WALKING IN A STRANGE CITY:
A STUDY OF POST-COLONIAL/POST-SOCIALIST TASHKENT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the practice of subjective, spontaneous, ethnographically minded and phenomenologically informed walks in the city. Assuming that merely theoretical elaboration will not suffice, the author "grounds" a certain Western tradition of exploring and narrating the city (epitomized by Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau) in contemporary Tashkent, putting its philosophical/artistic insights to anthropological use.

The Central Asian city of Tashkent was the official capital of Turkestan, the province of the Russian Empire, then the unofficial capital of the "Soviet East", and is now the capital of the republic of Uzbekistan, the most populous and arguably the most culturally diverse of all Central Asian states. Drawing upon my own walks in Tashkent, go-alongs and life-story interviews with the city residents, and corresponding texts (blogs, online forum discussions, booklets, tourist guides), I discuss in detail the key processes and tensions in contemporary Tashkent's cityscape: state-led national reconstruction of the symbolic landscape of the city (and resistance to it) and the evolution of the ethnic divide (autochthons versus Russians) from a clear-cut colonial dual city model to more ambiguous and contextual "invisible borders".

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INTRODUCTION

If there was a competition between socialist utopias – places like pioneer camps or theme parks where kids could catch a glimpse of the communist future – then Gorky park in Tashkent, the capital of the Soviet republic of Uzbekistan, would have had good chances to win. Playgrounds, statues and fountains (figure 1), a dance pavilion, a carting zone, a chess club, two cinemas, buffets and a café named after Buratino, the Soviet Pinocchio: a refuge from the tensions and conflicts of the city's life – tensions manifest in both previous and subsequent uses of this place.

Figure 1. Gorky park. A picture from a booklet, early 1960s

In the late 19th century, after the Russian Empire had conquered Tashkent, the place was one of the "public" gardens, laid out as an example of European rationality and prosperity. In such places, "Russian military and administrative elites enjoyed music and fine foods in luxurious surroundings as… 'ragged' Central Asians… peeked through lattices" (Sahadeo 2007: 38). And in the 1990s Gorky Park was razed to the ground, to give way to the semi-classicist,

semi-Orientalist splendor of the new *hokimiyat* (city hall), an icon of the newly independent Uzbek state (figure 2).

Figure 2. The new Tashkent *hokimiyat.* A postcard from a set published in 1999.

What are the forces behind these transformations? How do urban residents respond to and participate in them? What social, political and cultural divisions are experienced, imagined and negotiated through Tashkent's cityscape, and how can a researcher from outside decipher them? These are the questions I will try to answer in this study.

Tashkent was the official capital of Tsarist Turkestan, then the unofficial capital of the "Soviet East" (Balland 1997), and is now the capital of the republic of Uzbekistan, the most populous and arguably the most culturally diverse of all Central Asian states. In the Soviet era, due to the high concentration of cultural and educational institutions, and extreme ethnic diversity of its population[1] Tashkent became a multicultural ("internationalist", in Soviet id-

[1] Not only Russians and Uzbeks, but also Jews, Volga Tatars, Poles, Germans, Far East Koreans, Crimean Tatars (the last four groups were deported to he region in Stalin's era), Greeks (political immi-

iom) and, in a certain sense, cosmopolitan city. Equally distant from Russia and Moscow (i.e., both the climate and ideological pressure were more relaxed) and from its Uzbek hinterland, after 1991 Tashkent had to cope with a transformation into an abandoned colonial city in a post-colonial and a nationalizing (Brubaker 1996: 5ff) state – as, for example, Alexandria in post-1956 Egypt (Della Dora 2006).

Now Tashkent lies at the intersection of the processes common to, at least, the whole post-Soviet space (state-led national reconstruction of the symbolic landscape of the city and market-driven destruction of old residential districts to give space to luxurious hotels and business centers) and more endemic phenomena (e.g., the uncertain identity of the Russian-speaking minority in Tashkent as both hegemonic subaltern group; the use of the city as an object of hybrid socialist/colonial nostalgia).

Yet such a bold formulation masks the crucial initial uncertainty. Here I am, confronted by an unfamiliar city, in its peculiar historical configuration – a web of complex and contested physical spaces, spatial practices and urban imaginaries. How do I[2] approach this city? Where do I begin to untwine the threads? One thing is for certain: we should not start by taming fluidity, elusiveness and diversity into neat schemes and the "metalanguage" of our theories, but rather progress from our own, and our subjects' (urban residents) impressions, feelings, and narratives of the city – towards scholarly valid generalizations[3].

Hence the goal of this thesis: to explore the practice of subjective, spontaneous, ethnographically minded and phenomenologically informed walks in the city, a practice that allows for new insights in the anthropological study of contemporary urban phenomena. Assuming that merely theoretical elaboration of this practice will not suffice, I will try to "ground" a cer-

grants after the Communists' defeat in the Greek civil war in 1949) and Bulgarians (cotton-growers and construction workers who arrived in the 1950s–1960s). See (Ilkhamov 2002: 12–266).

[2] On my personal background in relation to Tashkent see pp. 20-21.

[3] This stance takes into consideration both poststructuralist insistence on "particularity and embodiment of all vision" (Haraway 1991: 189), and anthropology's practice of understanding big structures and global processes from the ground level up (Burawoy 2000).

tain Western tradition of exploring and narrating the city (epitomized by Walter Benjamin (1978: 97-131, 163-173), and Michel de Certeau (1984: 91-110) in contemporary Tashkent, putting its philosophical/artistic insights to anthropological use.

Speaking of more empirically-minded theories, my thesis lies at the intersection of two developments. First, the progression from attractive yet simplistic and/or biased metaphors, such as the "dual city" for the colonial urbanism and the "Islamic city" for the cities of Near/Middle East and Central Asia, towards seeing cities as sites of multiple forces, local, national and global, "a dynamic ongoing combination of confluence, diversity and conflict (Monterescu and Rabinowitz 2007: 1) – a progression that is underway in contemporary urban studies (e.g., Bodnar n.d., Isin 2002). Second, there is the post-colonial studies' turn from purely textual products to less mobile/transnational and more "rooted" objects – cities, landscapes and buildings (King 1995: 543-544).

My analysis also aims at avoiding both the macrostructural bias of urban geography (Low 1996: 384) and sociology's proclivity to view space as a mere backdrop, and not an actor in social processes and in people's lives (Agnew 1993; Gieryn 2000: 464, 466). I will focus on both the transformations of post-1991 Tashkent and their role in mediating and shaping the key social divides of that city's society.

I will start by situating my thesis in the field of contemporary studies of the Central Asia and by outlining Tashkent's place in the history of the region. Starting with the conquest of the city by the Russian Empire in 1865, I will touch upon Tashkent's transformation into a colonial city, an epitome of Imperial modernity, and upon Soviet attempts to level the colonial divides (Old versus New Town, Uzbeks versus Russians).

In chapter 3 I will step into the domain of theory, to defend my principal argument: the first step towards understanding the modern city is to immerse oneself in it, to explore it

through the researcher's own subjectivity, and through the memories and narratives of her informants, articulated during the walks in the city. I would start by tracing my route through the theories and methodologies that articulate this approach, and then proceed to more concrete details of applying them to my research in Tashkent.

Afterwards, in chapter 4, a thick description of one of my solitary walks will follow. An analysis of feelings, thoughts and adventures in official public landscape and in the Old (Uzbek) Town is intended to show the everyday functioning of the state's presence and the ethnic divide – the main "nerve-knots" of Tashkent's cityscape. Chapter 5, based on the material collected during go-alongs (Kusenbach 2003) with my informants, will address in detail the following issues. First, the construction of the official image of Tashkent – a capital city of a prosperous state that proudly asserts its national identity – and ruthless "creative destruction" of the city brought about by these projects. Secondly, I will argue that Tashkent's ethnic divisions have shifted towards less clear-cut and more contextual models: from the Tsarist "dual city" to the covert apartheid and invisible boundaries (Pellow 1996) of the late Soviet era. Now the key divide is between those who display a proper urban habitus in public places and those who don't; new alliance is forming: urban Tashkent Uzbeks and Russians against rural Uzbek immigrants. Thirdly, I will focus on the places that function alongside the state's policies, and are relatively indifferent ethnic divides, such as the urban parks and courtyards in residential districts. Finally, in the conclusion, I will reflect on how my study contributes to the understanding of the (post-)Soviet space in post-colonial perspective.

CHAPTER 1. CONTEXTUALIZING TASHKENT

1.1 Contemporary studies of Central Asia

In the fifteen years since the collapse of the USSR, the former Soviet republics have progressed along very different pathways of development and change. The countries of Central Asia[4], in particular, confront challenging questions concerning economic and political reform. The region has become a focus of Russian, American and, increasingly, Chinese geopolitical and geo-economic strategic concern. The peoples in the region are meanwhile facing the challenge of living within a rapidly evolving and often turbulent economic environment.

Despite occasional outbursts of geopolitical interest[5], the Central Asian region has remained a peripheral area for scholars of Soviet/Russian studies, as well as for the experts on the Middle East. Yet it is this very marginality (not quite global South, not typically post-Soviet, not exactly post-colonial) that makes Central Asia an exciting area to study.

Although increasing attention has been given in recent years to micro-level processes of change and people's everyday realities, there has been a tendency to focus on the revival of traditional and ethnic identities and cultures, rural areas and the indigenous rural population (e.g., Bichsel 2005; Petric 2002; Zanca 2004). This is a lamentable gap, as the cities are key sites of both opportunity and marginalisation in times of upheaval and change (Bauman 1993), where major social trends intersect to produce complex and distinct results (Sassen 2005, Stenning 2004).

[4] There is no unilateral agreement on the geographic borders of the region called Central Asia, but the most common definition refers to the former Soviet and now independent republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (e.g., Roy 2000: 1). See maps 1 and 3 (appendix).

[5] In late 1980s, when local Muslims were perceived a the most likely "fifth column" in the USSR (Myer 2002), or in 2001, in the wake of NATO's invasion of Afghanistan).

Despite a slight rural and Islamic bias, existing anthropological studies of Central Asia are admirable at least by the virtue of their rarity: the dominant Western academic discourse on Central Asia makes an impression of continuity with the scholarship of the Cold War era. Its key features, analyzed at length by Will Myer (2002), include the preponderance of policy-oriented research over more "independent" scholarly topics; the supremacy of political science; wholly negative view of Russian and Soviet presence in the region; the opposition of "traditionalism" and Western "modernity", the latter being the only future for Central Asian states, unless they wallow in "authoritarianism" or, even worse, "Islamic fundamentalism" (e.g. Olcott 1996, Rumer 2004).

A significant exception is the stream of recent studies known as the "new imperial history" (Gerasimov et al. 2005). In this paradigm, Russian Empire and the USSR are neither a "prison of nations" nor an "unbreakable union of fraternal peoples", but as a vast set of heterogeneous territories, political and cultural entities. New imperial history particularly focuses on the imperial borderlands (Central Asia being one of them) where multiple forms of power were constantly negotiated in a wide array of practices that cannot be reduced to simple accommodation or resistance to the policies of the centre (e.g., Brower and Lazzerini 1997, Khalid 1998, von Hagen 2004). Especially important is the refusal to see Russian/Soviet experience as entirely black or white, and as similar to that of the "classic" empires (French and British). In this study I try to be true to the new imperial history's call to investigate, from below, what unique mode has the relationship of colonial domination (or hegemony) acquired in Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet contexts. Unfortunately, recent studies only cover the period from the 1700s to the 1930s, while new histories of the late Soviet political and social order in Central Asia (which is pivotal to understanding the present configuration) are yet to be written.

Before we turn to contemporary Tashkent, it is necessary to situate the city in the broader history of Central Asia. Of all cities in the region, Tashkent is the richest in cultural layers: it is the only regional capital that already was a prominent centre before the Soviet era. What is more, it existed as an urbanized site hundreds of years prior to Russian colonization in the 19th century. Now I will touch upon its transformation into a colonial city, an epitome of Tsarist modernity, and then discuss the Soviet attempt to level the colonial divides (old versus new town, Uzbeks versus Russians), making Tashkent a showpiece of the "Red East".

1.2 1866–1917: contradictions of imperial modernity

Urbanization in the Central Asian region often preceded the Russian conquest. In the age of the Silk Road the Persophone oasis cities of the region (e.g., Bukhara and Samarqand) boasted mosques, madrasahs (Islamic schools) and mausoleums that could rival Cairo and Baghdad in splendor. However, slow decline of the Silk Road from the 16th century onwards (the shift of transcontinental trade to the sea routes controlled by Europeans was the main cause for that) and intermittent tribe warfare crippled Central Asian economy. The Shi'ite split of Persia in 1501 (the Central Asians stayed loyal to the Sunni orthodoxy), the encroachment of powerful Chinese Ch'ing state from the east and the Russian Empire from the North contributed to the increasing isolation of the region in the 18th–early 19th centuries (Khalid 1998: 40-44). As a result, all the principalities of the region (the khanates of Khiva and Qoqand, the Bukharan emirate) fell to the Russians without much resistance between 1865 and 1875.

Throughout its history, Tashkent was razed to the ground and rebuilt twice (in the 8th and 13th centuries). In the 18th century, when Bukhara and Samaqand were in decay, Tashkent grew in importance as the nodal point of trade between the Steppe and the oases cities, controlled alternately by the nomads from the north or emirs from the south (Sokolov 1965).

After the Russian conquest, Tashkent was made the capital of the governorate of Turkestan[6], thus receiving an immense boost to its development – from 1865 to 1914 its population skyrocketed from 60,000 to 271,000 (Ziyadullaev 1984: 222 ff)[7]. In urban development the Tsarist authorities tried to act as the agents of modernity (Sahadeo 2007: 22–78) – their rule over Central Asia was justified by the need to bring Western civilization to the backward Oriental peoples (Campbell 2002: 313) To show the "natives" an elevating example, the New Town built for Russian settlers alongside the existing city was designed as a showpiece of modern European rationality and urbanism. A legible street plan, wide boulevards, water pipelines, streetlights and other elements of modern infrastructure provides a direct contrast with crooked streets and mud huts of the natives' town.

Figure 3. Old and New Tashkent in the 19th century. Source: www.tashkent.freenet.uz

[6] There were at least two reasons for that. Tashkent was not a prominent religious and political centre prior to the conquest (unlike Bukhara, Qoqand and Samaqkand), thus less resistance was expected. Moreover, the city's strong mercantile connections to Russian markets ensured certain loyalty to the Russian rule. For the structure of Central Asia under Russian rule see map 2.

