

# The Politics of Civil Society, *Mahalla* and NGOs: Uzbekistan

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## Introduction

Since 1991, Uzbekistan has drawn considerable international attention, primarily as the most populous country in post-Soviet Central Asia (est. 25,600,000), and for its strategic position at the heart of the Eurasian continent. Thirteen years of independence have nurtured in this country a unique hybrid of national and Muslim symbolism, rule by decree, and a statist approach to socio-economic development. In an unusual twist, this hybrid is now endorsed by the government, which promotes a new local concept of civil society (*fuqarolik jamiyati*).

Civil society, as a highly abstract and controversial concept, has been invoked by various people to denote vastly different conceptions. In present day Uzbekistan, civil society is *not* about the existence of competing and counterbalancing organs<sup>1</sup> or freedom of speech. Uzbekistan is neither an urban society of free citizens (*societas civilis*), nor a bourgeois society formed by a particular modern historical experience (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*).<sup>2</sup> What is being discussed instead in this country is civil

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<sup>1</sup> Many investigators have discussed the absence of such organs in Uzbekistan. According to an article in *Uzbekistan Towards Civil Society* (published by the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan), the country is underdeveloped in terms of a multi-party system, modern organs of self-government of citizens, media as a '4th power', and a mechanism for studying public opinion. It has yet to stop giving priority to clan and regional interests, realise fundamental change in judiciary system, and form economic foundations for civil society. What is more, the people's enthusiasm for democracy is lacking. See: F. Tolipov, 'Mezhdunarodnaia aktualizatsiia demokratii i ee kontseptualizatsiia v natsional'noi ideologii Uzbekistana', in Ravshan Alimov (ed.), *O'zbekiston: fuqarolik jamiyati sari* (Toshkent, 2004), pp. 106–124. For a similar view, but of a leader of an independent Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, see: Abdumanob Polat, 'Can Uzbekistan Build Democracy and Civil Society?', in M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel C. Waugh (eds.), *Civil Society in Central Asia* (Seattle, 1999), pp. 135–157.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Uzbekistan is an overwhelmingly rural society (urban population of 36.8 per cent).

society associated with democracy *to be constructed* by the newly independent state.

The concept of civil society and the issue of democratisation are therefore closely linked in Uzbekistan. Past studies in civil society toward the analysis of democratisation might be understood as including three different approaches to the issue.

1. *Structural approach*. This is an approach in which the structural relationship of state and society is especially important, as are civil society organisations that are situated as intermediary between them, which include, but are not limited to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).<sup>3</sup> The existence of those organisations not only *autonomous from* but also *contesting against* the state is taken for granted before democratisation. Whereas such an approach is often taken in studies of comparative government, their scope seldom extends beyond trivialised arguments on the quantitative spread of NGOs, or some other ‘experts’ numeric evaluation of the state’s legal and regulatory framework for non-profit organisations.<sup>4</sup>
2. *Dynamic analysis approach*. Some research projects have addressed civil society organisations’ emergence and their behavior in the context of *actually occurred* transition from authoritarian rule. Claims

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Percentages of the urban populations in Central Asian countries are all under 50 per cent, with the exception of Kazakhstan (55 per cent) (See End Chart 1 of this paper). Its economy is heavily reliant on the agricultural sector (around 20 per cent of GDP, 60 per cent of foreign exchange receipts and 40 per cent of employment) and cotton as the leading export commodity.

<sup>3</sup> The term non-governmental organisation (NGO) was coined by the United Nations to refer to organisations that function in at least three different countries. Recently, the word is used for international and national civic philanthropy associations and development organisations that are typically distinct from interest groups or self-help organisations that work for the benefit of their members. Consequently, NGOs are increasingly viewed as quintessential institutions of democracy, and the word is often used synonymously with civil society, albeit problematically. Recent emergence of NGOs in development has given rise to bureaucracies carrying out grant-based projects on the basis of contracts with a government donor agency or foundation. Their activities are potentially subject to goals and values of those in control of budgets, which might be seen as a retirement from a casual image of organisations of citizens taking voluntary action.

