

## **The Fergana Valley: A Microcosm of Problems and Potential in Central Asia**

**S. Frederick Starr:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to say a word about a project we are engaged in here at this institute. This is to study the Fergana Valley. This is not a valley; it is a large plateau ringed by high hills and low and high mountains that is quite arguably the very heart of greater Central Asia and, really, just about all the great routes of antiquity pass through there.

It is an area about which the most extraordinary and, in some cases, bizarre claims have been made by Western pundits in the last fifteen years with a scant amount of information or hard knowledge of the region, usually the results of one or two trips across it with interpreters. And yet it is of very, very great importance. It is a center of agriculture, it is a population center, and it is certainly also a cultural center of the region with great cities past and present.

If you read the Memoirs of Babur, you read about his boyhood and what is now a place called Aksikent in Uzbekistan, a wonderful city in antiquity. It was the capital of the region 500 years ago, the successor to three or four earlier capitals of the region.

An extraordinarily rich and complex place, it always has been. In the Fergana Valley, you can find remains of a major sixth-century Christian church. There are Buddhist remains in the Fergana Valley. There are Zoroastrian temples in the Fergana Valley. It is a place of great cultural mixing, as it has been for 3,000 years and it certainly is today.

Its defining character today, as you are well aware, is that due to the rather peculiar if

not bizarre manner in which political boundaries were drawn in the 1920s, 1924 and then polished up in the 1930s in two steps. The area has been divided among three countries: the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan, and these are international borders today that divide a people which has always been highly differentiated, including all three of those peoples and many more, but now these are international borders.

Therefore, to study it, what we did was to assemble a group of, my goodness, 24 scholars, one on eight different key topics, each writing from the perspective of and with the information base of his country, and yet cooperating and collaborating closely with two other scholars from the other two countries and all addressing the same questions, a whole range of questions from history, religion, politics, culture, my goodness, across the board. And working as eight different teams, each team with a lead author. So each team, in a sense, receives three separate papers from each of the authors, and these are then combined into a single paper by the lead writer, and for each country, there is a national editor.

The national editor for Tajikistan is sitting before you right now, and he is actually one of the two inventors of this project, the other inventor being Inomjon Bobokulov, a young scholar from Uzbekistan. These two gentlemen were fellows at the Institute here together at the same time and hatched this plan.

It is extremely bold; it is an extremely complicated piece of work in that we are not asking 24 people to give us their

separate ideas but rather to work together and to come up with syntheses.

And I must tell you, this is a project that goes along for several years, involves dozens of people, immense problems of coordination. It is not the project that any normal foundation or funder would want to support, which makes us all the more happy and grateful that the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA took an interest in this from the start and has very loyally supported it and we hope that the final results, which will be more than a year in coming, will be of as much interest in Japan and elsewhere as they will be obviously to the people in the region.

We have had the opportunity to hear from one of the other co-editors, Bakyt Beshimov from Kyrgyzstan, from this podium. And it is a pleasure now to introduce Pulat Shozimov, who is the Tajik editor. It is impossible to describe him in one sentence. He is a philosopher, ethnographer, anthropologist and sort of a linguistic sociologist. I mean, my goodness. He is also a great, I mean, seriously great, I mean frightening level chess player, one of the star chess players in his era in Soviet times, and a formidable middle-distance runner which I have tested out actually from here to across Dupont Circle and he is still in pretty good shape. Dr. Shozimov is with the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. I must say, there is no scholar I know in the region who has developed a broader following of genuine friends and interested people who, whether they agree or disagree with him, always welcome him. Please welcome him here and I'm sure you will agree. Dr. Shozimov.

**Pulat Shozimov:** Thank you, participants and guests at this forum. I would like to say thank you to Professor Frederick Starr and

the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA for inviting me and giving me a chance to share my ideas. I hope to get from your questions some new inspiration for my research.

My topic is connected with the Fergana Project. There are very subtle questions and very delicate, and I will try to manage these questions in an appropriate way. We will have a lot of interpretation of what the Fergana Project means.

### **Geography**

What is the Fergana Project? Professor Starr has described very well about its three states, and the Fergana Valley is separated between these three states: in the eastern part of Uzbekistan, it includes Namangan, Andijan and Fergana; from Kyrgyzstan, Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken; and from Tajikistan, it is the Sogdian region. It is very important to note here that when we talk about Sogdian region, we should take into consideration that Fergana includes just Isfara, Kanibadam, and Khujand, but not Istaravshan because Istaravshan, if you will check, has a completely different history.

And the Fergana Valley, all of this space, it is not so big. It is about 330 kilometers from east to west, and about 170 from north to south. The Fergana Valley is within mountains, surrounded by mountains. And there is just one open way in and out, the Khujand Gate it's about eight, ten kilometers in.

Through this space, in history, we can see one of the great roads: the Silk Road that connected the western part of China with the west. And this is one of the interesting points about the Fergana Valley, it is only five percent of the territory of Central Asia, but it is home to 25 percent of the population of Central Asia. And this

situation has also influenced some processes that we can see happening; so we will describe what is going on in this region.

