikistan.

## **Historical Background**

The history of Tajikistan is bound with that of Central Asia. The area had never experienced a central political entity before the appearance of the Russians, who conquered the area between 1865 and 1884. Although officially part of the Russian empire, they did not replace the local Khans and Emirs with a Russian governor. The Russians as well as the Soviets exploited the raw materials and the endless territories of the area for extensive cultivation. The local population were also exploited, not only by those in power in Moscow, but also by their own local leaders who worked hand in hand with the Russians.

Although, at the end of nineteenth century the area lacked a central political body and its vastness was an impediment to contacts and organizations, some nationalist and religious resistance began to flourish. The movements suffered brutal repression, their program was superficial and confused and they were too weak and badly organised to sustain a confrontation with the Russian empire. The revolution in Russia changed the situation in Central Asia, but only from an administrative and ideological point of view; the idea of using Central Asia as a provider of raw material for the rapidly expanding Russian economy had always existed.

The Red Army reached and conquered the vast area of Turkestan in 1920. At this time resistance movements, called Basmachis, were a combination of religious and nationalistic forces. The movement became a coherent and effective force against Russian rule, especially under the leadership of Enver Pasha, who fought the revolutionary forces with the aim of establishing an independent 'Great Turkish Empire'. After his death in battle in 1922 divisions began to appear in the Basmachi movement. The divisions soon led to a progressive weakening of the movement and the Basmachi movement soon collapsed under the strength of the Red Army.

Some scholars, argue that the geographical and political division of the Central Asia area reflects the ancient theory of 'divide and rule' adopted by the Soviet Regime in order to strengthen their influence and to break relations between ethnic groups and clans. (Haugen 2003: 234)

Initially, however, the revolutionary socialist paid little attention to the 'National Question', nor the problem of social and political life. The Marxist ideology, in fact, is based on the concept of 'Internationalism' and rejects the idea of the nation as a natural category, arguing that the concept of nation was an historical construct, a product of capitalism.

On November 22, 1917, the soviet government issued an appeal signed by Lenin and Stalin to Muslims in Central Asia; the appeal recalls the concepts of freedom and ‘self-determination’ between populations.

Henceforth, your faith and customs, your national and cultural institutions are proclaimed free and inviolable. Arrange your national life freely and without hindrance. That is your right. Know that your rights like the rights of all the peoples of Russia, are protected by the entire might of the revolution and of its organs, the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants’ deputies. (Lutnitsky 1954: 14)

It is likely that the first goal of the Bolsheviks was the application of the Marxist ideology of ‘self-determination’ ‘freedom’, and ‘Internationalism’, obviously; these theoretical concepts were subjected at the personal interpretations of the Soviets and in particular of Stalin that especially in the Central Asia case, changed strategy quite often.

The ‘divide and rule’ theory is based on the perception that the national delimitations of Central Asia have been formed as a strategy in order to prevent an hypothetical menace posed by a unified Central Asia to the centralized Moscow power. This theory, however, has been challenged by Haugen, (Haugen 2003) who argues that the national delimitation has been a more constructive than disruptive process as Central Asia at that time showed to be characterized more by fragmentation on various levels than by unity.

The discourse regarding the establishment of a national political entity, that is ethnically based, reveals that the soviet regime hoped that the organization of national republics might counteract such fragmentation.

If elites coalesced around the national republics, they might be more able to engage in soviet construction. In this sense, the creation of the national republics was more about bringing together than splitting up. (Haugen 2003: 234)

In this analysis, the author fails to explain why the major Cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, that have a huge concentration of population of Tajik ethnicity, have been put under the jurisdiction of Uzbekistan, which remains today a matter of concern for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Bergne (Bergne 2007) discovered that in 1924 the Tajik leadership demanded a re-examination of the status of centres of Tajik settlement, such as Samarqand and Bukhara. The official response from the soviet authorities was that at the time of the 1924 delimitation, these towns and their surrounding areas had been allocated to Uzbekistan partly because Tajikistan had still been devastated by the Basmachi revolt, and therefore unable to administer these relatively large centres.