[7] Russians by no means confronted ethnically homogeneous population. Autochthonous Tashkenters were known as Sarts, a general term that "unified peoples of different regional, linguistic and cultural backgrounds who mixed in these urban areas " (Sahadeo 2007: 16). Substantial groups of Tatars (tradesmen from Russia), Jews and Armenians resided in the city.

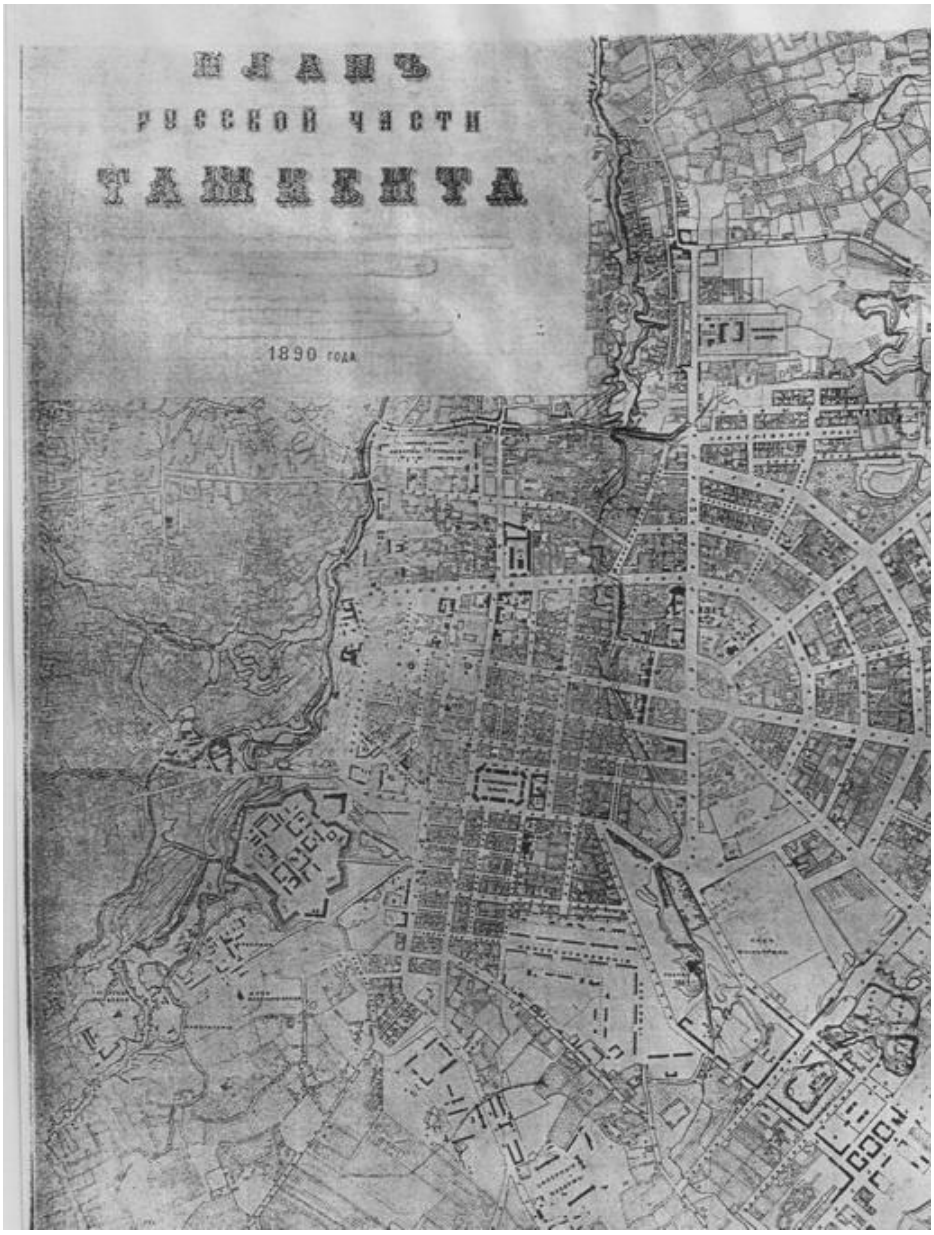

Figure 4. The 1890 map of Tashkent's New Town (note the clear-cut structure). Old Town is to the right, its contours deliberately blurred on the map.
The fortress, built in 1865, guarded the New Town and oversaw the Old.

However, this colonial project, and the dual city model that it implied, with clear-cut, unquestioned divisions (Asian vs. European space, culture, economy, politics) started crumbling almost immediately. The boom of colonial cotton economy, and the construction of the Orenburg-Tashkent railway, which was hailed as the instrument of progress, led to unintended consequences: educated and increasingly wealthy "native" businessmen started to gain control over the local economy, while lower-class immigrants from Russia, flocking to Tashkent's

small factories were demeaning the image of Russians as the agents of progress, with their vulgar appearance and dirty shacks – to the outrage of the settler elite of officers, officials and intelligentsia (Sahadeo 2007: 108–162)[8]. In the troubled years after the revolution of 1905 the tensions between the settlers and the metropole, between "Europeans" and locals, and between "modernist" and "conservative" factions of the local elite were rising, erupting during the years of the revolution and civil war (1916-1921) (Khalid 1996).

1.3 1917–1966: from colonial to socialist city

After the dust has settled, and Central Asia was firmly under Moscow's control, Soviet project for the region proved to be as ambiguous as the imperial one. On the one hand, the USSR portrayed itself as a state of workers and peasants – a kind of "subaltern in power" (Northrop 2004: 28), hell-bent on destroying the Tsarist order of privilege and segregation. The Soviet stress on all-out modernization and societal transformation throughout the whole state (and potentially the whole world) was a long way from racialized and exclusionist hierarchies of the interwar Western empires, which makes a strong point towards defining it not as a colonial empire but a modern developmentalist (Derlugian 2005: 78ff) or a mobilizational state, akin to Kemalist Turkey (Khalid 2006). On the other hand, both the Soviet and the Kemalist states employed the discourses and practices of European "high modernism", of a unidirectional path from backwardness to progress, of the salutary qualities of electrification and modern health care, imposed on ignorant subjects, if necessary, by force (Michaels 2000) – quite akin to the colonial violence!

[8] In Jeff Sahadeo's very recent history of imperial Tashkent the stress on the ever-uncertain status of local Russians is most important for my study. As their self-image of the bearers of civilization (thus not ruling by crude force alone) was being challenged by Central Asians' business success and the arrival of "poor whites" from central Russia, "investments" in various cultural activities was growing – a tactic remarkably similar to that in post-Soviet Tashkent.

In Tashkent, Soviet authorities tried to eliminate the division into Old and New town altogether, initiating ambitious projects of rebuilding the city. From 1930s on, "the challenge before Soviet architects… was to unite the disparate halves of colonial Tashkent into a single landscape which signified the ascendancy of the modern, Soviet social order" (Bell 1999: 188). In the Stalin era the changes were mainly symbolic, like the demolition of the cathedral in the main square and "populating" it with the statue of Lenin and government's offices.

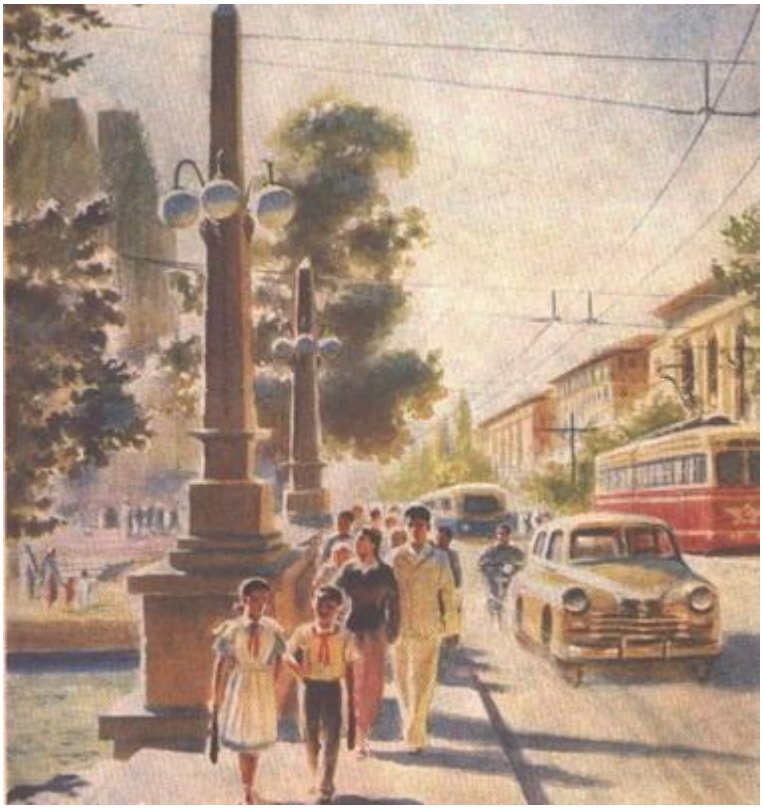

Figure 5. A bridge across Ankhor (a canal that separated Old Town from the New) – the symbol of the united socialist Tashkent.
Source: Vitkovich, V. *A Voyage across Soviet Uzbekistan*. Moscow, 1953.

At the same time, the physical and social landscape of both "Tashkents" remained largely intact – until the powerful earthquake of 1966, which, by chance, provided the opportunity for a massive project of urban restructuring. Up to this day, in the popular memory "1966" remains a highly contested event. The official story runs like this: after a disastrous earthquake, the whole family of Soviet nations rushed to help their Uzbek brothers, and in just a thousand days a new city was built on the ruins of the old, with modern 5, 9 and 20-storied

buildings replacing single-storey brick houses – transforming Tashkent into an exemplary Soviet and Socialist city (Ziyadullaev et al. 1984: 132–134). Alternative versions are more doubtful about the scale of disaster, arguing that it was more a pretext for Moscow to destroy the traditional order of the city, while for the architects and urban planners, both Russian and Uzbek, it was a chance to implement their ambitious Le Corbusier-style projects (Abramov 2006) – see figure 7. Nationally-minded Uzbeks among my acquaintances argued that under the pretence of "aid" Kremlin authorities flooded the city with Russian migrants who were given priority in acquiring flats in the new residential districts.

On the other hand, my informants from an older generation of Tashkent Russians said that the Russian part of the city suffered the most (Uzbek houses, built in ages-old traditional technique, were more seismically stable). Moreover, the influx of lumpen-proletariat from the four corners of the Union (they came to work at the construction sites and stayed in the city) dealt a mortal blow to the "old", "cultured" Tashkent that had managed to maintain its pre-revolutionary identity before. An urban legend puts the stress on the cunningness of Uzbek authorities who succeeded in extorting a huge sum of money from Moscow (and embezzled a large part of it, of course) – because Rashidov, the secretary-general of the republican communist party, shocked Brezhnev out of his wits by showing him only the most squalid and decrepit houses in the Old town[9].

However divergent these interpretations may be, there is no doubt that '66 was a deeply ambiguous experience for Tashkenters: the drama of seeing your house destroyed by an earthquake or a bulldozer mixed with the satisfaction with a new comfortable apartment (plus the advantages of subway system, new stadiums, cafes, theatres, etc). The city was steadily growing, mainly at the expense of the new residential districts (Chilanzar, Vysokovoltny,

[9] "Mifologiya Tashkenta" (Tashkent's mythologies). A discussion on http://www.fromuz.com/forum/lofiversion/index.php/t2949.html (in Russian). Retrieved May 29, 2007.

Karakamysh, Sergeli): from 626,100 residents in 1950 to 2,113,000 in 1991 (Ziyadullaev et al. 1984: 222 ff; Balland 1997: 229).

Also, after 1966, and even after the Second World war, it would no longer be plausible to define non-Uzbek Tashkenters in purely ethnic terms, as Russians. Henceforth I would be calling them "Europeans" – this is an emic term for multiethnic, Russian-speaking urban dwellers who arrived in the region during the Soviet era (they include, along with Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Ashkenazi Jews, Germans, Poles, Far East Koreans, Volga and Crimean Tatars). Despite their different ethnic, racial and religious background, and different reasons behind their arrival in the region (e.g., Germans, Koreans and Crimean Tatars were deported as alleged traitors in 1937-1944), they have been viewed as a single group by the autochthonous peoples and, by late Brezhnev years, have developed a common secular Soviet identity (Smith 1999, Melvin 1998: 34). In Uzbekistan, the bulk of the Europeans reside in Tashkent[10], making it a predominantly Russian-speaking city up to this day.

Figure 6. A building demolished by the 1966 earthquake. Source: www.tashkent.freenet.uz

[10] Its population was around 2,100,000 in 2002 (Tashkent 2006), Russians (without other "European" ethnic groups) making between 600 and 700 thousand (the number varies by various estimates – no general survey has been conducted in Uzbekistan since 1989). All in all, there are about 1,200,000 Russians in the country (Ilkhamov 2002: 188).

Figure 7. New residential districts. Source: Tashkent [a booklet for tourists]. Tashkent, n.d. (mid-1970s)

From 1966 onwards, relatively "safe" and unproblematic history of Tashkent ends, and the past becomes deeply contested, reflecting current tensions and divisions of the city. Thus, in the chapters to follow I will abandon univocal and unilinear narrative, and will proceed in a more genealogical vein. Looking at various phenomena of contemporary Tashkent's cityscape though my own, and my informants' eyes, I will also track their historical roots that go into the late Soviet era. To justify the subjectivity that such an approach to the city involves is the task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2. WALKING IN THE CITY: THEORY AND METHOD

The scholars of the city never tire of stressing radical heterogeneity of their object. They may focus on physical experience – staggering intensity and multiplicity of sights, sounds and smells that a modern metropolis unleashes upon its inhabitants (a constant theme of Western conceptualizations of the urban, from Simmel (1995) onwards). In a more theoretical vein, contemporary scholars (such as David Harvey or Edward Soja), being very critical towards early urbanists' attempts to define an essence of the city, emphasize fluidity, elusiveness and diversity of urban phenomena. However, merely to say that urban reality is heterogeneous will not suffice – we should devise tools to approach unique heterogeneity of **any** particular city that we study.

The aim of this chapter is to substantiate and elaborate on my principal argument: the first step towards understanding such heterogeneous an entity as the modern city is to immerse oneself in it, to explore it through researcher's own subjectivity, and through the memories and narratives of her informants, articulated during the walks in the city. I would start by tracing my route through the theories and methodologies that employ this approach, and then proceed to more concrete details of my outings in Tashkent.