### **Heart of Central Asia**

There are different characterizations of the Fergana Valley: the valley of conflict, the valley of angels. From my point of view, this is the heart of Central Asia. Here are concentrated a lot of informal religious networks that have very strong influence, not just on Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan but also in Tajikistan, especially the religious leaders who have had a very strong influence on the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party. If you will take, for example, Muhammadjan Hindustani, he was from Fergana and he had a very strong influence on Abdullo Nuri who is a former leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party. And most of the leaders are in the Fergana region -- even now, they have a very strong influence in Kyrgyzstan, too.

Historically, this region was connected with Kokand Khanate from 1709 to 1878, and after annexation of this region by the Russian Empire this Khanate was transformed into Fergana Oblast, then Fergana Province.

Right now, I would like to mention that this relationship between the Fergana Valley and the centers of the three currently existing republics created unique situations for this region. First of all, I would like to say that this geographical isolation created fragmentations. We have different enclaves in the Fergana Valley and we do not know where, for example, I visited Batken and I saw that it is extremely difficult to understand where the border is. And it creates some situations because people do not focus on the national-territorial aspect.

Independence and social, national sovereignty, is not very important because they live in a very fragmental space and they focus more on regional -- we can see some regional perceptions of the space and I would like to give some examples.

### **Types of Conflict**

We know that in the Fergana Valley we can see very crucial and very dangerous conflicts, and I would like to identify these different conflicts and to describe some types of conflict. For example, if you see the conflicts before the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is a water conflict in Khojai'Alo (Isfara) between Tajiks and Kyrgyz. And in 1989, it is the Fergana conflict between Uzbeks and Turk Meskhetins. And in 1990 it is the Osh conflict, a territorial conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups.

But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can see a conflict in 1998. It is an attack of the Khudoberdiev on Khujand, Tajikistan. And in 1999, an attack by Juma Namangani from the territory of Tajikistan into Batken, in Kyrgyzstan. And in 2005, the Andijan conflict.

You can see that the first three conflicts before the collapse of the Soviet Union were more connected with ethnic issues. They were inter-ethnic conflicts and struggles for resources. But the next three conflicts that were after the collapse of Soviet Union, I think we can see that these conflicts had more ideological character.

This is the difference between the two types of conflict, and from my point of view, we should be more careful about that and know that ideology also can cause conflict. That is why it is very important to create more

flexible structures in ideological space to prevent this type of conflict.

For example, if you take this discussion between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan about the Ragun hydroelectric station, we can see that this conflict also has more ideological character than simply pragmatic interest. It is interesting case that in the Soviet period, the first Secretaries of the Communist Party Rashidov and Jabbor Rasulov, the two chairmen of the republics, they implemented this project and they tried to use this project for both republics and this is -- but now, what has happened now is the question. And I think it is very important to get away from ideological frameworks, it will help to solve a lot of problems in the Fergana Valley.

### **Radical Religious Networks**

I would like also to describe the situation in the Fergana Valley in order to answer one question: Why does the Fergana Valley have very strong radical religious networks? One of the reasons from my point of view is that most of the cities of the Fergana Valley are too separate from the center. And this separation from the center, this territorial fragmentation of the Fergana Valley, created a completely different perception about this region and also created transnational ideas, regional ideas, and even Pan-Islamic ideas -- we can see very strong influences of pan-Islamic ideas like Hizb ut-Tahrir.

There were also economic and tax problems from 1995, closing some parts of the borders, and communication was destroyed between different economic groups in separate states. Of course, it also brought back ideas among some religious groups of the Fergana Valley about how to join together, like the idea of caliphate where

you should pay about 10% tax (or *zakiat*) instead of 30-40% at the present time. It is very dangerous, because if a state government cannot provide ideas and provide instruments and institutions for solving these problems, of course, we can see completely different ideas and ideologies emerge.

We have in the Fergana Valley a very high percentage of poverty, unemployment, high population density. It can suddenly create some difficult situations.

But I would like to move from this point and talk more about the identity issue and to compare the three cases, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, especially regarding tradition and culture, because this issue is also very substantial, very important for understanding the processes in the Fergana Valley.

We know that in 2007 in Tajikistan, the government started to reform the traditional sphere and they started to attack the more traditional networks. I asked Muradullo Davlatov, who is the Chairman of Religious Affairs under the President of Tajikistan, and he said that there is a distinction between the reform of the Islamic sphere that Islamists tried to do in 1991 and 1992 and the reforms now, since 2007. He said that the first reform led to the civil war, 1991, 1992, it was a very crucial period for Tajikistan. From his point of view the Islamists in 1991 wanted to do religious reform, but we now try to do social reform. Here you can see the change of the point of view.