Together with Samarqand and Bukhara, still now part of Uzbekistan, Khojand was at that time put under Uzbekistan sovereignty. The city of Khojand was subsequently transferred to Tajikistan on 31 March 1929.

The archives currently available are silent as to the pressures that persuaded the Uzbeks to give Khojand up to the Tajiks. When one considers the determination with which they resisted the transfer of the other two great Tajik-dominated cities, Samarqand and Bukhara, it is hard to believe they surrender without a struggle. Whatever the circumstances, on 31 March 1929, the Executive Committee of the Uzbek communist party reached the decision to transfer Khojand to the Tajik ASSR. (Bergne 2007: 104)

Despite the efforts or the strategies of the Soviet regime for the creation of new communist states, and the new identity (based on communist ideologies) Central Asia, and in particular Tajikistan, never reached such a point of cohesion that would permit the creation of a real strong national identity. As Bergne argues, the collapse of the Soviet Union might have been expected to offer the Tajiks the chance to define their common identity and their national identity as well, but neither the historical roots, nor the Soviet Tajik patriotism inculcated by the party provided the necessary skills for such achievements. In the effort to reach some economic and social achievement, like stability, security and economic growth, Moscow also built localised power structures that worked against national unity. These structures were to prove disastrous in a country that was unprepared for the responsibility of independence. (Bergne 2007)

The division of Central Asia at the beginning of the twentieth century showed these geopolitical characteristics: Uzbekistan received the central parts of the Khanate of Bukhara and the southern part of Kiva, parts of Samarqand and the Ferghana valley. Tajikistan was limited to the mountainous parts of the former Bukhara with mainly rural-Farsi-speaking Tajiks.

Later during the Stalin era, the principle of ‘national in form but socialist in content’ was fully applied. The Russian influence in all Central Asia Republics was greatly expanded. Russian became the common language, atheism and Marxist ideology became compulsory in schools and universities, religion was in many instances strictly limited, ‘Madrasas’ and religious schools were put under severe control.

The independent republic, which is known today as Tajikistan, was established as a separate entity in 1924 as part of the Uzbekistan Socialist republic. Only in 1929 did Tajikistan become its own Soviet socialist Republic with the capital Dushanbe.

### **Economic Structure of Tajikistan**

The economy of the country was structured on the soviet development plans, which not only exploited for the cotton and the crops monocultures, but also for the practical realization of its economic plans. These plans led to huge changes in the social structure of the country, as they included voluntary and forced migration in the 1940s, 1950s and particularly during the Stalin era, they moved millions of people.

The Pamiris and Gharmis were forcibly resettled in the southern and south western provinces of Kulob and Kurgan Teppe because labour was needed for the expansion of cotton fields. The new settlers lived in their own villages, within mixed collective farms, rather than integrating with the local population, the majority of whom were Uzbek and Arab (Jawad, Tadjbakhsh 1995: 8-9)

The economic structure of Central Asia, and Tajikistan in particular, has to a great extent remained colonial to this day. The communist economic plans under the Soviet rule made the cotton industry the dominant sector in Tajikistan as well as in Uzbekistan. Karaev, (Karaev 2002) divides the development of cotton industry into three periods.

The first period, starting from 1930 is today commonly known as the period of the ‘Monoculture of Cotton’. This period is characterised from the extensive use of the land and water resources, for the use of repressive methods and for the use of millions of people forcibly resettled in the cotton fields. An impressive infrastructure network, including irrigation canals, roads and agriculture machinery gave, at the time, an impetus to economic development of the regions.

The second period, in the decades following the 1960’s, the area devoted to cotton had considerably increased. Huge investments were made in the construction of the hydropower stations and water dams for cotton irrigation. Nurek and Kairakkum in Tajikistan were constructed during this period. Writing on this subject, Wegerich, Olsson and Froebrich, (Wegerich, Olsson, Froebrich 2007) in their article argue that the Tajikistan Hydroelectric potential had already been recognised as far back as the 1930s. This awareness led to the construction of smaller dams that could be used for irrigation as well as for electricity production.