2.1 Subjective approach to urban phenomena: a justification

Epistemological value of direct immersion in the urban is advocated, probably most vigorously, by Michel de Certeau. In his "Walking in the City" de Certeau eloquently contrasts panoptic gaze of planners, architects and other "experts" who treat the city as if from the God's point of view (detached, immaterial), and urban dwellers' intuitive, tactical relation to the city: their bodies "follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read." (de Certeau 1984: 93). In a more research-oriented way, Henri Lefebvre in-

vented the figure of rhythmoanalyst who "'keeps his ear open', but he does not only hear words, speeches, noises and sounds for he is able to listen to a house, a street, a city, as one listens to a symphony or an opera. Of course, he seeks to find out how this music is composed, who plays it and for whom." (Lefebvre and Regulier 2000: 229).

De Certeau and Lefebvre are very inspiring – yet it is somehow difficult to draw direct methodological conclusions from them. The primary reason for that is the highly idiosyncratic style of their texts, teeming with images and metaphors. As Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift point out, Lefebvre says little on how to practice rhythmoanalysis, merely explaining this rather elusive concept though other metaphors (such as "receptivity" and "openness") (Amin and Thrift 2002: 18–19). Secondly, the rigidity of oppositions such as "gaze" versus "walk", armchair researcher of structures versus curious explorer of street-life interactions, also seems problematic. A more subtle interplay is feasible: in my experience, I would rather say that a sally to the city might "stir up" inert schemes one works with, and fortuitous encounters in the city might spark off important insights about things abstract and permanent.

Another pivotal concept that capsules an ethnographer's immersion into the urban life is *flanerie* (as a practice) and *flaneur* (as a role). *Flaneur* is a hero of modernity: a dandy who strolls the streets of modern city in search of strange, unusual impressions, a disinterested observer who consumes the city visually (Benjamin 1989; Buck-Morss 1989: 340ff).

But, apart from such a historicizing, distancing vision of *flanerie* that limits this concept to 19th century poetry and shopping, acting as a *flaneur* may be perceived as the generic position of an ethnographer in the city. Such an interpretation of *flaneur* is usually based upon Walter Benjamin's own urban experiences and texts. It is important that Benjamin had both an eye for detail, for fleeting moments of urban life, and an acute sense of theory (in his case, a peculiar version neo-Marxism) that threw light on the social/political substrate behind seemingly disparate phenomena (be it intermingling of private and public in Naples (Benjamin

1978: 163-173), or substitution of money for power as the universal currency in Communist Moscow (Benjamin 1978: 97-131).

Although Benjamin's method so complex and unique that it may hardly be imitated, the notion of *flanerie* allows to bring together, in a powerful synthesis, otherwise disparate visions and techniques; is to balance "experience, knowledge and spatiality" (Keith and Pile 1993: 8). As contemporary cityscapes are very complex, diverse and overwhelm the researcher with a stream of messages that are frequently deceiving and always hard to decode, the tactic of "walking in the city" requires flexibility and certain astuteness in **reading** city spaces.

However, the epistemological gain of "going to town", of direct[11] access to the city may be annulled by one's inability to see below the surface. Panoptic gaze is not annihilated when one descends the skyscraper and merges with crowd (to employ de Certeau's imagery) – simply because we had all been tourists before we became scientists. I mean here not the social role of a tourist, with its practices of leisure travel and consumption (e.g. MacCannell 1999), but a certain way of looking at things with which this role imbues individuals. At the heart of this "tourist gaze" lies the desire to tame the alien, uncanny, strange; to control what one wants to experience in the city; to transform strange places of alien culture into homogeneous space where one may freely consume other cultures (Urry 1995: 165).

I would suggest two tactics that might be used to combat the consequences of a "tourist gaze" – the effects of "banality", "predictability" and "blindness" (i.e., inability to see anything save what's already in one's head). First tactic is deliberately aimed at breaking one's fixed frame of perception, ingrained conventions of what to look at and where to go. It implies readiness to get lost in the city – to free oneself of fixed routes and follow in the steps of a city's characters (e.g., a businessman, a beggar, a tourist, a policeman, a housewife), to see

their city (Zaporozhets and Lavrinets 2006: 11–15) This tactic, with its emphasis on spontaneity and contingency, goes back to "automatic walks" of the Surrealists and Situationists' notion of "psychogeography" (Jenks and Neves 2000: 7–8).

The second tactic entails quite the opposite: one should strive not to empty her mind, but to fill it with discourses and representations of the city under study. Ideally, walking with them in the city might allow to "bracket" them through twisting and twirling them in the rhythm of one's steps, and by confronting them with the immediate, sensual experience of the city. By bringing "ideas" and "ideologies" together in my head, in perpetual flux, I avoid being (unconsciously) enthralled by any single discourse that could have otherwise narrowed my vision.

This tactic, and the technique of "bracketing" particularly, brings us close to the phenomenological dimension of a flaneur-researcher's experience. In the most general terms, "phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view" (Smith 2003).

In my work, I adhere to a relatively cerebral understanding of phenomenology: in the city I pay less attention to my bodily experience and more – to the discourses and ideologies that frame my perception, trying to bring them to light and to analyze their workings. This move enables one to circumvent "ahistoricity" and "naivety" – common charges brought against phenomenological approach. However, I do not diverge from a basic phenomenological imperative: to be introspective and attentive to one's feelings (i.e., in this or that district it feels cozy, eerie, dangerous, uneasy, etc) – but simultaneously analyze/deconstruct them.

[11] That is, unmediated by its textual representations, usually dominant discourses that privilege the "panoptic gaze" of architects, surveyors and tourist agencies.

Surprisingly enough, empirical explorations of a *flaneur*-researcher position have rarely left the borders of "bourgeois-friendly" cities of the First World, as if *flanerie* is essentially a trendy theory for the trendy cities, i.e. most technologically and culturally "advanced". However, there have been two notable attempts to see *flanerie* as an experience of a Western traveler in a non-Western setting. One is centered around Roland Barthes' (1998) semiotic adventures in Japan (discussed in Bush 2005, Scott 2003), another – around German writers' travelogues of the same country (Goebel 1998).

Goebel's vision is especially true to my experience: for him, *flaneur* is just the right role for the hybrid space of Japan (split between the Third and the First world) or Uzbekistan – in transition from the Second to the Third world, a space both familiar to me, due to its Soviet heritage, and foreign, as a part of the Islamic world. "On the one hand, the *flaneur* seeks to perceive things from the point of view of the 'native' and even allows the foreign signs to undermine his subjective preconceptions and the universalistic claims of European values. On the other hand, his… predisposition produces the meaning of the foreign signs as… an effect of his own cultural memory, [resulting in] the dialectic of hermeneutic prejudgment and startlingly new encounter" (Goebel 1998: 379).

However, these authors' practice is in a way different from mine, as they deal with Japan, non-colonial and minimally Orientalized (in strictly Saidian terms) Orient, and their approach is anti-anthropological to an extreme – neither to study the place nor to unweave the webs of power/knowledge they were enmeshed in (what I consider my goals in this paper), but to inscribe their own poetic/semiological fantasies on the urban fabric.

Some personal background might come useful here: I came to Tashkent as a student of Oriental studies (in the middle of my 4th year at the Moscow State University). In Russia, this discipline is still rather conservative and apparently unaware of the challenges posed by Edward Said and the post-colonial movement. And so it was institutionally ingrained Orientalist

vision that constantly troubled me – I avoided seeing Uzbekistan as entirely strange and exotic, Turkic and Islamic place, and took special notice of the common features it shared with other post-Soviet spaces, including Moscow, my home-town. On the other hand, my inferior academic status, determination to conduct my research unofficially (i.e., making no use of my affiliation) and, finally, Uzbekistan's accented distancing from Russia (and its own colonial past) did not leave me much "positional superiority" that a classical Orientalist scholar could enjoy (Said 1978: 7–8).

To recuperate, the tactic of "sallying out" to the city, as formulated here, has an obvious advantage of direct, somewhat naïve exposure to the multiplicity and contingencies of a modern metropolis. The most obvious objection to this tactic speaks of the danger of drowning in one's own subjectivity – something that says much of anthropology's deeply-seated fear of not being scientific enough (to make one's person an instrument of research has been too risky, so why risk even more?). Defense against this critique would be built upon the consent (and necessity) to complement: phenomenological technique of noting one's feelings and perceptions – with the Bourdieusian critique of the social determination of phenomenologists' "life-world" (Throop and Murphy 2002: 190-193); personal perspective on a city – with that of its residents (gained through a very similar technique of walking together – see below). I also leave personal-subjective and philosophical-universal meanings of "phenomenology" aside, keeping it as a framework, while the substance that "fills" it are the historical, social and political structures.

2.2 The author, the informants, the city: go-along as a research tool

Immersed, subjective, ethnographically minded and phenomenologically informed approach to an (unknown) city is by no means limited to solitary walks. Moreover, to combine walking, interview and observation allows to evade narcissistic bias of the *flanerie* while keeping the direct experience of a city intact.

The hybrid method I am referring to here is relatively new, and it is called go-along (Kusenbach 2003). It requires a researcher to accompany his/her informants on their "natural" outings Through asking questions, listening, observing, taking photos, go-along allow to investigate the informants' stream of perceptions, emotions and interpretations as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment (Kusenbach 2003: 463–464). When it comes to exploring the role of place in everyday life, this method allows to circumvent the disadvantages of participant observation (arbitrariness of an ethnographer's judgments) and interviewing (static, fixed, logocentric situation, i.e. a room plus a recorder).

Go-alongs are also an offshoot of the phenomenological stream in sociology (e.g., Milligan 1998), as their aim is to place "researchers in the mobile habitats of their informants, thus facilitating access to their experiences and practices as they unfold in time and space" (Kusenbach 2003: 478). This method is especially useful for exploring the themes at the intersection of spatial and personal, such as spatial practices and attitudes of informants, spatial dimension of their biographies, the social architecture of their lived environment (for example see Kusenbach 2003:. 466-477).

Unlike Kusenbach's, however, my research is focused on the city (precisely, how social and cultural processes are reflected in the discourses of Tashkent), not on a neighborhood. Of more use to me was Guano's (2003) work. She studied how middle-class residents of Buenos Aires of European descent waged symbolic struggle with the new *mestizo* underclass that "invades" their habitat by inscribing, both in the visual environment of their district and in the "stories of the street" told to the foreigners, the narrative of their "cultured, respectable self and its dangerous other" (Guano 2003: 358). Similarities to Europeans in Tashkent were striking, especially at first glance! The article is staged as an imaginary stroll through the contested neighborhoods, interspersed with the locals' narratives, fragments of tourist guides, essays, murals, paintings and other cultural texts (an approach that I employ in this text).

Doing the fieldwork in Tashkent (October/November 2004), I got an access to my informants by snowball method, starting with my colleagues at the National University of Uzbekistan (psychology department) and expanding the circle[12].

All in all, 14 of my 19 informants belonged to the city's cultural elite (although to its lower segments) – university teachers, poets, journalists. Apart from practical reasons, this bias can be justified by an idea that the "experts", especially text-producing professionals, are more capable to express the discourses of a given group than its average members. Also, not all informants were Europeans (on the meaning of this category see above, p. 14), let alone Russians – there were Uzbeks, too, but urban, Tashkent Uzbeks whose class status and professional status makes them closer to Europeans that to their compatriots from the rest of the country (on this group see below, p. 52) .

Eight informants agreed to take a go-along with me (this is a very time-consuming activity, lasting from 1 to 3 hours). I asked them to take a walk with me in a place in Tashkent (of their choosing) that is most important for them; for seven informants these places in the city's center, not in the residential districts where they live. With the rest of the informants I conducted a life-story interview with a substantial focus on their urban experience (on the average, 90 minutes in length)[13]. All interviews were conducted in Russian[14].

[12] In this work I also used 10 life-story interviews with Tashkent Europeans conducted in November 2002, on my first fieldwork in the region. I could not look for informants by more conventional and "wide-ranging" methods (e.g., knocking on the door or publishing an ad in a newspaper) for two reasons, both related to the peculiarities of Uzbekistan's political regime. Firstly, only a guarantee from someone she knows would guarantee that an informant would be frank in expressing her opinions to me (and I would not denounce her to the authorities). Secondly, making any official body aware of my research would have resulted in either prohibition to conduct it or in supplying me only with the "right" people who would tell me the "right" things.

[13] We discussed the following issues: how has Tashkent changed during in recent years; what do informants think about these changes; whether they can influence the way the city is being run, and how; what are the most important problems the city faces; into which areas is the city divided; what kinds of people leave in Tashkent and in which places; whether they go to and what do they think of, presumably, the most symbolically loaded places in the city.

[14] It was not too difficult to establish rapport with my informants, for I was both comfortably close to them (Russian as the native language, common Soviet and post-Soviet cultural background) and intriguingly alien – a new person, from Moscow, who shows genuine interest in their local affairs. Actu-

Yet the main methodological problem with conducting and analyzing go-alongs is their fragmentariness: they unfolded not in a coherent narrative, but in a set of disconnected opinions or reminiscences evoked by places we walked through. To be able analyze this data, I was marking our routes with photos of every building or site that attracted informants' attention, and then attached interview excerpts to the photos. As for the remarks about the city in general (its history, recent transformation, how it is structured), I divided them by themes and subthemes, selecting those relevant for this research to link them into theoretical models (method described in Ryan and Bernard 2003).

I employed the same technique to analyze numerous Tashkent-related texts on the Internet: memoirs, blogs, forum discussions. Finally, official representations of Tashkent (postcards, booklets, tourist guides from the 1960s-2000s, and the fundamental "Tashkent encyclopedia" of 1983) made another important source of data. Limited use I make of the conventional sources of urban analyses (statistical data, household surveys, urban development plans) stems not only from markedly hermeneutic approach adopted in this study. Uzbekistan regime's obsession with keeping data classified, its suspicious attitude to independent researchers from abroad, and, consequently, scarcity of good and reliable Western research on the Central Asian urbanism is also to blame. Also, I wholly agree with Deniz Kandiyoti that "in the absence of an in-depth understanding of the local meanings attached to the categories that are most routinely employed in questionnaires and interview schedules, survey findings can be of limited utility, and may even be quite misleading" (Kandiyoti 1999: 500).

ally, during our conversations sincerity of informants was less of a concern than my own occasional susceptibility towards taking their opinions uncritically.

CHAPTER 3. TASHKENT, NOVEMBER 14TH 2004: PHENOMENOLOGY OF A CITY

3.1 Exploring the official landscape: a play with signs

On a warm and sunny Sunday in November 2004, I was preparing for an outing to the city in a rather panoptic manner – by surveying an abstract space of a map. Generally, in my outings to various districts of Tashent I aimed at **seeing** (and taking photos of) the city's diversity, taking notes of the most evident contrasts in the organization of space (public/private, rich/poor, pre-Soviet/Soviet/post-Soviet). I was not particularly looking for encounters and adventures, yet any fortuitous interaction I would engage in was experienced so sharply that it was always a source of data.