And, of course, now we see that in the case of Uzbekistan, destroying traditional networks can lead to the appearance of radical movements. And from my point of view, if you will see the Uzbekistan case,

when they started this -- they started to do the same that Tajikistan is doing now. They started in 1980, in the Soviet period. They started also attack traditional networks and they get Namangan after that.

I do not speak now about traditionalism; I speak now about traditional networks that have the capacity to understand and to interpret Islam in different ways. Not just in practice, but also in the cultural dimension it is important to have more free space for discussions about this issue.

One of the interesting points if you compare the Tajikistan case with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan is also in a process of reforming traditional networks, but to what extent will it be appropriate? And from my point of view, the Tajik government, when they started to do this reform, now they do not know how to get out of this situation because they saw the very strong influence of the Salafi movement. Now we can see in Tajikistan a very strong influence of the Salafi movement. And it is very interesting that we can see the Salafi movement not in the Fergana Valley but in the center and the south. Some people maybe see a connection between the Islamic Renaissance Party and the Salafi movement. From my point of view, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IPRT), that is, political Islam, tries to fit religious identity within the national identity. This is an important distinction between a pan-Islamist agenda and political Islam in Tajikistan.

In Tajikistan, IPRT focuses more on the connections between the national project and religion, that is, religious values within the national project -- as a Tajik, within Tajik culture and so on. The Pan-Islamic agenda is more focused on the transnational

and they do not have space or national boundaries.

And we can see something like that not only in the center but also in the Fergana Valley and it is very interesting. In that context Chorkuh is a very important village within Isfara in Tajikistan. In Isfara there are different kinds of villages, like Surh which is very traditional, and Khojai'Alo that has a more regional and ethnonational agenda, Vorukh, it is an enclave within the Kyrgyzstan part of the valley that has an agenda close to Khojai'Alo, and Chorku that is a very religious village and even there, we can see more influence of the Islamic Renaissance Party than from other religious groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

But one of the interesting things from my point of view, right now, the Islamic Renaissance Party controls the situation and has a very strong influence on the Fergana Valley. They have very strong networks, and recently I interviewed the Chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, Muhiddin Kabiri, who mentioned a group of businessmen who sent a letter to him in order to defend their rights. They had a problem with local powers. And it is very interesting, we can see strong connections between the middle class, the Islamic middle class and Islamic Renaissance Party. It means that in the context of Tajikistan, we see that the middle class is under the control of the Islamic Renaissance Party and they formed, they created this capacity for a middle class. One of the reasons, maybe it is connected, is that the government focused too much on concentrating power and financial resources in their own hands. And then they did not have space for businessmen, who are in a secular space, and that is why we can see that it is a completely different situation.

And from my point of view, the Islamic Renaissance Party created situations to influence and control the Fergana Valley and to try to preserve some traditional values, too. And one interesting point is that they organize debates, open debates, not only in Dushanbe but also in Isfara, among intellectuals, among the population, including scholars, religious persons.

We can also see the same corrosion and destroying operations against traditional networks in the Kyrgyzstan part. In Kyrgyzstan, they have the same problem right now, but the distinction between Islamist groups and traditional groups is underlying the divide between mountain Kyrgyz and settled. They do not have the usual separation between north and south. They have a traditional understanding of this region and the structure, social structure, through such terms as the right wing, left wing, and the center. And the president of Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev, he is connected with Ichkilik, with the center.

### **Cross-Border Influences**

Now if you look the border areas, we can see the very strong influence of Uzbek culture and I think it is an objective factor because Uzbekistan has about 60 percent of the territory of the Fergana Valley; Tajikistan, it is 25; and Kyrgyzstan, 15. And most of the Kyrgyz people and political elites worry that Osh and especially Batken are very strongly influenced by Uzbek TV and radio.

And now we can see, and it is one of the interesting things, that most Uzbek people from the Kyrgyz perspective identify themselves as Muslim more than Uzbek, because they try to separate their own identity from the Kyrgyz identity. And the question is, from my point of view, maybe

they do not want to separate from Kyrgyz people so maybe they tried to find connections with Kyrgyz people through their, I don't know, common ground as Muslims.

This is the case in Tajikistan and I think it works also in Kyrgyzstan because we see that in Kyrgyzstan, in the Kyrgyzstan part of the Fergana Valley, most of the Uzbeks do not have enough access to the power and economic structures. And maybe it is one of the reasons they tried to identify themselves through this term.

But now also, we have a completely different shift. Many Uzbeks started to speak in Kyrgyz in the Kyrgyzstan part of Fergana Valley and they even started to give Kyrgyz names to their children. There are also very interesting changes that we can see in Kyrgyzstan.

### **Balancing Tradition and Innovation**

If you see the differences throughout different parts of the Fergana Valley, I would like to suggest the following examples: my research has showed me that if you take, for example, Uzbekistan, we can see that Namangan has more inclinations toward modernism and a positive orientation toward religious reform and in this case Namangan has some crisis of traditional institutions.