Moscow’s subsequent ‘Virgin-Land’ policy and the view of cotton as a strategic resource in the competition with US and China shifted the use of the dams toward irrigation.

In 1953, soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev initiated the “virgin-land” policy which was intended to increase agricultural productivity, as part of the virgin land project, Khrushchev promoted the ideas of expanding the irrigated areas in Central Asia. In 1959 the Nurek dam was proposed and construction started in 1961. This would suggest that the dam was explicitly built to support agricultural production. (Waterish, Olsson, Froebrich 2007: 3817)

As a result of this policy, huge areas in the southern and northern parts of Tajikistan, particularly in the Vakhsh Valley and the Tajik part of the Ferghana Valley were brought under cotton cultivation. However, the construction of water reservoirs together with the diversion of the region's main rivers led to one of the most acute ecological disasters of the century.

The third period is characterised by a decline in the production and export of cotton. The disintegration of the Soviet Union had a serious impact on the development of industry and the economy of the country.

Both Pomfret, (Pomfret 1995) and Karaev, (Karaev 2002) argue that Tajikistan at the time of independence was not prepared in terms of political and economic strength for such a huge structural change.

The Civil War has inevitably protracted its state of economic and political instability and has delayed and in certain respects, changed the process of post-communist transition.

### **Localism**

As in many armed conflicts, the interests and actors that joined forces to fight the war were complex and changed over time. The main warring factions were composed of political groups allied with people capable of mobilizing armed militias, often through regional affiliations. (Akiner Barnes 2001)

What Akiner and Barnes argue in this brief description is in my opinion the key element of the Tajikistan civil war. The conflict has often been portrayed, as one that is ideological and political, the latter of which appears to be justified by the active participation of political groups. Ideological aspect however, has been pursued at length and at times wrongly. It is true, that on the surface, the civil war appears to have been characterised by the confrontation between political armed parties whose ideology lay with the old communist and 'Islamic- democratic' coalition but, the extent of the conflict and the subsequent developments shifts the conflict analysis towards other targets.

Due to the aforementioned historical background, Roy, (Roy in Djalili, Grare, Akiner eds 1998) argues that regionalism was the key to the Tajik civil war. The author argues that the geographical fragmentation of the country, due mainly to the artificial division of the area in the soviet period led to the development of a strong regional identity at the expense of a national sentiment. In brief, the lack of a sense of nationalism encouraged strong regional relationships among individual groups. The state was not seen as a unique entity, consequently the government did not assume much legitimacy as state representatives, but instead, it assumed legitimacy only for the region, or regions, whose members it represented.



His assertion is supported in some respects by Akiner and other scholars who identify, within the political parties, strong and deep relationships with regions and their representatives. The chronology of the conflict reveals some aspects of this point of view. In the early 1990's, the old political elite many of whom were from the northern Leninabad region joined a new alliance with people from the southern region of Kulob. In the soviet period, Kulobis were generally under-represented in the institution of state power but by the 1990's had the capacity to muster armed groups to reinforce the government. Through this government alliance the balance of power shifted to the Kulobis as the war continued. By the end of the decade the Leninabadi old guard had been marginalized from government and the Kulobi faction retained power under President Emomali Rakhmonov.

Opposed to the government forces was a coalition of new opposition parties and their armed supporters. Most of these parties identified themselves through ideology, (e.g., promoting 'democracy' or 'Islamic values' or a revitalized 'Tajik nation') but drew their support from a particular region. The largest of these parties was the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), with its stronghold in the southwest from among families relocated from the mountainous Qarateghin region that had been forcibly relocated to the cotton fields of the Vakhsh valley in the Soviet period.