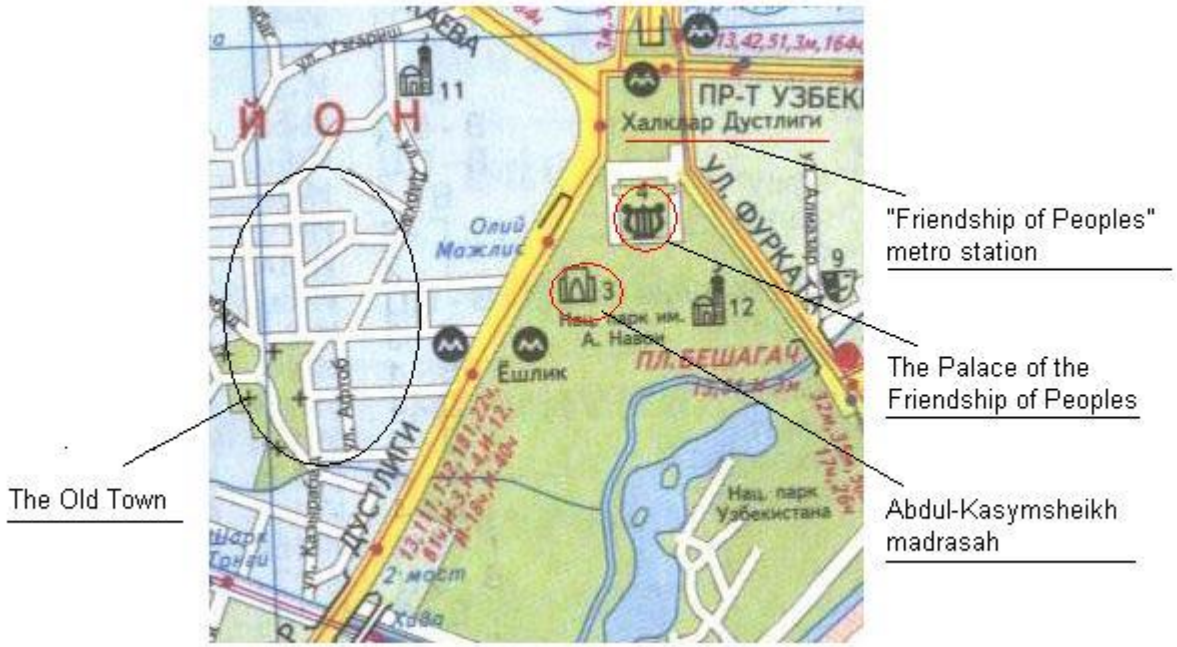

Figure 8. A map of my walks (14.11.2004).

I chose my route lured by a convenient proximity of numerous objects in different shapes and styles: an avenue, a park, interesting sights in abundance, and meandering lanes of the Old Town full of signs like "mosque" and "cemetery" nearby. Then, after a 30-minutes ride from my apartment, armed with a backpack, map, digital camera and a notebook, I leave

the "*Halqlar D`ostligi*" station for the square of the same name, to the south-west of the center of Tashkent.

Immediately, there's a clue to decipher politics from the city signs: after 1991 new authorities have kept this Soviet toponym[15] (the square, and many of the buildings around were constructed in the 1970s, the heyday of the Brezhnev era), merely translating it into the state language. Actually, "…of the USSR" in the end was also dropped, but after these transformations official internationalism found a place in the new state's ideology – it is not discussed, nor even proclaimed in a slogan, but implanted into the toponymy, to be uttered in the everyday speech of Tashkenters.

Figure 9. The Palace. Source: www.nu.narod.ru

On the square in front of me, amidst two thoroughfares surrounded by tall buildings with glittering slogans placed on their roofs, I see an edifice of marble and concrete – the Palace of the Friendship of Peoples. Blazing sun, silence, smell of heated bitumen. A bunch of

pruned bushes, waterless fountains, an empty stadium; a row of public buildings (the Palace, the Parliament, a *madrasah* – Islamic school) looms in the distance.

Figure 10. Landscape around the Palace. Photo by author.

The first interpretation that seizes my imagination – isn't this place like the Red Square in Moscow or Karl-Marx-Allee in Berlin? An open, public and ceremonial place, designed for speech-making, wreath-laying and other agitprop activities – but also as the masses' official space of leisure. Yet now it does not look very hospitable; only a handful of people are busily traversing the fringes of the square, paying no attention to its sights. So how can I reconcile the joyous functions of these buildings and their actual desolation? A term that comes to my mind brings about a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Stalinist public spaces. Around me, these are the spaces of jubilation – "luscious metro stations, leisure parks, places of culture where [Socialist] rites of exultation happen… Beneath the ecstatic optimism compulsory for

[15] While much of the street names of Tashkent, especially the likes of Bolshevik Street or Red October

these spaces there looms a deep anxiety: in fact, these rites have always been funeral rites in disguise, mourning for an object that could not yet be named" (Ryklin 2002: 10; see also Pak n.d.).

Probably now I can name this object – it is Soviet culture itself, which has always eluded me, covering its tracks with cute objects of consumption: "*Nu, pogodi!*" cartoons, "Olympic Games'80" bubble gum, cardboard milk packets – the only things Soviet that I remember from my childhood. And only here, on the outskirts of the former empire, I can finally have authentic experience of the USSR.

However, a critical question starts ringing in my head – why on earth am I so eager to apply the epithet of "Soviet" to life in Tashkent? It isnot my personal nostalgia for the past that is to blame, but rather a collective Russian predisposition of the murky 1990s (when I grew up). As many other Russian visitors to Karimov's Uzbekistan or to Lukashenko's Belorus, I associate cheap foodstuffs, slogans on the roofs, calm rhythm of life and only good news on TV with the "golden" years of the late USSR. Yet I must not give in to this tourist mood (Urry 1995), which is ignorant of or indifferent to the gloomy realities of political repression and economic stagnation beneath the happy façade (the same can be said of the Western fellow travelers to the USSR of the 1930s, like G. B. Shaw or R. Rolland).

There's another option – I could discard historical associations altogether and focus on this place's contemporary functions. But even if I come here when the official landscape comes to life on a state holiday, Navroz (holiday of the spring equinox, banned during the Soviet era – Adams 1999: 364-365) or Independence Day, and take a seat on these stands, amid the cheering crowds, *I would understand but not belong.*

district, were renamed after some illustrious personae of Uzbek history.

Figure 11. The stadium. Photo by author.

The rituals enacted here create a new hegemonic narrative of national identity, their message is addressed not to me, but to the members of the "imagined community" of the Uzbek(istani) nation. For the ruling post-Soviet elites, new public holidays are a tool for fostering the populace's national identity, as opposed to other loyalties – to a family, genealogical or territorial clan (Adams 1999: 364ff). Although I may know the code and understand the meaning of the spectacle (e.g., from Adams 1999 or March 2002), I am excluded from it, like the colonial censor from the collective body of the "true" readers of the national Indian novel that he has to read (Anderson 1991: 53-55). The new Uzbek elite employs the "Grand Style" of the Soviet celebrations, yet their focus is narrowed. The only options for me as an outsider are to praise the revival of the national culture or to laugh at its pomposity and tastelessness – from a distance.

Yet now, on this hot afternoon, this space is fully subject to my steps, and immobile state signs are defenseless to my interpretations[16]. For instance, here's the Abdul-Kasymsheikh madrasah, built in the 16th century, once a hub of the Yangi Mahalla district, but eventually deprived of its urban context and function, as adjacent baths and a mosque were demolished under the Soviets, and the madrasah ended up in the 1990s as a workshop of souvenirs.

Figure 12. Abdul-Kasymsheikh madrasah. Photo by author.

Contrary to James Bell's assumption that Islamic buildings "pose the most pernicious threat to the cautious, secular iconography of Uzbek national identity, embodied by Tashkent's post-independence landscape" (Bell 1999: 206), here the madrasah functions as a pure

[16] When no spectacle is staged here, the chasm between me and the locals is less wide. "Architecture has the dangerous potential of turning all of us, locals and visitors alike, into *tourists* gazing at a stable and monumental image" (Abbas 1999: 148)

sign of “Islami-ness” and a glorious past that sanctifies its state surroundings. Official internationalism, official Islam… all the pillars of the national ideology are there.

Yet these observations are too banal – these signs give away their meaning suspiciously easy. And that is what they were placed here for: “Monumental buildings mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought” (Lefebvre 1991: 143). Perhaps I could understand this regime better if I focus on less deliberate things. Take a look at *Oliy Majlis* (the parliament), at its turquoise dome and toned glass, golden windows. The dome, initially a landmark of the mosques of Bukhara and Samarkand, was profaned, in a final outburst of Soviet consumerist Orientalism, and crowned a fashionable café in the center of Tashkent. Then, in the 1990s this blue dome, elevated to the status of the prime symbol of national architectural tradition, crowned every monumental public building.

Figure 13. *Oliy Majlis*, Photo by author.

The glittering windows help to create an impression of power and opulence, but also have earned these buildings the sobriquet of "mafia-like": they see us, but we don't see them, as my informants used to say. No, you are not quite right (I would rejoin) – why this ugly post-Soviet vision – haughty authorities, mafia, corruption? We are in Asia, where a parliament is right to be not a fidgety talking-shop, but an unassailable castle in the lake, enshrouded in the air of imposing silence. Remember Ottoman empire, whose statecraft valued a prosperous quietude epitomized by the silence that ruled those who entered the courtyard behind the Imperial Gate of the Topkapı palace" (Murphy 1998: 373). No, you are spellbound by Orientalist fantasies, and do not know the coarse realities of our life here, they would retort. No, we should try to understand the phenomenon before cursing it, I would say…

These conversations could go on forever, unrestrained, even in public spaces – the regime does not seem to care. Even in its own open places, such as the Friendship of Peoples square, its gaze is manifested by the policemen. Yet however numerous they are in Tashkent, they are not very attentive, even to a foreigner: they walk around talking, seemingly deep into their own problems – so I could walk around, take photos, even pretend that I am marching and singing Soviet songs, absolutely free to play with these large and defenseless signs around me.

3.2 Lost in the Old Town: under the gaze of the Other

Crossing the "Friendship of Peoples" avenue, I slip through an aperture in a tight row of ten-storied buildings. Almost immediately, I find myself in a totally different space. Obvious contrast between immense structures of marble and concrete, well-ordered shapes of monumental edifices behind me and narrow winding lanes, stocky single-storied houses surrounded by plane-trees ahead only partially explain that feeling of difference.

Figure 14. An entrance to the Kamalan *mahalla*. Photo by author

After all, I knew that I crossed a historical urban frontier, entering an Old Town *mahalla*[17], with an intention to take some nice photos of its picturesque old buildings, mosques and cemeteries. Yet when I, already deep into the area, try to take the digital camera out of my pocket, a strong feeling of uneasiness grabs me. Something strange (and rather unpleasant) seems to be happening, as if the air around me suddenly thickened and bound my movements. **I cannot avoid somebody's constant gaze**. In contrast to the barren official landscape around Friendship of Peoples square, there are people everywhere. Young mothers with prams, children playing in the street, elders drinking tea by the porch – taking photos would

[17] Neighbourhood community and/or quarter in urban areas of Central Asia. Before the Soviet era, mahallas could be walled and had one or two gates that would be closed at night. Mahallas fulfilled local self-government functions: a council of *aksakal*s, respected elders, presided over life-cycle ceremonies, resolved conflicts and represented mahalla to the outside world. (Geiss 2003: 86-93). In Soviet times mahalla was recognized as a unit of informal self-governance, yet aksakal candidatures had to be approved by the authorities, and were used as a means of surveillance over the population. In contemporary Uzbekistan, mahallas are hailed as the cornerstones of the Uzbek national tradition and organized into formal units of self-government – yet also used by the state to control population: prudent elders are to admonish and restrain potentially restless youngsters (Massicard and Trevisani

mean violating their privacy. Neither can I take photos in an underhand way, being stared at all the time!

But what causes such attention? What am I for them? Who am I? The gaze forces me into an identity I have never considered my own before: **a white man**[18]. Earlier, my experience of Tashkent did not radically differ from that of Moscow. Contemporary Tashkent makes no assault on a foreigner's senses (as Cairo or Tehran might do), neither with stench, din, and dust nor with the carnivalesque glitter of local dress or cuisine. Both cities are multiethnic and multicultural, and immigrant Central Asians are numerous and visibly present in the capital of Russia. But there the burden of coping with their alterity falls on the Central Asians, while I merely enjoy the aesthetic effect of cultural diversity – here and now it is just the other way around.

This explanation, however, fails to resolve the anxiety, and I keep looking for other explanations of my strange condition. Probably the order of everyday life in a Tashkent *mahalla* has no space for a person like me. In similar sites elsewhere I could disguise myself as a tourist, but here this role appears to be uncommon: nobody runs to me at the sight of the camera, posing or begging for baksheesh, as in Samarqand or Bukhara. Besides, there are no "sights" that could legitimate photographing. With my map and camera, I risk being seen as a suspicious person, a spy or a terrorist[19]. Questioning (on the part of locals responsible for maintaining law and order in the mahalla, *posbonlar*) is likely to be imminent: "Who are you? What are you doing here?". I could not disclose my true identity (a foreigner and a researcher)

2003). The term "mahalla" is also applied to all Uzbeks living a traditional way of life, whether in the quarters of the Old Town, or in new apartment blocks. See below, p. 49ff.

[18] Not in a purely racial sense. Rather, I speak of a sense of radical alterity prompted by substantial differences in skin color, ethnicity and language

[19] Uzbekistan authorities have become increasingly worrisome, almost hysteric, about the "state security" issues during the last six years. February 1999 explosions and March 2004 skirmishes with "terrorists" in Tashkent made the urban space of the capital (and its population, too) a prime object for security-tightening measures.

because I have neither permission to conduct any kind of research here[20] nor a document issued by the Trade Union of Artists (or Trade Union of Journalists) that is required to take any kind of "non-tourist" photos in Tashkent. And in case of trouble I could not mumble something like "Sorry, I don't understand" (in English) – my Russian passport would disclose me.

Here, in the Old Town, I lack the irony, detachment, self-confidence of the gaze that are necessary for acting as a *flaneur*, like an hour earlier, among the static signs of official public landscape. Neither a tourist (there is no spectacle of exotic and consumable "native culture" performed for me and my wallet) nor an exemplary anthropologist, who, by means of carefully arranged communication rituals establishes rapport with his informants, ultimately achieving Hermeneutic penetration into the culture he studies (Crapanzano 1992: 43-44).