In the case of Kokand, we can see a more traditional orientation, maybe more traditionalism. And in Andijan, we have some adaptation of traditions to innovation, I mean, modern ideas in the traditional cultural context.

And this means that if you will see the differences, the different models, we can see that Namangan is more modern but they

have a problem with -- we know about Namangan in 1991. In Kokand the traditionalism, and the mix in Andijan, the connections between tradition and innovation.

The question is to how to find the balance between tradition and modernization. How to deal with the question, for example, of a modernized economic system, social system, and how to deal with some ideas that come from the outside.

In Kyrgyzstan, if you look at this through same lens, we can see that Jalal-Abad has more strong modern elements connected to cultural transformations. Osh is more connected with the traditional and mixes traditional mountain culture and religious, settled Kyrgyz culture, and Batken has strong religious components.

In Tajikistan, we see connections between religion and some element of modernity in Isfara. I think that they identified connections and they have an interesting model of these connections. Kanibadam has a more traditional orientation and there is a very strong secular orientation in Khujand. We have there a very interesting co-existence of traditionalism and modernism with strong inclinations toward a pan-Islamic agenda that is between two dimensions: traditionalism and modernism.

I would like to save time for discussion, but in the end I would like to say that we can see in the Fergana Valley a lot of fragments, a lot of problems, border problems, but the Fergana Valley has the possibility to transform these boundaries, not for conflict but for cooperation.

## Neutral Social Space

It is important to build some neutral social space, space for discussion. An interesting moment was when people came to Isfara, in the Tajikistan part of the Fergana Valley, for a chess tournament. I met with religious persons, non-religious persons, people from Kyrgyzstan, too. Chess joins together a lot of people, from Batken, Kyrgyzstan they came to this place, from Chorkuh, very strong religious people came also. I did not see big problems. They use chess as an opportunity to discuss key issues, the water problem, and they solved a lot of problems about how to organize some events and so on. Often they can meet in order to play chess in any house where people have interest in this game and you find a lot of such kind of places in Isfara.

I think one of the best things for this space is to build some neutral social institutions in order to give people a chance to collaborate with each other and also to create connections between religious people and intellectuals who will be able to discuss some very, very key issues openly. And from my point of view, I think that we have a chance to get away from ideological perspectives. And this chess case showed me that it is possible in Kyrgyzstan and the Tajikistan part of the Fergana Valley. Thank you, I'd love to take your questions.

**Starr:** Thank you very much. I just want to remind the audience that this study covers everything. There will be very careful analyses of economic life in the region, social affairs, water and ecology, health, education, and especially the history going way back, and interestingly you mentioned several instances of issues that are being addressed today as having roots in the Soviet past. Well, our friend Sherzod Abdullaev, who is here in town at the

Uzbek Embassy, former rector of Fergana University, has pointed out in his own scholarly writings the importance of the religious events in the pre-1917 generation and he sees some of what is happening and has happened more recently as a continuation of that long, long history.

### **Islamic Renaissance Party**

Now, having said that, if I can begin this discussion, you have made an astonishing remark, and that is that the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan has managed to find a real social base in the emerging middle class. We had a report here last session by John Daly, we have just published his long paper as a Silk Road Paper, on the emerging middle class in Kazakhstan. Well, your emerging middle class story, especially in the Fergana Valley, is extraordinarily different. And I wonder if you could elaborate on this and extend it to, if I may, the issue of Andijan, which you identified as a peculiar mixture of modernity and tradition as opposed to Kokand and Namangan.

**Shozimov:** Yes. We can see now the very strong potential of the Islamic Renaissance Party and now they really control a lot of situations. For example, take Kokand or Andijan. In the case of Andijan, we can see the forming of informal networks and the forming of a middle class. We can see the same case in Istaravshan, Isfara, and Khujand, namely a strong connection between economic groups and religious groups.

It is interesting that even in Kyrgyzstan, I discussed this issue with one of the experts, and he also said that now they also have the same collaboration between economic groups and religious groups. And in Tajikistan, I think the government lost

control of the forming of the middle class. And this is one of the cases where it is difficult to say if it is good or not. The government even lost control of the discussion about values, about the direction of the state. And this is, I think, more connected with the influence of the Islamic Renaissance Party -- they know exactly what they want. And it also leads to some radicalization of different groups, secular and religious.

### **Distance from National Capitals**

**Starr:** One of the striking assumptions that permeates your entire presentation that you made explicit at the beginning is that the national capitals are a long way off. They are quite distant, this is common for all three countries. If you are sitting in any of the three parts of the Fergana Valley, a national capital is a good trip away. But is that equally so for all three parts or has the nation-state penetrated more deeply in one or another part of the Valley than in others?

**Shozimov:** It is very interesting that when I interviewed a very important person, the administrator of Khojai'Alo village in Isfara, I asked him, "What kind of music do you like to listen to?" And he said Shashmakom. Shashmakom is traditional music; it is common throughout Central Asia. And it is sad that after that he said, "You know, I do not like Falak." Falak is a traditional music of the southern part of Tajikistan. And it is interesting that he listens to Uzbek music and he said that he listens to Uzbek Shashmakom in the Uzbek language. But for him it does not matter because he knows this song in Tajik. People know that most of the text was translated from Persian into Uzbek and everyone accounts for all this.