The IRP aligned itself with the new Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), while the Rastokhez popular movement was composed mainly of Dushanbe-based intellectuals with a Tajik nationalist agenda, and the La'li-Badakhshan was a party, whose members were primarily Pamiri people who advocated greater autonomy for the mountainous Badakhshan region in eastern Tajikistan. As the war progressed, some of these groups united in the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) to further their military effort and to participate in peace negotiations. (Akiner, Barnes, 2001)

The same authors attempt to explain some outcomes of this conflict. It is clear that the 'regional political groups' were not engaged in a secessionist war, they were not looking to establish their own territory, or independence from the centre. In fact, never have the groups mentioned above in their often-confused programs, stated a secessionist target. Moreover, they argue that war was not driven by 'deep rooted' animosities between regional or ethnic groups. This assertion is unconvincing because the authors do not offer other explanations as to why the hypothesis of a conflict based on clashes between ethnic groups is discarded.

As is discussed by Horowitz, (Horowitz 1985) ethnic conflict is a recurrent phenomenon. It is essentially the social, political, colonial and post-colonial contexts that make ethnicity prominent to varying degrees. Often overshadowed by international warfare and masked by wartime alliances, ethnic allegiances are usually revived by the wartime experience or emerge again soon afterwards.

The context is however, the most important factor in that it can provide as a setting in which ethnic demands seem timely and realistic.

‘Certain world wide ideological and institutional currents have underpinned the growth of ethnic conflict. The spread of norms of equality has made ethnic subordination illegitimate, and spurred ethnic groups everywhere to compare their standing in society against that of groups in close proximity. The simultaneous spread of the value of achievement has cast in doubt (and self-doubt) the worth of groups whose competitive performance seems deficient by such standards. Finally the state system that first grew out of European feudalism and now, in the post-colonial period, covers virtually the entire earth provides the framework in which ethnic conflict occurs. Control of the state, control of a state and exemption from control by others are among the main goals of ethnic conflict. (Horowitz 1985:5)

Accordingly in the case of Tajikistan, ethnic groups fought not for ethnic supremacy itself, although we cannot exclude that deep-animosities can be present in Tajik ethnicity, but for the control of state. The main point is that we cannot exclude from our analysis the fact that deep animosities are present in the contest and such ‘animosities’ could have played a leading role in the conflict.

Roy, (Roy 1998 in Djalili, Grare, Akiner, eds.) gives a different interpretation of the cause of the Tajikistan conflict.

The key to the Tajik conflict is localism, that is to say factions defined above all by geographic origin, reshaped and restructured as it was by the population displacement of the soviet period. Almost all the officials of the IRP (Islamic Rebirth Party) are ‘Garmis’ (native of the Garm Valley or Karategin), and almost all the current leaders of the country are ‘Kulyabis’ (natives of Kulyab province) or come from Leninabad province. Garmis and Kulyabis alike are Tajiks. (Roy 1998:136)

The first conclusion, based on the results of the empirical analysis of the events of the conflict, show that some regional or local solidarities that have been created have always transcended political division.

The main solidarity groups involved in the conflict are primarily defined by geographic origin, the Kulyab valley and the Garm valley. The question that Roy highlights is how such geographical allegiances managed to acquire the political force that characterises them today? Roy believes that these allegiances can play a key role in terms of power because they are a product of the social restructuring brought about by the soviet regime. The collectivisation and the role of Kolkhozes rather than reorganising old clan affiliation have played a leading role in the formation of this ‘new’ community identity.

From this perspective, the conflict is the result of the restructuring of identities induced by the soviet system through population displacements and the re-formation of groups around the kolkhozes. The kolkhoz became either the expression of a solidarity group or the object of a power struggle between rival groups.

In summary, ethnic violence in Central Asia is less the clash of traditional 'ethnic groups' than of groups restructuring within the framework of the Soviet system. This system 'territorialized' and rendered the territories dependent on a single source and collective framework for the distribution of goods and access to wealth. In the soviet system, social existence and economic survival were dependent on belonging to a 'collective' Kolkhoz, (economic structures artificially created by the soviet system) factory or trade union, which were plugged into the state apparatus. These collectives transformed themselves especially in the countryside, into new 'clans'. Though Roy's hypothesis is interesting, I think that his conclusion that 'the key to the Tajik conflict is localism' needs to be reviewed.