But what if the vagueness of my position is itself a clue? For the locals, I am a **stranger** (Lofland 1973), "a category defined by its uncertainty – neither a friend nor an enemy, neither a neighbor nor an alien"(Clarke 1997: 43). The problem remains, though: this analytical figure is often used to describe the universal condition of human beings in a modern metropolis, but here in the *mahalla* I seem to be the only one who is anxious about his "strangeness". Throughout my previous urban experience this condition was taken for granted – after all, all of us are strangers in the streets of Moscow or London; but here, in confrontation with a **slightly different** order of city life, the anonymity and alienation of a modern metropolis is experienced as if afresh.

At last, my feelings lead to a hypothesis about the urbanism of the Tashkent *mahalla*: it is modern enough to do without gates and guards, and not to arrest a trespassing stranger[21],

[20] In the 2000s, the Uzbek government has become increasingly hostile to journalists and academics from abroad, and "legalizing" myself would require a lot of money and would inevitably place me under some kind of control.

[21] Cf. J. Abu-Lughod's account of the neighborhoods in the Arabo-Islamic cities, structurally similar to the *mahallas* of old Tashkent: "I am often struck, as I wander around Arab cities, with how easy it is to tell whether I am in public space or have blundered into semi-private space… A sudden narrowing of the path… is a sign of the shift, especially if the road widens again soon afterwards. But even when the spatial semiotics [cf. the difference between Friendship of Peoples square and the *mahalla* – A.K.]

but not as modern as Moscow (or "new" Tashkent), the world of strangers. *Mahalla* communities must have succeeded (despite the impact of Russian/Soviet modernization) in maintaining their integrity (even keeping it visible) while elaborating subdued, untraumatic ways of distancing itself from, and excluding its European co-townsmen. My European informants used to tell me: "Old Town? We don't go there. Why would one want to?"[22].

Meanwhile more and more lavishly decorated cars stop by the doors; people in the street are embracing and kissing each other; old men in gorgeous caftans and youngsters in full dress (suits and neckties) take their place on the benches in the courtyards. Festive mood is in the air. Suddenly it comes to my mind that today is *Ramazon hayit*, or the feast of Ramadan that ends annual 30-day period of fasting (in Arabic, this holiday is known as Eid ul-Fitr). Festivity is here, but no theatricality of costumes, ceremonies and entertainments that impressed Western travelers in Cairo or Istanbul in 19th century (Crichfield 1990). Still, cultural symbols are being deployed, messages are transmitted (me not being among the addressees), and meaningful events are happening (from which I am tacitly excluded).

Although more than half of Tashkent's inhabitants celebrate *Ramazon hayit*, I would have never learned that this was the day, if it was not for a handful of fortuitous signs:

a) A taxi driver congratulating me upon the occasion (he looked rather embarrassed later, when he saw my face, as though he had erroneously assumed me to be an Uzbek)

b) Large slogan on a Soviet-type poster: "*Ramazon Hayit qutlug' bo'lsin!"* ("Congratulations upon the feast of Ramadan!" stretched over a couple of places.

c) Plenty of young girls wearing headscarves and old men with long beards in the underground and other public places. It also caught my eye that policemen who usually harass everyone with too "Islamic" or "traditional" appearance behaved much more benevolently on this day.

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are absent, the personal ones are present. There is the questioning look or the approach of someone

The last two facts made me think that the Muslim festival, something that "belongs" to the Uzbeks, may become known to the Europeans through occasional imprints it makes on the public space controlled by the state. While an incident with a taxi driver, my embarrassment in a *mahalla* – this is not a proof of, but definitely a hint at the invisible border, less physical than mental[23], within Tashkent.

The presence of this border is by no means an absolute fact, as in Franz Fanon's Manichean cities. In Tashkent, the relatively transparent and mixed nature of the modern city makes itself felt – and that is why (mis)adventures such as my "intrusion" into *mahalla* during *Ramazon hayit* are possible. Certainly I am not the only one to get into awkward situations because of the city's puzzling mixture. During the same holiday Uzbek boys singing *Ramazon* "carols" ring the bells at the doors of apartments in multi-storied tenement houses. If the one who opens the door has an Uzbek face, they start singing (in exchange for a little gift – usually confectionery or small money) – everything goes normal, but if they see a "Russian" face, they run away in silence.

My wanderings are finally resolved by a phone call: I book an appointment, and this gives me a valid pretext to assume the appearance of a business-like person. I head fast away from the *mahalla*. My normal state of body and mind only comes back as I enter a mini-market on the ground floor of a 9-storied building, one of those that surround (defend? conceal?) the space I ran away from.

wanting to help but clearly also wanting to know" (Abu-Lughod 1987: 169).

[22] I heard no narratives where Old Town was presented as a transgressive/seductive place.

[23] Probably it shapes not the space itself but rather ways of living and moving in it – "maps" and "tours", according to Michel de Certeau (1984: 118-120).

Figure 15. An exit from the Kamalan mahalla. The signs say “farewell!”. Photo by author.

The principal goal of this chapter was to put you, the reader, in my shoes. The painful change of roles I underwent – from a self-confident, detached observer – to a perforce self-reflexive person blinded by the (returned) gaze of the Other – is probably familiar to every anthropologist’s experience[24]. Moreover, I employed my memories and feelings to situate Tashkent in larger histories and geographies: USSR, post-Soviet space, Orientalism, strangeness, modernity. Finally, the state’s presence and the ethnic divide, – the main “nerve-knots” of Tashkent’s cityscape – are hopefully no longer mere abstractions for you: I tried to get (and give) a glimpse of their everyday functioning. In the remainder of the thesis I will discuss these forces at work in a larger set of Tashkent spaces, in broader time span and through a wider array of perspectives.

[24] And not only anthropologist’s. Speaking of generic Western attitude to other spaces, “there was a contradiction, therefore, between the need to separate oneself from the world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly… Within the labyrinth of the city, where Nerval hoped to immerse himself in the exotic and finally experience 'without interpreter' the real Orient, they [Nerval and his photographer] were unable to find any point from which to take the picture… In the end they found themselves outside the city…. Here at last, amid the silence and the ruins, the photographer was able to set up his device” (Mitchell 1991: 27)

CHAPTER 4. ENCLOSURES, BORDERS, HAVENS: THE CITY AND ITS SOCIETY

4.1 From showpiece city to "forbidden city": Tashkent in the hands of the state

"Every city has a heart, and we are really lucky that the heart of Tashkent is neither an empty square nor a pompous palace, but a park, a humble assortment of trees, benches and paths" – says Andrey[25], a philologist (b. in 1955) as we stroll through the park of Amir Temur (a former park of the Revolution), with an imposing equestrian statue of that mediaeval prince (which replaced a whole succession of monuments, including Kaufmann, the first imperial governor, and Karl Marx).

In the Soviet times, as well as today, this park has been deemed too small and cozy to house any demonstrations of public grandeur, and acted as a place for *flanerie* and informal activities. The "Square", as it was called, was populated by dandies and hippies, showing off their apparel amid the crowd of Tashkenters chatting, dating, eating ice-cream, etc. Those with a taste for less innocent treasures could enjoy a glass of beer in a nearby café or vodka straight on the benches beneath the plane-trees, not to mention the prostitutes who would show up at the "Square" in the evening – a testimony to relative laxness of the late Soviet regime on the margins of the empire.

Nowadays the "Square" is under sway of Amir Temur (Tamerlane), a 15th century descendant and successful imitator of Chengiz-Khan, praised as the founder of Uzbek statehood (e.g. Manz 2002: 56-66, March 2002: 374-377) – a huge statue and imposing turquoise dome of the same ruler, illuminate in the night, command the landscape. The park is now a heavily-policed area, clean but deserted, except for occasional old ladies selling flowers or offering one to weigh herself on the electronic scales.

Figure 16. The statue of Amir Temur (Tamerlane).

"*Look, all around here you can see construction sites, a few glittering skyscrapers, and a lot of well-protected mansions*" – Andrey tells me as we walk towards Atatürk Street (before 1991 it bore the name of Kirov, a prominent Bolshevik). "*Some are occupied by foreign firms, but most of them were built by and for the state. This city of ugly Soviet concrete and flashy stained glass favored by our present regime is a far cry from Tashkent I grew up in, with its murmuring* aryks *[small irrigation ditches laid by the streets] and one-storied housed buried in verdure…*".

Narratives such as this were the most common thing that I heard about Tashkent. Even if we put nostalgia aside, there is much factual truth in them. After 1991, despite changing economic fortunes[26], the Uzbek government transformed Tashkent into a huge construction

[25] All the names of the informants were changed for the sake of confidentiality.

[26] Export of cotton and gold provide the lions' share of the country's revenues (the reliance on the former reflects the dominating colonial pattern of Uzbekistan's economy that persists since the late XIX century). Growth and development of a more varied economy is hampered by two interconnected factors: the weight of large and insufficient agricultural sector which is increasingly unable to absorb growing population, and government's reluctance to undertake substantial economic reforms. In the early 1990s, the government's decision to leave the system of state socialism largely intact was generally received positively by the people – their "Soviet Byzantium" presented a stark contrast to the shock of violent post-socialist transition in the neighbouring countries (especially to the civil war in Tajikistan). Yet by mid-2000s the policy of tight governmental control over economics (media and politics as well) has been increasingly perceived as senseless and oppressive, again in contrast with its

site. The principal projects, reproduced on postcards, tourist booklets, stamps, etc, fall into three main categories. First, monuments and public buildings that inscribe into the cityscape the new narrative of nationhood (Bell 1999: 201-205), such as the statue of Amir Temur or the new parliament (see chapter 4.1).

The second category of project is the proliferation of "proud towers" of the state, such as the new city administration (*hokimiyat*, figure 2) or the parliament (*Oliy Majlis*, figure 13), sealed off from the environment by the air of imposing silence, maintained sometimes by high fences, sometimes by patrols of policemen/soldiers, but invariably by windows of toned glass.

Finally, there are numerous luxurious hotels, business centers and banks, modernist in structure, postmodernist in the garish building materials used, conveying a twin message of opulence and impregnability. For foreign visitors, the citizens, and the state itself, these edifices are supposed to represent Uzbekistan's progress towards market economy. Yet this impression is somehow spoiled by the fact that most of these buildings stand unfinished or half-empty and are regarded as funny alien droplets in the cityscape by the locals, who give them nicknames such as "Darth Vader" (figure 17) or "Christmas cake" (figure 18).

more prosperous northern neighbour, Kazakhstan, a state that undertook ruthless economic reforms in the 1990s. (in 2005 Uzbekistan's GDP per capita was around 400$, while Kazakhstan – around 3,700$ (Economist 2006).

Figure 17. “Darth Vader” (National Bank of Uzbekistan building, near “Ghafur Ghulom” metro station). Photo by author.

Figure 18. “Christmas Cake” (hotel-cum-business center under construction, Shahrisabz street). Photo by author.

This role of a Potemkin village, the showcase of government’s achievements, is not something new to Tashkent. For numerous visitors from the West and, especially Third World countries[27], Tashkent of the late socialist years was to epitomize the Soviet achievements in transforming “its” East: bringing health care, education, emancipating women, etc, whereas Uzbek-language theatres and opera, some carefully preserved mosques, the only working madrasah in the USSR were intended to refute the accusations of the Kremlin’s hostility to indigenous cultures and Islam in particular. The same logic partly applied to Tashkent’s relations with the Kremlin: the visible manifestation of the center’s increasing leniency to the regional elites’ informal activities and de-facto control of “their” republics (in exchange for open loyalty and the fulfillment of cotton quotas) were the visits of official delegations (or in-

[27] Tashkent hosted film festivals (held every two years after 1968), conferences of the writers of the Third World, and international Islamic conferences (every three-four years after 1965). (Balland 1997: 237)

spections) from Moscow, the latter being quite content with "Oriental hospitality" of lavish music performances and sumptuous banquets thrown in their favor.

The growing power of the national elites in Central Asian republics precluded any fight for independence or decolonization in the turbulent Perestroika years – there was no struggle like that of the Baltic Republics, let alone Eastern Europe. Independence was more or less forced upon the ruling elites, who, "far from being discredited on account of their… links to the communist regime, gained additional legitimacy since they were regarded as symbols of continuity in a time of flux and uncertainty." (Akiner 1998:20). What was there of the nationalist oppositional intelligentsia ("Birlik" and "Erk" movements) was ousted from the political field by 1992 (Melvin 2000: 35ff). CPUz secretary-turned-president Karimov and his apparatchiks not simply crushed, but outwitted the opposition by adopting nationalist ideology to legitimize their rule. New language laws were passed, to make Uzbek instead of Russian the language of administration and "interethnic communication" (Bohr 1998); the alphabet was changed from Cyrillic to Latin in order to remove the stain of the Soviet past, history books were rewritten to emphasize the glories of ancient Uzbek civilization.

Speaking of the cityscape, it should be noted that the official Soviet stance on the culture of its constituent republics ("national in form, socialist in content") was mirrored in Tashkent architecture by coating steel-and-concrete constructivist buildings (built in the same design from Warsaw to Vladivostok) by ornamental sun-screens (*panjara*) – iconic reference to the indigenous architectural traditions. This bears striking resemblance to French architectural Orientalism in Maghreb (Wright 1997: 330). Yet the Maghrebians eventually demanded, instead of architectural signs, real recognition of their autonomy. Uzbek elites, on the other hand, somewhat internalized the Soviet Orientalist image of their own culture[28] and even after independence have expressed the new national ideology in the old Soviet forms, from slogans

(figure 19) to Scheherazade-style public buildings (marble, concrete, patterned columns, turquoise domes), reminiscent of the décor of luscious Stalinist productions of national Uzbek operas (figure 20).

Figure 19. A slogan on top of a luxury boutique signboard (near "Khamid Olimjon" metro station). Photo by author.