I mentioned before that there is some separation, fragmentation of the Fergana Valley, and this has created situations of misunderstanding in that region. What does a nation-state mean for them in the Fergana context? They do not have a classical point of view about the nation-state. As Gellner said, the marriage between state and culture, it is not there. It is more ethnic and cultural identity than national because national identity is more connected with the territorial aspect. But if you do not have a defined territory, they start to think about Bukhara, Samarkand, they think more in regional terms, but they do not have a regional framework. In a previous study I asked one person in Isfara about national symbols, he did not know about that. This is an answer to your question: most of them do not know. But at the same time, they worry about the Tajik language, they worry about Tajik culture. There are great differences between ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries and state boundaries. In the case of Fergana, the people's imagination is beyond national identity. And this is common not just in Tajikistan, for Kyrgyzstan it is the case, too.

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Role of the Borders**

**Questioner:** Thank you very much. I was wondering if you could maybe talk a bit about the role of these borders in posing problems for economic activity. With the ethnic complexity and linguistic complexity of the Fergana Valley, does there exist any kind of lingua franca for commerce throughout the valley?

**Shozimov:** You know the territorial issue is very difficult. It is more artificial. Most of the borders were constructed during the

Soviet time and after the collapse we have had a lot of problems with that.

The Fergana Valley includes a nomadic dimension and settled dimension. In Kyrgyzstan they are nomadic, but even now they also separate themselves, for example, they say that marginal parts of Kyrgyzstan like Ichkilik, are not so connected with Kyrgyz culture because they do not do beshbarmak and so on. They are too far from the national traditions and they have a completely different identity. They identify Kyrgyz who live in Batken as sometimes, from my point of view, I do not want to say this is true but sometimes they identify them as being Uzbek.

In Isfara, for example, you go through the border and the driver says, "This side is Kyrgyz, this is Tajik." But after two kilometers he says that one side is Kyrgyz and the other side is Uzbek. It is unique and hard to understand. It is completely strange.

Kyrgyz officials now worry about the southern part of Kyrgyzstan. They worry about Tajiks moving too far into Kyrgyz territory. But there is a different interpretation about the location of the border.

Where are the borders? Because we have three legal systems, we have three interpretations of this border and what law you will use depends on where you are and how we can identify the border.

And that is why most Tajik officials and Kyrgyz officials do not pay attention to that question because they do not ask these key questions. For my point of view they are now in the process of maybe constructing a new model.

But for me it is very interesting that Kyrgyzstan wanted to move their capital from Bishkek to Osh in order to solve this problem with the border. You see, they do not know how to deal with this, how to deal with these borders. And nobody knows how to solve this problem.

**Starr:** It is worth mentioning that we have drafted the outline for this whole project and there were only two topics on which we simply could not get agreement on a single author; one of them was the boundaries. No scholar in any of the three countries was prepared to stand up and write the definitive chapter on the history of the boundaries. And by the way, all boundaries are artificial; let's agree on that in the beginning. But the other was water. No scholar from any of the three countries was prepared to do that, and let it be said that none of the three countries were eager to see someone from one of the other countries write the chapters on the borders. We have three contributing authors doing immense background papers on those chapters, but on those two areas alone the lead authors are from outside by general consent. Yes, sir, here and then in the back.

### **Tajik Regionalism and the Islamic Renaissance Party**

**Questioner:** I, too, was struck by your comment about the Islamic Renaissance Party's influence in northern Tajikistan. And I sort of want to pin you down on that because historically in Tajikistan, the people in the north felt a degree of separateness from the south and look to people who would speak up for the north. A series of questions here. First of all, you said that the Islamic Renaissance Party did, but most fundamentalist groups did not have attraction in the north - the Islamic Renaissance Party being relatively

moderate, at least that is what I heard you say. Does this represent a shift in the interests of the people in the north that they are now attracted to the Islamic Renaissance Party even though the Islamic Renaissance Party is not seen as a spokesman for the north? It really is a national party, after all. It is not particularly focused on the north. Have their interests shifted or is it because the other groups with which they were associated before are no longer strong and the Islamic Renaissance Party is the only thing left as far as they are concerned?

**Shozimov:** Thank you, it is a good question. It is very important to know the context. The largest number of supporters of the Islamic Renaissance Party is not in Khujand but in Isfara. Yes, it is in Fergana, but one of the interesting points is that when you ask a question about where they are from, they will tell you, "From Karateghin." In the nineteenth century, when Kokand was very active, the Fergana region had very strong commerce, communication, economy, many people from Karateghin came to Fergana, to the Uzbekistan part and the north part of Tajikistan. For example, if you take New Matcho, it's about 30 km. from Khujand, they have very strong supporters of the Islamic Renaissance Party and most of them are connected also with Karateghin. This is one of the answers.