In his hypothesis, he makes no reference to ethnicity, ethnic groups, their structure and behaviour. 'Localism' seems to deny the original ethnic allegiances and relationships of the groups. The new 'clan' form generated by the kolkhoz and collectivisation policy is not only something completely new, but is also without roots. The ethnicity of the groups, that were deported into the kolkhozes, and their subsequent inter-relations have not been analysed. Ethnicity is something deep, that has its roots in ancient times, it is related to culture, identity, religion, historical and geographical background, in general ethnic identity is strongly felt, and is behaviour based on the sense that it is normatively sanctioned, often accompanied by hostility toward outgroups.

Jawad and Tadjbakhsh argue that the voluntary and forced migration of the Stalin era resettled groups where the new settlers lived in their own villages within mixed collective farms, rather than integrating with the local population, the majority of whom were Uzbek and Arab.

Tajikistan is an artificial creation of the Soviet Union and most scholars quote the subsequent lack of a sense of state and nationality as the cause of the conflict. However, it was not until 1929 that Tajikistan became its own soviet socialist republic. 60 years had not been enough to create a sense of nationality, despite the efforts of the soviet propaganda. The Kolkhoz is an artificial creation of soviet economic plans, which began to implement the collectivisation projects more or less in the same period. If in 60 years the people of Tajikistan did not develop any sense of nationalism or attachment to the state, conversely, they were still bound to ancient allegiances and ethnic relationships, (ethnicity and regionalism together, have played a clear role in the politics of Tajikistan) why should they develop an attachment to such an artificial creation as the kolkhozes?

Accordingly, Foroughi (Foroughi 2002) argues that one explanation for the high rate of violence in rural areas in the Vakhsh valley during the civil war of 1920 is that a large number of these 'cotton and irrigation migrants', who had been forced to emigrate from their homes by economic incentive, had not easily adapted into the new soviet structures. Consequently, mistrust and misunderstandings with other ethnic groups remained through the decades, leading to violent outbreaks at the time of a power vacuum in central government.

For this perspective, what has created animosity among peoples has primarily not been ideology, but competition over perceived limited resources by differing ethnic regional groups. (Foroughi 2002: 49)

Additionally, the groups in the collective farms did not integrate with the local population because of ethnic and cultural differences. How was it possible for the eventual 'new clans' to achieve so much power, income and the loyalty of the local population to fuel a conflict?

Akiner argues that the conflict in Tajikistan had the classic dynamics of a civil war in which different interest groups mobilized to contest the control of the state and its resources. However, it was not clear upon which principles the newly independent country would be based: secular or Islamic, democratic or authoritarian.

The assertion that the conflict is related to economic factors is clear enough. The chronology of the events and the factors analysed show that regional party alliances have been extremely focused on the achievement of power and the control of economic resources. The nature of this civil war in Tajikistan subsequently, can be analysed as an example of 'war economy', more specifically a 'civil war economy'.

Ballentine and Sherman argue that such wars are characterized generally by the militarization of economic life, the mobilization of economic assets and activities to finance the prosecution of war. Recent studies, however, have identified several features unique to 'civil war economies', namely, that they are parasitic and illicit, they depend on black markets, and are predatory. This means that they are based on the deliberate and systematic use of violence to acquire assets, control trade and exploit labour. They are also highly dependent on external financial and commodity networks that provide access to the globalized marketplace. (Ballentine, Sherman 2003)

To define the Tajikistan civil war as an example of 'war economy' we need to analyse all the parameters that concur with the above definitions. Other factors that should be further analysed are why and how the regional groups involved achieved the sufficient enough income to sustain the conflict? Tajikistan is the smallest country of the region and the poorest in terms of both natural resources and economic output. Shortages of, and competition over natural resources, primarily land and water, are thought to have been the precursor to the conflict.