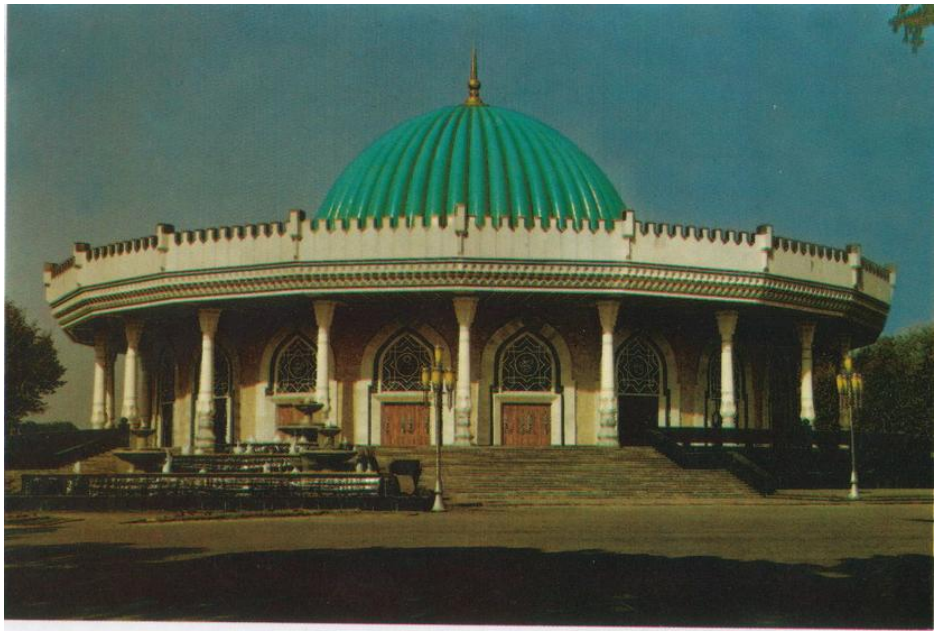


Figure 20. The museum of Amir Temur. A postcard from a set published in 1999.

[28] This idea is forcefully defended by Laura Adams (Adams 1999), on the material of the Uzbek theatre scene in the post-1991 era.

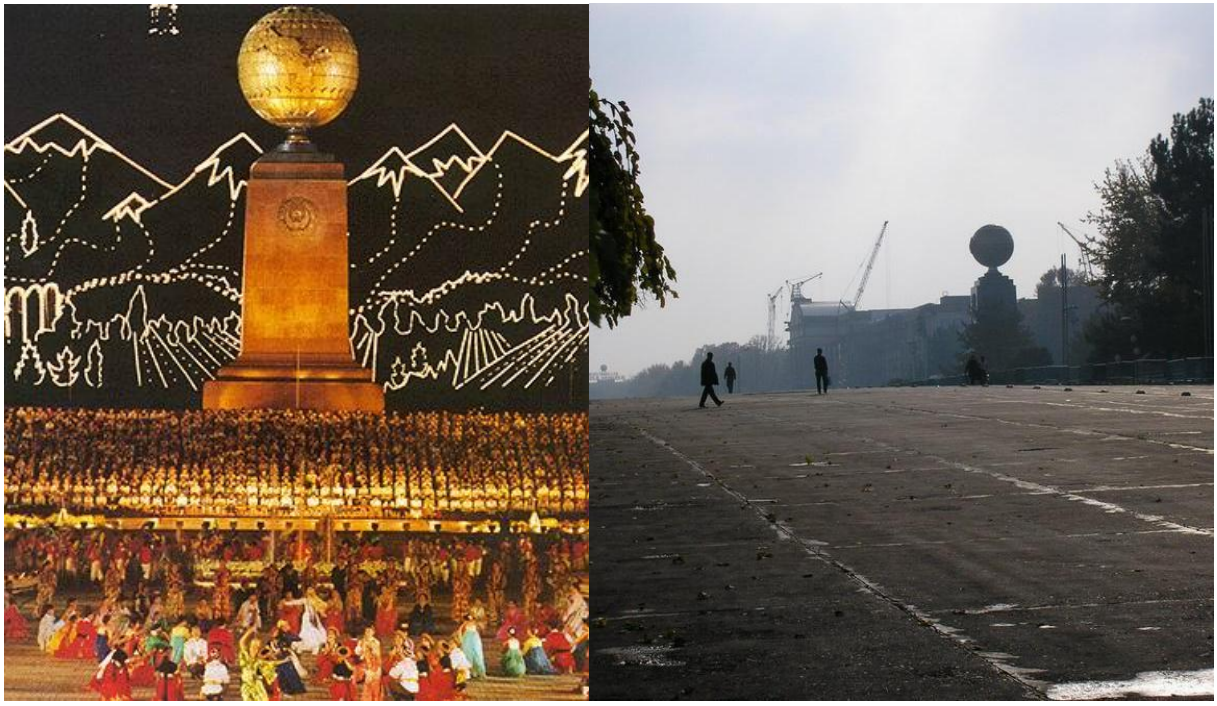
So the official image of Tashkent is that of a capital city of a prosperous state that proudly asserts its national identity. The other side of the story is the destruction done to the city center in order to make space for the afore-mentioned building projects. The first victims of demolition are markedly "Russian" public buildings (theatres and libraries) and city parks (because of the plentiful spaces they could provide)[29]. Such a ruthless "creative destruction" of the city, with a varying proportion of state's and capital's interests involved, has been traced in a great many contemporary cities, from Beirut (Makdisi 1997) to Hong Kong (Abbas 1999). What is probably peculiar for Tashkent is the acute sense of presence of one man: Islom Karimov, Uzbekistan's president. A few streets in the center were closed to block the access to his residence, tram lines ripped off, buildings demolished; trees and bushes in the park adjacent to the road he uses were cut down, to prevent potential terrorists from lurking there; this or that roof is reserved for the snipers who guard his way. But also the districts he rides by know relatively few shortages of electricity (the city must look cheerful!).

Authorities' outright hostilities towards trees, bushes and all kinds of uncontrolled foliage reached a climax in the mid-2000s, reflecting the shift from state paternalism to paranoia (i.e., political exploitation of the fear of terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists, etc) as the basis of the state's legitimacy (Liu 2005: 436). From the immediate vicinity of top-level governmental buildings this policy has spread throughout Tashkent – a city where summer temperatures of 40-50°C are not infrequent. The project of building/maintaining a comfortable and even of a showpiece city now appears subordinate to the project of carving out a secure state space in the city[30].

[29] Home-sick emigrants and government's political adversaries keep track of this destruction on their sites and forums, such as Ferghana.Ru (http://forum.ferghana.ru/viewtopic.php?t=16).

[30] It is quite obvious that the residents' attitude towards these policies oscillates between irony/skepticism and anger. However, it should be mentioned that authorities just follow Tsarist and Soviet trends of the "creative destruction" of Tashkent. The difference that tips the balance in favour of negative attitudes is probably due to the lack of "compensation" for the destruction (in the form of large-scale housing projects), and to the overall deterioration of the economic situation in the country (Radnitz 2006: 659, 667–669).

Undisturbed by policemen (although I received a warning about taking photos here without official permission), Andrey and I conclude our go-along at the huge Independence Square, a parade-ground surrounded by lofty ministerial buildings, with a golden "Globe of Uzbekistan" that replaced a Lenin's statue in 1992.



Figures 21-22. The Independence square.

Torrid and deserted (except on state holidays and similar occasions), akin to the Friendship of Peoples square, the square epitomizes the domination of the state space of quietude over the center of the city, a domination that now makes "real" (public, informal) center drift away and disperse. The "center" as a place of interactions and consumption moved to nameless small parks unfrequented by the police, where youths may enjoy their bottle of beer and vodka, or alternatively to distant metro-stations (something like Ors Vezer tere in Budapest), where supermarkets and cafes are bustling with life until late evening, far from the vigilant eye of the authorities.

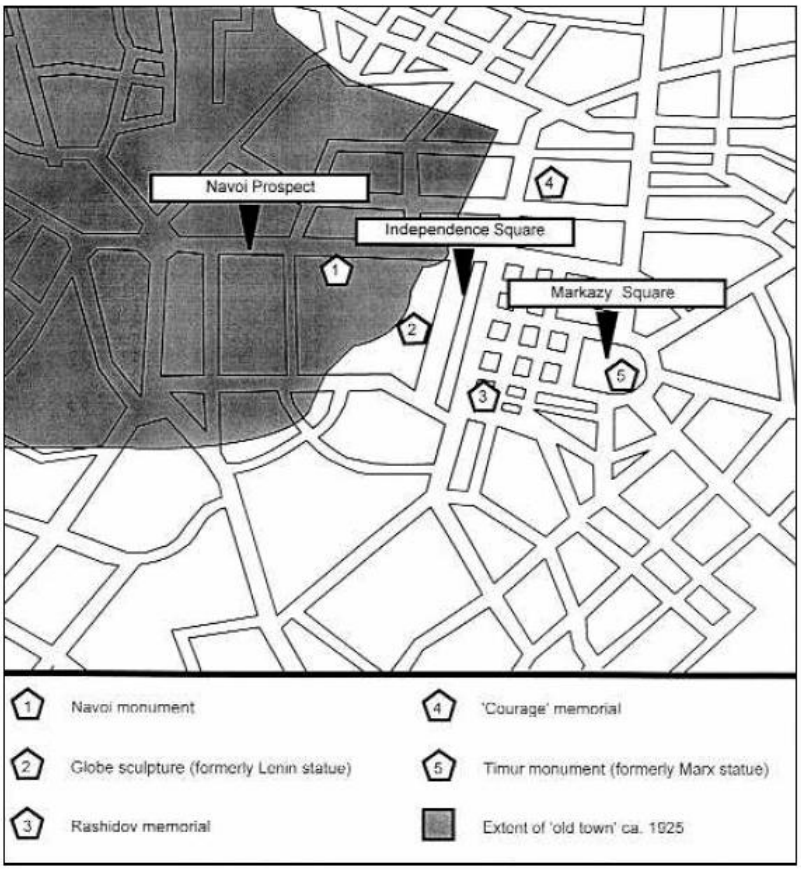


Figure 23. Map of central Tashkent (Bell 1999: 189).
Sayilgoh avenue (see below) connects Markazy square (now called Amir Temur square) to the Independence square.

4.2 Uzbeks and "Europeans": from covert apartheid towards anti-rural alliance

At the present, the "Square" is the quiet end of a noisy and crowded Sayilgoh avenue, better known as "Broadway" (see figure 23). From the late 1980s to mid-1990s, when the USSR was approaching its end and the new Uzbek state was not yet consolidated, this pedestrian street was a place where musicians, artists and poets were performing to the city-wide audience, as idle Tashkenters were strolling between numerous small cafes and tea-houses. By the mid-2000s Broadway has become more consumerist: cheap snack-bars, karaoke stalls, and roaring music booths – a noisy yet picturesque place.

Figure 24. "Broadway", mid-2000s. Source: www.oloy.uz

However, when I proposed to take a stroll through Sayilgoh during a walk-along with Maria, a 22-old psychology student (a Russian), she flatly refused:

> *Look, I hate being jostled all the time, being pestered by café owners with their stupid offers… and these tipsy Uzbek youngsters who would throw pop-corn at you, just for fun! Okay, it was very nice and cultured before – artists and so on. But now all the rural*

Uzbeks who visit Tashkent have two things to do here – to gape at the globe of Uzbekistan and to show off at 'Broadway' cafes.

Such statements, bursting out quite unexpectedly, hinted that the tension between Europeans and Uzbeks is felt no less acutely than that between the people and the state. This tension persists despite the fact that after the 1966 earthquake (see above, pp. 12-14) division between the old Uzbek and the new European Tashkent had finally ceased to be the fundamental feature of the city. Furthermore, the policy of merging the two populations (one immigrant, multiethnic but predominantly Russian-speaking; the other autochthonous and Uzbek-speaking) was implemented, as these groups now lived side by side in modern apartment complexes.

Yet the Uzbek Tashkenters were evidently the hardest nut to crack; it was their alterity, represented by the Muslim religion, closely-knit communal forms of association and "retrograde traditions" that Soviet urban policies sought to combat. In 1989, 69% of Uzbeks lived in rural areas (Kaiser 1994: 203). Those who moved to the city were encouraged to "integrate" into Soviet/Russian urban culture, although the degree to which this occurred is not clear. Uzbeks immigrants (from the old town and from other areas of Uzbekistan) maintained their traditional way of life (e.g., occupied whole apartment blocks by a single *mahalla*[31], celebrated religious holidays, kept fowl in the apartments) even in the individualizing environment of modernist residential buildings.

However, division between "European" and "Asian" Tashkent did not disappear altogether, but has only become more elusive and subdued. It is not "two cities" anymore (although core quarters of old Tashkent still remain, and are still quite distinct and closed to strangers, as my experience testifies), but different quarters, streets, yards.

[31] On mahalla see above, page 33, footnote 1.

> *When I grew up* [in the 1970s], *me, and my classmates, we all knew that there are divisions in the city. Under no circumstances could we enter a mahalla – they would always thrash a Russian boy. If you entered a mahalla – you have only yourself to blame, nobody invited you there. And the same applied to Uzbek boys who might come to 'our' streets… We had really bloody fights, you know: boys from Russian-language school against boys from Uzbek-language school. Real apartheid, maintained from both sides. Now it is gone, the youths intermingle much more freely*". (Mikhail, a journalist, b. in 1966).
>
> *Just behind our brick four-storied block of flats there was a mahalla. 'Uzbeks' lived there, and we, 'Russian' boys, were always fighting with them. I am half-Uzbek, but considered myself Russian, because I went to a Russian-language school… The windows of our bedrooms faced the Unknown. Life of mahalla people was totally different from ours – even after they moved from the huts of the Old Town to multi-storied buildings of 'imperial' concrete. They bred hens on the balconies, installed trestle-beds in the courtyards… Their world was thrust open as the doors to their houses, apparent as the interior of their courtyards – yet still it remained covert, mysterious, impenetrable* (Yanyshev 2001).

It could be suggested that "Europeans versus locals" division has gone underground – no longer in the visible urban policies of public/political discourse (as in divided cities such as Belfast or Beirut), it persisted in myriad of invisible boundaries (Pellow 1996) that traverse the fabric of city spaces. This urban phenomenon had its analogue on the national level. The creation of loyal "national" infrastructures and "national" bureaucracies allowed the Kremlin of Khruschev and Brezhnev to abandon costly Stalinist policies of battling the "traditional" order. The solution has been called the **double-tier society**: parallel existence of a modern, urban, Russian-speaking tier and the native, "traditional", un-Russified world (Carlisle 1991: 99ff).

In the 1970s-1980s the division had reached certain stability (i.e., whose courtyard is Uzbek and whose is European had become a part of local common knowledge), but post-1991 changes have made invisible boundaries even more complicated.

Initially, though, the situation appeared quite simple, as it was generally believed that the Europeans in Uzbekistan would share the fate of the French in post-independence Algeria.

A short-lived outburst of Uzbek nationalism on the everyday level in 1989-1993[32], and general economic and political uncertainty brought about a large-scale emigration of Europeans with a definite ethnic homeland (Russians, Jews and Germans)[33]. Nevertheless, the state's reluctance to pursue vigorous nationalistic policies (it was old Soviet elite that was in power, after all), and irreplaceability of European personnel for the country's industry, tertiary sector and public service drastically reduced the scale of emigration by mid-1990s. In 1989, 1,653,000 Russians lived in Uzbekistan, and in 2000 1,200,000 were still there (Ilkhamov 2002: 188)

Speaking of Uzbeks, there has been growing inter-country migration since the late 1980s: Uzbeks from the countryside bought Tashkent apartments from those who were leaving the country. And recently, with collective farming deeper in crisis, high rural birth rates and inadequate land and employment, the flow of rural residents to the city (which is indeed an island of prosperity in comparison to other regions) considerably increased. Most of them are employed as *mardikors*, casual workers.