The second point, maybe you are right that they (the north part of Tajikistan) do not now have access to power. After the peace agreement, they do not have so strong of a position to defend their own interests. And one of the reasons maybe that is connected with the Islamic Renaissance Party is that they have presented these ideas for a long while. But I know that more articulate ideas come from Isfara and Chorkuh and

they have very strong connections with the Islamic Renaissance Party.

### **Regional Identity**

**Questioner:** I was curious about this regional identity, particularly among secular people, and I wondered how it worked out with Soviet identity. Are there remnants of that? How does it play out? And then, do newer regional formations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have any saliency with people in that area?

**Shozimov:** Thank you. When I talked about the regional perception (not in terms of Kokand or Fergana regional cooperation but in the Bukharian framework of imagination, of course with Tajik national inclination) of the Fergana Valley, it is not for all of the Fergana Valley. It is just for a group who had roots in Karateghin. And you know that Karateghin (or Garm) was connected in history with the Bukhara Emirate. And that is why some ideas, regional ideas come from historical perspectives. I don't think it's a rule for the entire valley.

**Starr:** I wonder, how do you frame this in taking a long view? Here you have the Fergana Valley, and down to the late nineteenth century, having the most powerful state in the region based there, Kokand. I mean this was a very muscular Khanate. These guys, at one point, as you know, ruled half of Xinjiang in China. It was because of their muscular rule that many Kyrgyz from further north welcomed Russian colonialism simply as a means of countering Kokand. In other words, this was a very powerful place. And you go to Kokand today to look at the palace and you can see this was a serious operation.

Now, the Russian response as I understand it from the now nine historians working on this project, the Russian response was basically we have got to prevent this from becoming a power base again. Therefore, the base of operations for the region was in Tashkent, as the Russian generalship was based there and then in Soviet times, the region was divided to prevent this from happening again.

And this is the kind of very complex history that these three independent countries inherited. I mean they did not choose it; they got it. And then you add to this the fact that these are new states with their capitals really quite distant from the valley in each case. And you can appreciate what a very unusually complex situation it is. And you also have the linguistic, the ethnographic, and so on and so on, and trade and those relations.

I want to refocus your question if I may because I think it really is important, and ask Dr. Shozimov to look ahead and say okay, this is the history. We understand. This is a transitional period, new states and so on. What do you see as the range of development alternatives going out 10, 20 years? Are we going to see something fundamentally different? Are nation-states really going to take root there? Are borders going to be redrawn? Is it all going to end up a mess? What is going to happen or will they all be fat and happy and adjusted to life?

**Shozimov:** Yes, this is a very crucial point. But now, the three republics worry about their own national space and they would like to just fix the boundaries. But the question now is all this discussion about Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, about how to deal with enclaves in order to find connections with national territory. And

you know, there should be a very strong debate about that, but maybe it is impossible to do. The Fergana Valley now needs to create economic free space in order to transform this issue in those terms.

**Starr:** So sort of an economic Kokand?

**Shozimov:** You see, this is about communications, maybe they will, I do not know, it will recreate something. The center of it could provide some conditions for communications, less focus on ideological and territorial boundaries, and more on cultural exchange and economic exchange. It is like in Europe. They have boundaries, but they also have something else.

**Starr:** Okay, let me try it differently. Again, back to your idea of all three capitals being quite a long distance away. A further point that you might have made is that the Fergana region has not exercised the decisive voice in any of the three new countries. I mean, the last time Fergana had a native in the top government in Uzbekistan was Nishanov; that was a complete failure and they did not try that again. The Kyrgyz never have and certainly nothing could be further from that situation when you have the power centered in the far south in Kulob in Tajikistan.

So do you see any possibility of there being any kind of political revival in any of the three sectors of the Fergana Valley within their nation, new countries, or are they going to continue to be marginal?

**Shozimov:** In the Fergana Valley we can see more cooperation right now underground, it is through the Islamist agenda but less in a national or structural way. And I think the states, now, they are not ready for this kind of issue. But a potential for revival, we can see that the

middle class in Isfara shows that this potential is here, it has been for a while. But at the same time, I think we should think about how to move in a constructive way, how to create possibilities and space for them.

**Starr:** You mentioned Uzbek TV, a very interesting reality throughout the region. I mean people really do watch it. You also mentioned musical taste, an interesting issue. Could you touch on athletics? You are a jock yourself. Are there intra-regional based athletic competitions? Is there regional-based popular music? Are there any other manifestations of regionalism that extend beyond any one sector of the Fergana Valley?

**Shozimov:** As I said, in a historical perspective, many people came from Karateghin and the south to the Fergana Valley. And it is only one case, but it showed that they identify themselves in a completely different way. But that is very interesting: they identify themselves with Shashmakom (traditional classical music), not with Kokand (or Fergana school of music) but with Bukhara (Bukharian school of Shashmakom). You see, it is a different shape. It is not fixed. It is not connected directly with the Fergana Valley as Kokand is because when the Karategins came to this place, they also came with new ideas and new imagination.