Subsequently, socio-political circumstances, namely the vacuum of power and the ready availability of guns ignited the conflict itself.

This accessibility of guns was the result of a long-term black market with Afghanistan that had been for dozens of years prior to the Tajikistan civil war, the repository of several billion dollars in armaments.<sup>1</sup> Illicit drug trafficking is another source of income that maintained the economy of the conflict. As a result of a lucrative drug trade flowing from Afghanistan, Tajikistan has been described as having the most criminalised economy in the region. One estimation projects that drug trafficking constitutes as much as 30% of Tajikistan's economic activity. Afghanistan produces as much as three-quarters of the world's illicit opium and an increasing amount of this trade is via the Central Asia corridor, of which Tajikistan is a large part. (Foroughi 2002)

It is likely that the majority of income that came from drug trafficking was used to buy arms for the Tajikistan civil war, but the question of why remains.

A hypothetical answer focused on competition over perceived limited resources by different ethnic or regional groups has until now failed to be exhaustive, particularly with regards to offering economic reasoning. The incomes obtained from illicit drugs and arms trafficking are decisive. Illicit trafficking or any form of illegal, black or grey market need, more than anything else, an internal but corrupt stability and not a destabilising conflict.

### **The resurgent of political Islam**

A significant political and ideological development in the period leading up to the Tajikistan civil war was the re-emergence of Islam as a powerful and emotive force for the cohesion of society.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomena has been deeply studied, not only in the specific case of Tajikistan, but also in the international political context of the Middle East and Central Asia area, where religion assumed the characteristics of a strong political force able to destabilise states as well as to change the geopolitical and the political structures. In the specific case of the Tajikistan civil war, political Islam has played a leading role in the ideological interpretation of the conflict. Islamic symbols, the green flag, quotations from the Q'uran, prayers, and other cultural and religious symbols characterized the initial phases of the conflict. This ideological dimension has led scholars,

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan, shared with Tajikistan, (at the time of civil war) not only the longest border of the country, but ethnic and clan allegiances. President Rabbani, and his military commander Ahmad Shah Masoud are ethnic Tajik, and during the civil war Afghanistan hosted thousands of the opposition fighters, then part of the UTO (United Tajik opposition).

<sup>2</sup> The major religion in Tajikistan is Islam, mainly Sunni 93% and an Sh'ia minority 7%, also Christianity.

journalists and politicians to address the conflict as a form of jihad (holy war) against the corrupted, secular regime. Subsequently, studies and analysis have demonstrated that the causes of the conflict lie far away from the Islamic context. The explanation of the Tajikistan civil war, Karagiannis argues, lies essentially in the clash of interests among different regional and ethnic clans, which probably used the ideology as a pretext to mobilize support both within and outside the country. (Karagiannis 2006)

Karagiannis's interpretation, broadly accepted by the majority if not all scholars, is supported by the analysis of the attitude that Islamic ideology has pursued during the conflict.

Initially it seems that the Islamic parties, of which probably the most popular and influential was the IRP (Islamic Renaissance Party), have given the conflict a strong ideological dimension. The party's speeches have been based in the mosques, and interviews with various party representatives (mainly mullah) leave no doubt as the dimension of the movement. In the weeks following the Islamic opposition victory, they occupied the television. The programmes took on a distinctly more Islamic tone. Once defeated, the opposition received protection in Afghanistan. However, in the specific context of Tajikistan, Islam (as political ideology) far from represented a menace, a force capable of imposing an Islamic State, and this target was never pursued or officially declared.