The state, however, has maintained and even toughened Soviet residence regulations, turning Tashkent into a "closed city" where non-Tashkenters cannot legally reside. Residence permits are granted by a special municipal committee, and only on individual basis: if one is not top-level state official or does not offer a very generous bribe, the chances are almost nil (Kudryashov 2005a). Apart from security reasons (preventing terrorists and other suspicious persons from entering the state's capital), another important reason behind these regulations

[32] "*There was no violence, but the general atmosphere in these years was pretty strained… Well, occasionally one could hear in the [food] queue – 'You Russian, why don't you leave for your Russia, it's Uzbek land here!'. Or a bus-driver could stop the bus and tell all Russians to get out. But it soon stopped, because the Uzbeks themselves turned nostalgic for Soviet calm and security. Besides, there was not much money or privileges to be wrested from us and… we now feel that we are in the same boat*" (Olga, a psychologist, b. in 1955).

[33] The number of Germans in Uzbekistan fell from 40,000 in 1989 to 8,000 in 2000 (Ilkhamov 2002: 166), of Jews – from about 100-120,000 in 1989 to 15-20,000 in 2002 (Jewish Community in Uzbekistan n.d.) Net out-migration of Russians was 20,-30,000 on the average in the late 1980s, soared to ap-

may be thoroughly Russified and Sovieticised Tashkent Uzbeks'[34] fear of competition from their compatriots. Uzbek elite (political and cultural) is caught between nation-building policies, which emphasize the unity of the Uzbek nation, in opposition to both local clan loyalties and Russia as a former empire (Adams 1999: 364ff, Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001), and the desire to maintain its particular privileges (e.g., residence in Tashkent, and opportunities given by the knowledge of Russian and English acquired in the city's schools).

At the present, the Europeans, diminished in number (due to emigration) and deprived of the positions of power and prestige allocated to them by the Soviet state[35], are in many ways closer to Tashkent Uzbeks than the latter's rural brethren. Symptomatically, "*haryp*"[36], an extremely derogatory appellation of an uncouth person, was coined, and is still more vehemently applied by Tashkent Uzbeks to newly arrived migrants from the countryside (only later it gained currency among the Europeans). Again, these attitudes go back to the late Soviet era – as an American who visited Uzbekistan in the 1980s testifies: "I noticed a tendency for the people of Tashkent to consider themselves better than those from other parts of Uzbekistan… Particularly, some women feel themselves too good for Uzbek men from other towns: 'They are not *kul'turniy* [cultured, educated] enough'." (Mongomery 1983: 142)

Back to the cityscape, I would argue that from 1950s onwards Tashkent's ethnic divisions have shifted towards less clear-cut and more contextual models: from the Tsarist "dual

proximately 100,000 every year in 1992-1995, but then again dropped to about 20,000 a year. In 1989, there were 1,653,000 Russians in the country, in 2000 – 1,200,000 (Ilkhamov 2002: 188).

[34] This formation of this hybrid group was probably the most visible result of otherwise futile Soviet efforts to foster the creation of new Soviet nationality. "There are urban, upper-class Uzbeks who have a minimal knowledge of the Uzbek language and are more comfortable speaking Russian. These families speak Russian at home and acknowledge that their children might never learn Uzbek. However, they identify themselves as Uzbeks" (Montgomery 1983: 142)

[35] Migrants arriving in the republican capitals and largest cities of the Central Asian republics from other Soviet republics for employment were often prioritised for accommodation in the new housing estates (French 1995: 152-155; Giese 1979: 156). Europeans formed the bulk of skilled factory workers and engineers in Uzbekistan, and held significant positions in the Union-level structures located in Uzbekistan (army, KGB, many academic institutions).

[36] The origins of this word are unclear; one etymology links it to *garib* (stranger, in Arabic). See the recent discussion at http://community.livejournal.com/ru_etymology/546238.html (in Russian).

city" to the covert apartheid of late Soviet era, and now the key division is between those who display a proper **urban** habitus in public places and those who don't. To behave "normally" means quiet speech, no exuberant laughing, no wild gesticulation, no jostling of strangers, a suit should be worn like a suit, not like a rustic *chopan* (caftan), the colours of a woman's dress must not be gaudy, etc. Unmarked, "natural" term of this opposition is the "modern" way of behaving[37], and the marked term, i.e. visible and frowned upon, is attributed to rural, "uncultured" Uzbeks – here "class" intervenes with "race".

For Europeans, this notion of "normal versus uncultured behavior" is virtually the only tool to decode and stabilize uncertain geographies of contemporary Tashkent, whose ethnic and social composition has been in constant flux since the early 1990s. However, their means to uphold this distinction are only ideological (i.e., not coercive), while these are police patrols (always staffed by Uzbeks, usually recent newcomers to the city) who turn judgment over somebody's rural/urban habitus into a repressive tool – by singling out "foreign" Uzbeks in the crowd to detain them for the lack of residence permit, extort bribes, etc.

To demonstrate how this notion may structure the city space, let me give a lenghy quote from one of my informants (Dilyara, b. in 1973, a Tatar, teacher):

> *Okay, I take the metro train at 'Beruni', the easternmost station, near the National University where I work. And a horde of Uzbek students takes the same train, noisy, pushy – they can tread on my foot not even bothering to say 'excuse me'. If I start admonishing them, they would just ignore me. At their home, in the Old Town, they never behave like this! They are very quiet and decent, because there are always elders who would reproach and punish them for any misdemeanor. On the other hand, even in the underground, when the train enters western districts, more European* [built around an engineering plant and an aircraft factory, and populated mainly by factory workers who came from Russia in the 1960s-1970s], *these Uzbek teenagers almost immediately lower their voices, make no vulgar gestures and in general start to behave like civilized persons. But in this border area, outside Old Town and a few definitely European districts – basically the whole centre, and especially Broadway – there they throw aside all restraint.*

[37] This attitude to behaviour in public places was brought to the region by Russians, and enforced during the Soviet rule, but genealogically it goes back to the West" to Elias' (1994) idea of civilization as taming of the body and to Simmel's (1995) blasé attitude as a pillar of modern urbanism.

In this section I tried to show how interethnic relations are embedded in and negotiated through the urban spaces of Tashkent. Interethnic tensions and alliances are less visible than the signs of the state's ideology, inscribed in social relations and attitudes, rather than in the built environment. Yet one voice is lacking here – that of the migrants from the destitute countryside who are struggling to get into Tashkent[38], and are excluded from the city both by the harshness of the state's regulations, and by the old residents' class prejudice. To hear their voice, and to give it a place in the broader picture – this is a task for future research.

4.3 Beyond state and ethnicity: spaces public and private

Thus far I have been discussing Tashkent's cityscape as if is was shaped by a single agent, the state, and the Uzbek/European division was the main source of tensions within it. There are ample reasons for this perspective, yet there are other, less evident spaces and forces that act alongside (or even against) the state, and are relatively indifferent to the ethnic divide.

Even in the severe Stalinist years the official organization of space was contradicted by the discourse and spatial practices of people, leading to "rival versions of place" (French 1995: 9). This is particularly true for the peripheral regions such as Central Asia. Thanks to its distance from Moscow, population's difference from the Slavic core of the USSR, and the power of the local elites, "totalitarian waves" emitted from Kremlin grew even weaker[39] – hence the eventual compromise of the double-tier society (see above). And if under Stalin some freedom from the gaze of the state was possible only in the private space of a home, in a

[38] Or Moscow. From a migrant's point of view, Tashkent is not markedly different from Russian cities, where up to 2,5 million Uzbeks go each year in search for a casual job (Greenberg 2007). Everywhere they face unfamiliar (Russian) language, merciless police and scornful locals.

[39] For example, on the actual failure of 1930s *hujum*, a highly publicized policy of women's emancipation in the Soviet East, see (Northrop 2004: 344-348).

relatively lax atmosphere of the late Soviet years there emerged a set of alternative public spaces.

One kind of them is related to Tashkent parks, where urban youths were hanging out in the 1980s (figure 13). Some key features of the urban public space may be discerned in these practices: a tolerant atmosphere that allows for informal intermingling of strangers (as opposed to the tacit apartheid in the residential districts – see above, p. 50), and emphasis on consumerism (cf. Zukin 1995: 259-260; 189).

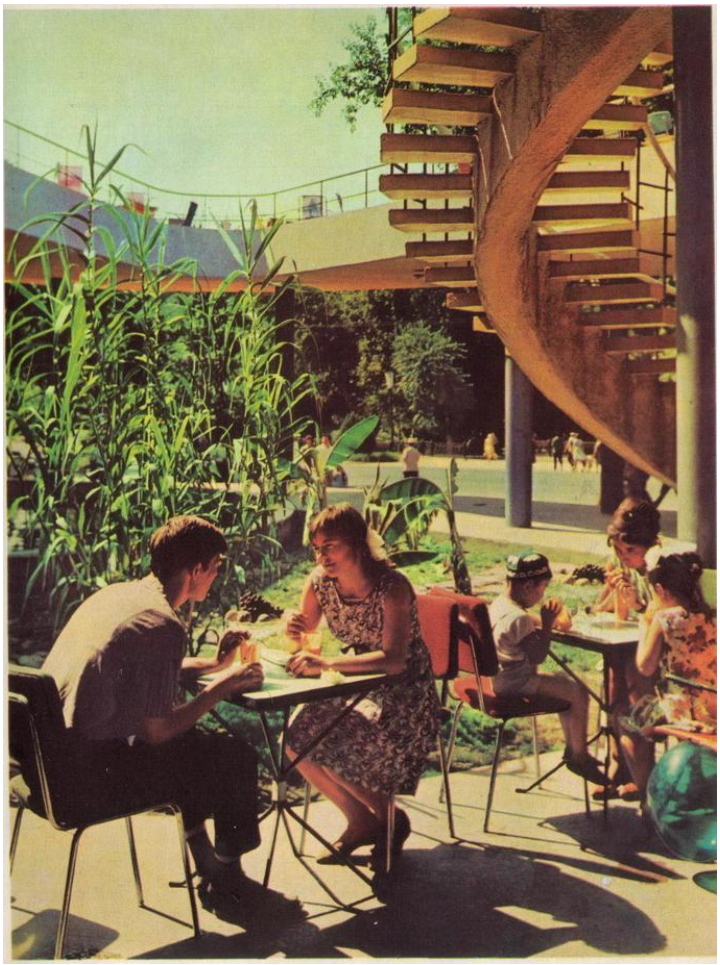


Figure 25. In a café. Source: *Tashkent* [a booklet for tourists]. Tashkent, n.d. (mid-1970s)

Komsomolka [a park named after Komsomol, a Soviet youth organization] – *twenty hot mince pies for a ruble + Pepsi-Cola for 15 kopecks – and plop into the lake! Maksim Gorky park – a small cinema for 3 roubles (Bruce Lee, Schwarzenegger…), video games for 15 kopecks, "Khiva" summer cinema, disco in the park (cops and tipsy guys), whirligigs… Vostochka* [vernacular name for another park] – *café in the center, plenty of*

swimming pools. Now it is in decay, café is shut down, everything is neglected… Furqat park (a charming place to take a girl out) – desolate. Children's park – all destroyed, Karimov built his hut there (curse him!)[40].

I fell out of love with my home town. When our love was in flower, Tashkent was so different… A park in the center of the city, where many generations of Tashkenters have strolled in the shade of ancient oaks and planes. A tiny stained-glass pavilion – as if some magician made it and put in the park. In May – outings to the nearby mountains, and in the summertime, bathing in Ankhor [a rivulet that runs through Tashkent, initially marked the border between old and new town – A. K.], *under the willows… Wandering around sumptuous bazaars with my 'European' relatives, and waving them farewell at the airport, heaped up with melons that are waiting to be shipped to all four corners of our vast homeland… I remember that unique Tashkent sense of community – our city, large, scattered, slovenly, made of so many dissimilar faces, was sparkling with generosity, cordiality and hospitality. But when did the signs of a rift began to appear in our friendship? I cannot say for certain. Maybe when my friends started to leave the city – the people with whom I had gone to school and to university, who taught me, who have healed my kids, who have built and embellished my city. Maybe when tall and strong fences encircled the places that I love – and I felt that these fences have cut through my heart. Maybe when a fairy-tale stained-glass pavilion was demolished overnight… and I felt that the face of my beloved was mutilated*[41].

The assertion of supra-ethnic Tashkenter identity, and hostility against the post-Soviet conditions that destroyed it are particularly notable here. However, the tricky issue here is that all of the places mentioned belong to the past – now they exist only in my informants' reminiscences and in the emigrants' forums and blogs. Whatever factual truth is there in nostalgic discourse, its main function in the present is to defend Europeans' symbolic domination over the city, however shadowy it may be at the moment[42]. "Among members of the former urban elite… one often heard how sweet life was before the revolution. These sorts of narratives… generally focused on the damage wrought to cultivated and civilized society by the 'barbarians at the gate'" (Cunningham Bissell 2005: 235). Yet in the case of Tashkent these are not Uzbeks who are labeled barbarians but the state – impersonal force that brutally and

[40] From "Rodnye I lyubimye mesta v Tashkente" (Tashkent places we love), a discussion at "Forum of Emigrants from Uzbekistan" (http://fromuz.com/forum/lofiversion/index.php/t266-50.html) In Russian.
[41] "In Love with the City", an anonymous essay (http://mytashkent.uz/2006/08/27/roman-s-gorodom/). In Russian. Retrieved May 25, 2007.

bluntly destroys the order of urban life to make place for its pompous projects. And, given the meager political and economic (but not cultural!) resources of Tashkent Europeans[43], doleful evocations of times gone and places destroyed would hardly be able to transcend the limits of mere longing (or, at best, ironic critique).

Another alternative public space grew from a semi-private space of a courtyard: inhabitants of the ferro-concrete boxes in the new districts started planting trees and small front gardens to protect themselves from the heat (figure 27). Chilanzar, a large housing estate of modern apartments blocks, built after the 1966 earthquake in the marshy wastelands south of the city's center (where tigers were hunting up the 1920s), was particularly prone to these transformations.