### **Migrant Remittances**

**Questioner:** Would you speak just a little bit about the impact of migrant labor in other parts of the former Soviet Union, particularly in Russia, and financial remittances? Is this having a particular impact in one or another parts of this Fergana region? And is it having an impact beyond economics? Is it having any kind

of a social impact on family structure, local inter-ethnic relations, that kind of thing?

**Shozimov:** Yes. In the context of the Fergana Valley, we can see a very strong influence of money that has come from the outside -- from laborers who work in Russia. But if you compare the Kyrgyzstan part of the valley with the Uzbekistan and Tajikistan parts, we will see some differences because Uzbekistan started recently, laborers started to move into Russia after the Andijan events when they started to collaborate more with Russia and they opened the door.

But in this case, the Tajikistan part of the Fergana Valley now has more advantages if you compare it to Uzbekistan. Labor from the Uzbekistan parts of Fergana, Kokand, they work at Isfara because Tajik laborers don't want to work for the price that many labors from Kokand are willing to work for. This is amazing, yes, but this is the case, they are from Kokand. And most of these people, they work in the Fergana part of Tajikistan.

And one of the reasons that Isfara is a very key part of Tajikistan, of the Fergana Valley, is because it is a mediator. Even in the Soviet period, Isfara played a very major, a very key role in the economic life of the region. They have networks, economic networks in the Russian Federation for selling fruit and so on. And this money, when it came to Isfara, of course, it created a completely different situation. It grew a middle class that is connected to and is supporting the goals of this people. But I would like to stress that these people have very strong connections with the Islamic Renaissance Party, very strong connections.

**Questioner:** We just did a cross-border trade study covering these three countries. I also went all the way to the border in Isfara and what struck me the most actually is that there are no young people in Isfara. In Isfara, there are roughly 50,000 people, of which 90 percent pretty much are women, children and elders. So that was really my point. And you will not really see this kind of influence of the Islamic Renaissance Party elsewhere in Tajikistan. I speak only for Tajikistan as I do not know the situation in the other "stans," but it is really peculiar to Isfara. So I was just wondering if you looked at that aspect. And you know, the middle class there might be very strong, can have their own connections and their own businesses, but if you look at the overall situation in the region, one can thus cast a fair share of doubt whether that is the case. So it is just a comment or maybe just an observation.

### **Creating Neutral Institutions**

I had one question related to creating neutral institutions, as you mentioned in your presentation at the end of your speech, as a way out. I mean, historically, for the last at least ten years, all the governments have tried some sort of mediation mechanism, creating some committees, intra-region, extra-region, but nothing really worked. So how do you really create these neutral committees in a region where there is no neutral opinion and no neutral situation that can be found, because there are so many different viewpoints involved? Thank you.

**Shozimov:** Before the creation of these institutions it is very important to build trust between people. It is the first step, to try to speak about things more openly. I talked about one case in my presentation: chess. It was amazing, in one house, suddenly there

are a lot of people, two from Kyrgyzstan, from Batken, they knew each other very well. They came together. They organized some competitions between Tajik chess players and Kyrgyz. That is something with some formal institutions and it builds the case for trust, more trust than on an official level. And I think maybe we should think about things like that for building trust along the borders, for example, between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. And after that you identify the issues and focus on other things. It is a crucial point.

Of course, a lot of questions are connected to religious interpretations and cultural identity. You know that there is also the linguistic distinction between Persian Tajik and Turkic because the Tajik part is more connected with the Indo-Iranian group of languages, and Uzbek and Kyrgyz are connected with Turkish. But the common language for both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks that they all know is the Uzbek (Turkic) language. Even Tajiks in the Fergana Valley speak both the Tajik and Uzbek languages because the common base for them in that region is the social and cultural group 'Sart' (trader) who traditionally speak both languages.

This is the first of my suggestions. It is to create some informal institutions that will create some bases for trust and so on.

### **Contemporary Islamic Identity**

**Questioner:** My question has to do particularly with Tajikistan. A moment ago we were discussing the historical importance of the Emirate of Bukhara. But I wonder if you would compare briefly the importance for contemporary Islamic identity the sort of historical moments like the Emirate versus what you just referenced, the pan-Persian, mutually

intelligible languages, and influences that flow between the region and makes Central Asia part of the broader Middle East?

**Shozimov:** This is only a case; it is not a rule. I gave this as example, regional imaginations, as a case to show that in this region we will see a lot of construction, a lot of perceptions about regional cooperation. And less about national forms of identity, where the focus is on the border.