...the Qazi Haji Akbar Turajonzoda, supreme judge of the religious hierarchy of official Islam, who now heads the opposition movement against the regime from Afghanistan, knew that condition in Tajikistan were unfavourable for the establishment of an Islamic state. The Qazi would point out that, despite his wishes, it would take 30 to 40 years to teach Tajiks the abc's of Islam. Tajikistan would not have become an Islamic republic for the following additional reasons: those who vocally advocated an Islamic state were few in number, concentrated in small and dispersed districts. In contrast, those who would have objected were many: the large "Russian-speaking population" including the Russian and the 30% Uzbek population, the entire northern province of Leninobod, the majority of women scared by the prospects of a return to the veil, and the Badakhshoni people who, being Shiites, would not have accepted domination by a Sunni state. In its programme, the Islamic Revivalist Party (IRP) of Tajikistan, which had once been a regional affiliate of the Islamic party of the Soviet Union sought the establishment of an Islamic State, but only after Muslims had been prepared sufficiently to accept one. (Jawad, Tadjbakhsh 1995: 12-13)

Subsequently, studies of the structures of the political parties that joined the conflict have revealed that some representatives of the Islamic parties had previously been part of secular groups, while others came from the old communist nomenklatura.

In the 'Islamic-democratic' camp Qazi Turajonzoda was the head of the official clergy during the Soviet era, while, the leader of the Democratic Party, Shadman Yussof or Yusupov, had been in charge of the Communist Party at the Philosophy Faculty in Dushanbe; even one of the leaders of the Islamic opposition in the Kurgan-Tyube Valley, Abdullo Nuri came from a family of apparatchiks (Roy1998: 134 in Djalili, Grare, Akiner eds.)

An investigation of the society showed that Mullahs had been more eager to follow the political orientation of the ethnic groups they belonged to rather than to the Islamic oriented parties.

In conclusion, the role of Islam in the civil war remains an object of debate, the complexity of the phenomenon and its deep involvement in the conflict and Tajik society is not something that can be resolved through a mere exclusion of it. A simple assertion that the Islamic ideology<sup>3</sup> has only been a pretext of mobilization, cannot explain how or why this 'pretext' has been used, nor can it explain why some regional ethnic groups decided to characterize their movement islamically despite others deciding for the secularization of the movement itself.

If the different issues surrounding the particular conflict are not deeply understood, the complexity of the factors involved in the civil conflict cannot be resolved with the implementation of a peace process program. Failure to consider the multiplicity of the interrelation of issues is likely to result in the peace process being immobilized at the first level of its application. The cease-fire, that is, the end of hostility, is only the first step of a process that, owing to the complexity of its realisation, requires a deep knowledge of the historical, political and social structure of the country affected by conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The bloody civil war and its consequences (economic, political and social) have, over the past ten years, dominated Tajikistan's short history. The content of the 1997 General Agreement that led Tajikistan out from the violence has produced great debate and various conclusions. Major criticisms concern the vagueness of its content and the lack of consideration of the Tajik context when the resolutions were implemented in the country's peculiar social and political

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<sup>3</sup> Although social movement theorist have usually downplayed the role of ideology in mobilizing collective action, ideology is a concept that encompasses ideas, beliefs, values, and symbols that can motivate individual participation and give coherence to collective action ideology often performs multiple function, including transforming vague dissatisfactions with a politicized agenda. (Karagiannis 2006:11)

structures. Its practical application as was vaguely set out in the document, has been in many instances, misunderstood by those implementing the measures.

This trend was apparently confirmed by the re-election of Emomali Rahmonon in 1999's fraudulent presidential election and the 'Kulyobization' of Tajikistan, where cadres from the southern region of Kulyob (who had provided the troops that brought pro-government forces back to power in late 1992) came to hold the majority of the key positions in government, despite the power-sharing mechanism of the General Agreement. However despite the resurgence of an authoritarian government, Tajikistan has on the whole, avoided fragmentation along regional lines and a descent into further conflict. Governmental, oppositional and international actors have often successfully worked together to re-establish security in the country and to begin rehabilitating the economy. Some successes in economic reconstruction have not been significant enough to enable a declaration that the Tajikistan peace process has been successful and that all causes that fuelled conflict have been eradicated or resolved. This is particularly evident in its society that is, on the one hand, subject to conservative forces; Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country to officially register an Islamic political party (Hizbi Nahzati, islamii Tadjikistan) the Islamic revival party of Tajikistan. While on the other side, it composes of an attempt to democratize, a western life-style and the secularization of the structures. (The efforts to secularize the state are supported by the government).