> *Initially Chilanzar blocks looked faceless and uniform. But soon the residents informally divided the courtyards between themselves – and front gardens started to grow. Families whose windows faced the sun were the first to plant trees, as there was no air-conditioning in the 1960s… Islambek, our neighbour, who had moved to Tashkent from Guliston* [capital of the Sirdarya province, adjacent to the Tashkent province] *was the first to enclose his garden with an iron fence… We helped each other to gather the fruits, exchanged fertilisers, saplings, seeds. An urban teenager, I learnt to loosen the soil in spring, to hunt the plant pests, to look after the flowers. Longing for the soil and for the rural way of life united Uzbeks who migrated to Tashkent from the countryside, and to urban Russians, such as my parents, who came to build Chilanzar after the earthquake* (Kudryashov 2005b)

[42] Although for emigrant Tahskenters remembrance is less political than psychological: a remedy against the sense of dislocation. "There is exile but no possibility of redemption; only mourning remains" (Valensi 1990: 97).

[43] In a state-run and thoroughly corrupted economy of Uzbekistan, most positions of power and profit are located in the state apparatuses, and are divided between different Uzbek clans and power groups (Abdullaev 2004; Collins 2006).

Figure 26. A courtyard in Tashkent ("Minor" district). Photo by author.

For some Tashkenters these improvised dachas meant the experience of growing peaches and cherries and relaxing in the shade of elms with the neighbors. Yet others treated the courtyards as a "no man's space" and enclosed them for private luxuries (e.g., garages and arbours). Initially these amenities were constructed in a discreet manner, for vigilant Soviet authorities would inevitably pounce on too serious a breach of egalitarian principles in the urban space, yet after 1991 the privatization of fenced areas went unmolested, covering them with small shops, swimming pools, and chic Japanese gardens. No wonder that the municipal decree of 2005 prescribing destruction of fenced gardens and annexes (Ezhkov 2005) – another instance of the "anti-foliage" fervor mentioned above (p. 45) – met with such a stubborn and unanimous resistance from the start that it remained only on paper. Private development goes even more unhindered in the single-storied *mahalla*s, transforming former symbols of backwardness into icons of gentrification, air-conditioned villas decorated with oriels and loggias. Only the sight of a young woman besoming the porch (to gain favor with her mother-

in-law, as the custom prescribes) marks difference from, say, the villas of Russian nouveau riches (Humphrey 2002)

Figure 27. New villas in a *mahalla* near Shota Rustaveli street. Photo by author.

That the issue of courtyard space is deeply political was made clear by the recent debate in the media. One of the positions voiced was in favor of the decree: although great many governmental decisions are absurd and harmful, this one gives Tashkenters an opportunity to build some order by themselves, to excel in self-discipline, so that neatness and cleanness of apartment blocks akin to the post-socialist Berlin and Warsaw might one day replace chaos and unsightliness of Tashkent districts. In a new incarnation of Le Corbusier versus Jane Jacobs debate, another author rejoined by stressing the capacity of ordinary people to organize their life (and space) without petty control from above, which, at least in Uzbekistan, will bring no re-ordering but merely the necessity to bribe responsible officials; moreover, the beauty of the city lies not in the tedious *Ordnung* of central Tashkent, but in the ecological beauties of the "urban forest" in Chilanzar (Kakim byt' Tashkentu 2005).

Yet behind anti-foliage regulations and the lack of unanimous support for the suburban utopia advocated by Sergey there is also a deep-seated fear of not appearing urban and civilized enough, a fear fuelled by a certain ruralization that many post-Soviet cities faced after

1991, with the disruption of planned economy and mass closing down of factories (Burawoy, Krotov and Lytkina 2000). In Tashkent this ruralization is marked by goats, sheep and cows that graze on the streets and in the parks.

Figure 28. Sheep in the city (Furqat street). Photo by author.

For the Uzbeks (especially for recent migrants to the city) cattle may be the only source of meat and fresh milk, or an invaluable addition to a meager salary. Yet Tashkent Europeans frown upon this resurgence of stock-breeding in the city, seeing it as another instance of post-Soviet destruction of "cultured" Tashkent: parks are cut down by barbaric authorities and trampled out by goats.

Furthermore, cows in the city instill Europeans' fear of seeing Tashkent, the last oasis of urbanity in Uzbekistan, being finally devoured by the countryside, where lights go out at eight in the evening, people sleep on horse-hair mattresses – and, desperate from poverty and hunger, turn to radical Islam. And here comes the final paradox of this paper. Although angry or

bitterly ironic of state-sponsored urban restructuring and paranoiac security measures, European Tashkenters unanimously look upon the ruling regime as the only bulwark against bloody popular resurgence under Islamic slogans – an Andijan uprising of May 2005 writ large. Whether Andijan events were a coup-d'etat staged by "Islamic" terrorists, as the official Uzbek version puts it (Ezhevischkin 2005), or a brutally suppressed peaceful rally of protest against impoverishment and repression (Human Rights Watch n.d.), the city's theatre ablaze was, for Europeans, a portent of their culture's possible fate.

Whether this is a justified fear[44], or the result of the successful propaganda, only future can tell. Now Europeans curse president Karimov for suicidal economic policies and for the suppression of all secular opposition, but admit that for the time being they are in the same boat, safe behind the walls of heavily policed Tashkent, "the stone city" (according to the popular etymology).

CONCLUSION

By this point I have, hopefully, given an exhaustive account of social, political and cultural divisions that are experienced, imagined and negotiated through Tashkent's cityscape. The city – a mixture of the material, the structural and the imaginary – is a useful frame of analysis, indeed. Yet much of the issues discussed here point beyond the city limits – e.g., the symbolic boundaries of the Uzbek(istani) nation, Central Asian political regimes' quest for legitimacy, covert "colonial" division in the USSR. But, before I discuss how this study may be expanded to cover these broader issues, something must be said about its limitations.

On the whole, the method of studying the city by walking in it (alone or with the informants) has proved to be quite efficient. An important caveat: outings to the city have been not the sole source of data, but the insights gained during these walks proved invaluable when other sources (interviews and forums/blogs) were brought into the picture. The main bias of the study concerns not the privileging of my personal perspective but the desperate lack of "objective" data (statistics, household surveys, urban development plans). Practicing a peculiar version of the "evidential paradigm" (Ginzburg 1992: 96-125), I had to decipher the plans and decisions of those who control and change the city from the traces these plans have left on the city face, as well as through urban residents' opinions. Also, adding a more broad and more representative sample of informants would certainly expand the picture – but what could change it drastically is the voice of non-Russified, Uzbek-speaking Tashkenters (particularly recent migrants) speaking about **their** city.

These limitations notwithstanding, my study makes a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on the nature of colonial/imperial dimension of the Soviet Union. Cautious not to interpret the USSR in the light of simplistic and Eurocentric models (e.g., Westerners

[44] Fuelled by the memory of the civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s, when many Russians were massacred or forced to flee (Assessment for Russians in Tajikistan n.d.).

versus natives, metropole versus colonies), those engaged in the debate look for more nuanced schemes (Adams 2005: 333-335, Khalid 2006).

From Tashkent perspective, I would argue that it makes more sense to speak of inner hierarchies of the USSR in terms of positions rather than territries: the "center" was equal not to Moscow, let alone Russia, but to the party officials and the hierarchy of their institutions, from headquarters in Kremlin towards republican, regional, municipal and district Party Committees. The USSR as a state was a modernizing project, egalitarian in its ideology, but operating upon a certain territory ridden with inherited geographic, ethnic, economic, cultural differences, some of them colonial.

Under Lenin and Stalin the equalizing/universalizing thrust came from the center, "from above", while the land and the population "below" was characterized by "untamed" differences of every sort. In a kind of reversal, central authorities in the late Soviet years (from Brezhnev to Gorbachev) have become increasingly lax and lenient to all sorts of deviations from the Communist dogma (black market and informal *blat* networks (Ledeneva 1998) are a good example). Yet by that time there was more uniformity "below" (due to such institutions as the army service, schools and universities, radio and television) so the official fiction of the "Soviet society" (idealistic, egalitarian, non-racist, scornful of profiteering, etc) was maintained, with a certain cynicism (Yurchak 1997).

Zooming in to Uzbekistan, I would come with a following hypothesis of how this structure worked on the ground. A double-tier society in action (see above, pp. 52-53): Uzbeks, an absolute majority in the countryside, toil in the cotton fields (but can have a large private garden or herd, luxury denied to the peasants of Central Russia (Poliakov 1992), while Uzbek party elite slowly gets its hands on the political and economic power in the republic, constantly bargaining with Moscow (bales of cotton for state subsidies). At the same time Uzbekistan is not only **national** Uzbek space, but also a segment of broader Soviet (and even

Eastern Bloc) space, which basically means that it used by the Center as a site of large-scale industrial projects, barely related to the local economy. To work on these projects, and for other reasons (evacuations and deportations during the Second World war, rebuilding Tashkent after 1966 earthquake), large groups of non-Uzbek Soviet citizens were relocated to Uzbekistan. Indifferent or critical to the Soviet state (the experience deportation from one's homeland is not easy to forget), this group (I referred to it as the "Europeans") nevertheless enjoyed the privileges of the Soviet order (e.g., the privileged status of Russian language).

Then, after 1991, Uzbek elite acquires full control over "its" territory. Some Europeans left, and those who stayed enjoyed the "Soviet Byzantium". Yet by the 2000s, as the economy decays, competition for the jobs (and for the right to live in Tashkent) has been rising (see chapter 4.2.). The future of Tashkent "Europeans", deprived of all positions of power, might look gloomy if it was not for two factors. First, economic recovery in Russia and economic boom in Kazakhstan (which has a substantial Russian majority and is predominantly Russian-speaking country (Kolsto 1999) provides the "Europeans" with a space to go and to invest their cultural and social capital. Secondly, the group itself, which had acquired its identity in the Soviet era, may be disintegrating, as some of its members (Russians) may form important transnational (economic and cultural) allegiances elsewhere. Some (Tatars) may forge greater connections with Uzbek communities through the shared revival of Islamic behavior and practice, while others (Koreans) are more inclined to rely on intra-group networks, becoming a leading trading minority in the region.

However, all these hypotheses require seeing Tashkent not a as bounded whole, but as a mixture of networks and imaginaries, maintained and produced beyond its physical boundaries: by emigrants, Uzbeks and Europeans alike, and in other cities of the region, from Kazakhstan border towns where Tashkenters buy much of their merchandise (to avoid paying

huge import duties), to Moscow. To take into account these transnational contexts would be a good starting point for further research.

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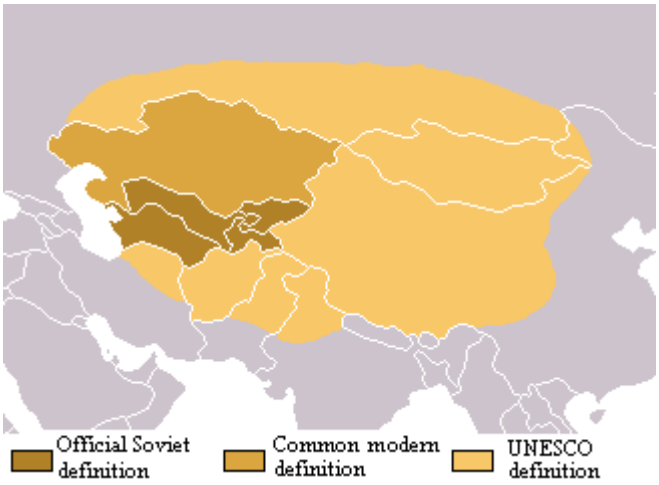
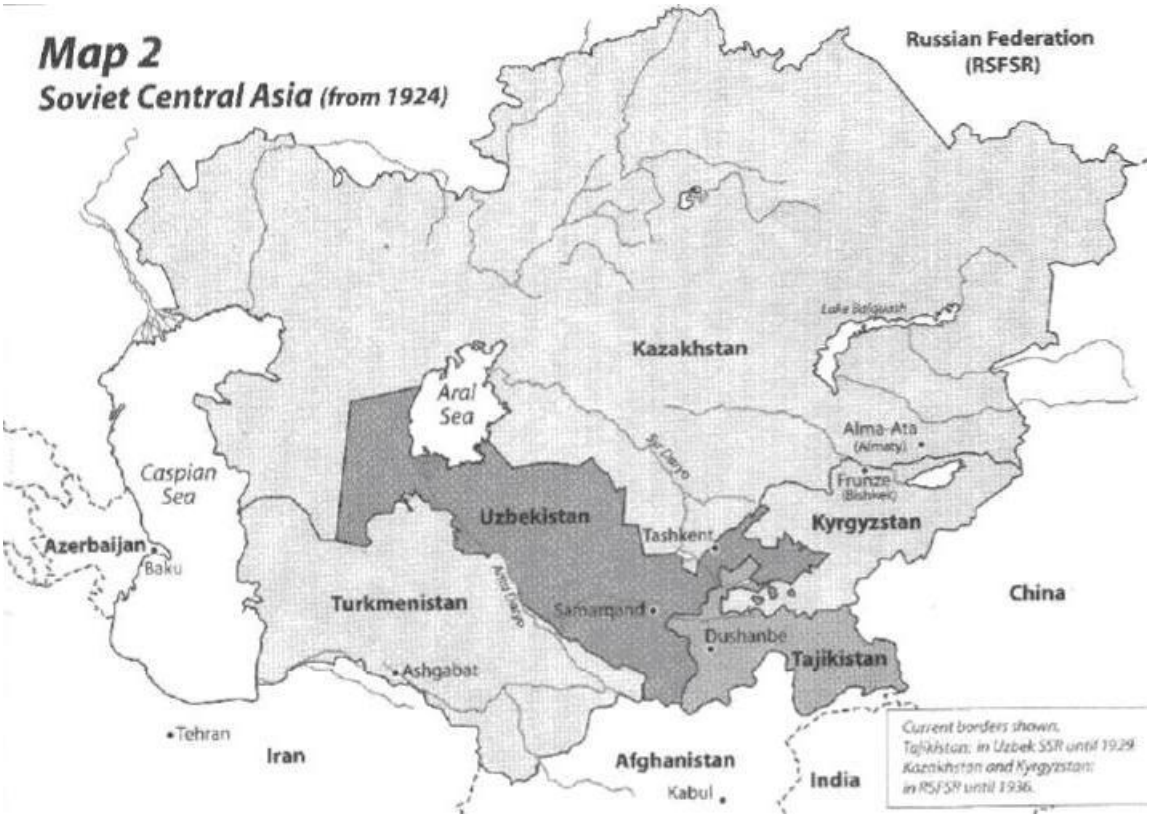
APPENDIX. MAPS OF CENTRAL ASIA



Map 1. Central Asia: definitions of the region

Map 2. Tsarist Central Asia. Source: Northrop 2004: 16.



Map 3. Soviet Central Asia (after 1991, the borders of the newly independent republics have remained the same). Source: Northrop 2004:, 18.