What about the Islamic Renaissance Party and their agenda? I told you that the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan is more focused in the area of Tajikistan. They do not think about Bukhara, Samarkand. They just focus within this space. And they have some terms, 'Tojikiat' (Tajiks) and 'Islomiat' (Islamic). It means Tajiks and Islam should be connected via interrelations between the national project and the religious project. So it is like a Samani project and an Islamic project, it looks to Ismail Samani, but only in the sense of culture and an Islamic form of identity. When they try to focus on their own interest in this space, this contemporary space, they focus more on the territory of Tajikistan. They do not say otherwise. In this case they are more moderate and I do not see an inclination toward regional perceptions and the potential of Bukhara and Samarkand, no. It was the case in 1991, 1992. This tendency was related to the cultural elite in Tajikistan in 1991-1992 who tried to do that. But it came to a civil war in Tajikistan.

### **NGOs**

**Questioner:** I want to ask a question that has been asked in different ways over the past ten or fifteen minutes, and to use the word "non-governmental organizations,"

recognizing that there are serious constraints, certainly in Uzbekistan and other places. But for example, in Kyrgyzstan, there is a fair bit of interest in conservation, on preserving the mountain heritage and the plants and the birds. I have talked to a man who heads an NGO who actually is an ornithologist by training. Issues of women's development, of child welfare, Kyrgyzstan is a very poor country; that has been a real issue. Are there any possibilities of linkages around these issues that transcend the borders and build this trust and this sharing? Can you give us some examples?

**Shozimov:** Examples of trust between...?

**Questioner:** Of organizations that are looking at and working on issues that cut across all these countries, such as child welfare, women's development, women's –

**Starr:** If I may, I think the distinction has to be drawn here between those that are externally funded and to that extent artificial, and those that are genuinely local. There are plenty of the latter even though the former had a tough time and for partly understandable reasons.

**Shozimov:** I know of an organization that works on gender issues. Most of the data are very abstract and they politicize a lot of questions. And in some cases, for example, in Khujand, when I met with some representatives of international organizations who study this issue, every time when I ask them about their results, they say that it is in the process of working. They're always in the process.

And it is interesting that most of the international organizations are very careful about this issue and it is very difficult to find direct connections like you said, some

data, some statistics about women's life in mountainous regions. You could get more information from some specialists from Kyrgyzstan, who have done very good research on the issues that you mentioned, especially about the cultural resources in the mountainous places of Kyrgyzstan. One of them works with me as a project contributor from Kyrgyzstan's part of the Fergana Valley.

**Starr:** One last question. Yes, sir?

### **Migrants in Russia**

**Questioner:** Following a little bit on migrant labor, is there any common experience of people going to Russia, people from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan working together in Russia and building connections there? And kind of related to that, the status of the Russian language in the region, is it still a viable language?

**Shozimov:** Unfortunately, in Russia, most of the population there, the labor, they work very closely on not just the ethnic but on the tribal and regional levels. They work together but they do not communicate with each other. It is very strange. Even in a megalopolis like Moscow, they work separately. And we can even see some separation between Tajiks. Some Badahshani (a Tajik regional group from Pamir) work together as one group, the Kolobi (a Tajik regional group from Kulob) in another group and this is very strange, but it is not the case that they mix.

**Starr:** I did hear in Kazakhstan of the sort of thing you are talking about. I think it is probably a little easier there.

Well, we have to unfortunately break this off. I would like to just offer one final

comment and that is that there has been a tendency, I think, to catastrophize about the Fergana Valley and to see it only in terms as a collection of insoluble problems and endless chaos and confusion. I do not think that is the whole story. And one of the things that I think has come out very clearly and from the preliminary reports that are coming in from the various contributing authors is that there are very interesting moderating elements. One is the labor, migrating labor. That really is a kind of safety valve and it has been touched upon here and it is worth emphasizing.

The second is you have good soil. This is great agriculture. I mean, this is spectacular agricultural land if it is irrigated. And even if you do not have cash to go buy lots of things, you can eat. And, you know, nature is very, very nice to these people. And it certainly is a moderating force.

The third I would mention is implicit in what you have said, and that is, these folks know one another. They have lived with each other for hundreds and thousands of years. I mean, whether you are talking about nomads and settlers, that is 3,000 years of history. Whether you are talking of the settled people or whether you are talking about Tajiks and Uzbeks, or Persians and Turkic people all the way back to the Kushan Empire. This has been going on. So they really do know one another. And this is not a we/they thing because it is also within any given family. In any of the three zones, you will find all these elements mixed up in exceedingly complex ways. So this is a moderating element.

However, whatever plans some well-wishing do-gooders might bring in from the outside, they know how to deal with each other a hell of a lot better than we do. And that has been a moderating force at the end

of the day. I think given the peculiar circumstances in which they have lived for fifteen years, they have maybe done better than we credit them.

We will see, and you all will get a chance to read the book that comes from all this. It really will be available and I think it will be very, very interesting. And I want to thank once again our good friends at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA for their interest in this rather arcane and very difficult topic to put together and I thank very much one of the co-inventors of this entire project, Pulat Shozimov, for being here today and wish him and his future work well.