The 'peace' in its broad sense seems to be working in the country, despite the failed attempt to resolve the causes of the conflict.

Some scholars define the peace-building as a 'paradox' of the concept of peace-building itself.

The success of Tajikistan in avoiding further war is more than a historical anomaly or a temporary reprieve, and that the lack of progress in democratization is more than a matter of impatience with an inevitably long-term process. Tajikistan as a particular case of peace-building refuses to abide by its peril/promise dichotomy. Moreover, its unresolved status represents a paradox of peace-building.  
(Heathershaw 2007)

The 'unresolved status' in its theoretical conceptualization has been wrongly attributed to technical mistakes in the peace process and, in particular, in the peace-building program.

I believe that the approach that peace-building has used, has in a technical way respected the guidelines suggested by the UN, international bodies, and international interventionists in conflict areas. Peace-building in the Tajikistan context has missed some important points. It has focused its efforts on searching for a compromise that would be mutually satisfying to the warring groups. Jeong argues that the re-establishing of the former status-quo, is not likely to lead to a long term social transformation. (Jeong 2005). The restoration of order ignores imbalances between groups in



the existing structures, as well as the relationships that already existed or that had been created inside the ethnic/regional structure of Tajikistan.

In the case of Tajikistan, however, because of its peculiar social structure that is based on ancient ethnic historical legacies and the new sub-structures born from the artificial changes of the Soviet period, the society has become quite peculiar. The external ancient relations between different ethnic groups, as well as the internal relations (elites and popular groups) no longer follow (at least not completely) the previous legacies but instead others have been created with different bases, with different relational structures and different achievements. (I suppose in the Tajikistan case these achievements have been mainly economic and political). In short, there is a creation of a new social structure that obeys new legacies and social relations, but in the meantime those of the old, ancient, do not cease to exist. Due to the profound historical and cultural basis the ancient legacies cannot disappear overnight. (The resurgence of Islam, and Islamic parties during the civil war and the resurgence of Islamic values today, show this attitude)

The elites as well as the masses have found themselves covering the dual role of depositary of the ancient legacies, and the managers of new ones. These ethnic/regional groups led by elites, I believe, had lived together peacefully because of internal balances that comprised of both old and the new parameters. They started to fight *not only for economic reasons, or for the achievement of power and the scarce resources in Tajikistan*, but also because the internal dual structure broke up.

The recurrent question highlighted by Horowitz, of why masses participate in conflict, could find its explanation in such a stratification of the ethnic based society. Masses follow the elites into conflict merely because of a promise of a particular unique economic or political reward, merely for ideological values merely for the achievement of the status of 'dominant regional/ethnic groups' in the area. One of these ambitions alone does not explain the totality of the factors that have been involved in Tajikistan's conflict.

Masses have followed the conflict, or supported one faction or another because in that 'faction' they found all 'values' or the peculiar 'value' that could be ancient legacies, religious affiliation, or new economically based relationships. These values were sufficient enough to justify their support of the conflict.

Elites in this case have not only has been the representative of a peculiar regional, or local faction (Roy 1998 in Djalili, Grare, Akiner,) but also the representative of a wide range of more general values. The peculiar elites can be at the same time, and in the same moment the representative of a peculiar local faction, but in the meantime can assume the representative of different values, such as those that are ideological, political and religious. I assume that this

stratification of different values, that can satisfy masses at different levels, could be an explanation for Tajikistan's civil conflict.

The peace-building in Tajikistan has completely failed to consider this aspect, and the old structures that are related to ethnic\regional groups have essentially returned to Tajikistan in the post-conflict social, political and economic situation.

To paraphrase Heathershaw, "peace-building remains the dominant prism through which the successes and failures of the Tajik 'peace' are interpreted."