<sup>4</sup> Among others taking this approach, see: Andrew T. Green, ‘Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 54:3 (2002), pp. 455–471.

that civil society has guided the transition to democracy are abundant in popular writings on democratic transition of Eastern Europe or Indonesia. However, influential ‘transitologists’ have argued that transition occurs *once something happens* among the ruling elite of an authoritarian regime, taking a dim view of the role of civil society in democratisation.<sup>5</sup> Democratic ‘consolidologists’ (although admitting the importance of civil society in their own respect) have in turn noted that ‘a full democratic transition, and especially democratic consolidation, must involve political society’.<sup>6</sup> Here, the question is put forward as to whether a democracy gives birth to a civil society, or civil society (*organisations*) engenders democratisation of a regime.

3. *Concept analysis approach.* Research based on this approach encompasses the conception of civil society by local administrators, intellectuals, and the people governed. Simultaneously, such an approach might take into account local history, political culture, and power relations, along with external influence, all of which form and are formed by the politics of civil society in the new context of international relations.

Previous studies of Central Asia apparently lack the use of this third approach: critical analyses of how local people understand and articulate the concept of civil society.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, most studies published to date are those by foreign scholars who idealise existing societies of modern

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<sup>5</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell, C. Philippe Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, 4 vols. (Baltimore, 1986). See especially: Guillermo O’Donnell and C. Philippe Schmitter, ‘Opening (and Undermining) Authoritarian Regimes’, in O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, pp. 15–36.

<sup>6</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, 1996), p. 8. One critic has stated that ‘[t]here is a pervasive sense that civil society both cannot and should not reach beyond its role as a support structure for actually existing democracy at the state level’. See: Gideon Baker, ‘The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society’, in Peter Burnell and Peter Calvert (eds.), *Civil Society in Democratization* (London, 2004), pp. 43–71, citation from p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> An exception is: John R. Pottenger, ‘Civil Society, Religious Freedom, and Islam Karimov: Uzbekistan’s Struggle for a Decent Society’, *Central Asian Survey* 23:1 (2004), pp. 55–77. However, although Pottenger examines Karimov’s arguments on civil society, his own consideration specifically addresses whether Uzbekistan fits into John Rawls’ concept of a ‘just society’ or not.

Western Europe and the US as models of civil society and analyze the ‘impediments’ to creating similar societies in Central Asia.<sup>8</sup> However, today’s civil society might be too important to be dismissed as an exclusively ‘Western’ agenda. The fact that Central Asians and Uzbekistanis themselves are claiming their *own* civil society *as a target* should be taken seriously. I assert that it is necessary to understand how the local conception of civil society is formed in relation with history, culture and power relations of the studied country. In other words, it is necessary to research the concept of civil society ‘from within’.

Furthermore, researchers of the political analysis field have assigned a narrowly defined political space *a priori* by specifically examining only state institutions and usually on the highest legislative organ, which might exist and serve to camouflage important power relations embedded in practices and mentalities which are beneath the formal upper state apparatus. Focusing solely on the constitutional order and the state institutions, and as some choose to do, putting Uzbekistan under the broad category of superpresidentialism not only masks important differences among various types of regimes, but obscures the crucial authoritarian nature of the regime.

In this paper, I will not attempt to instrumentalise the controversial concept of civil society and make it applicable for a study of the few associations that contest against the state in Uzbekistan, or for analysis of a transition from authoritarian rule that has yet to occur in this country. I will instead concentrate on the local conception of civil society as a mirror that offers a reflection of the political environment of Uzbekistan.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See for example: Touraj Atabaki, ‘The Impediments to the Development of Civil Societies in Central Asia’, in Touraj Atabaki and John O’Kane (eds.), *Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London, 1998), pp. 35–43. See also: Sergei Gretskey, ‘In Search of Civil Society in Central Asia’, in Sally N. Cummings (ed.), *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia* (London, 2003), pp. 84–95.

<sup>9</sup> In other words, the aim of this paper is not to compare my version of civil society with various existing models of civil society or the actual society of Uzbekistan in order to present mine as an ideal recipe for sublation of power. I simply propose a broad working definition of civil society following that of Walzer, who sees civil society as ‘the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology—that fills this space’. See: Michael Walzer, ‘The Concept of Civil Society’, in Walzer (ed.), *Towards a Global Civil Society* (Providence, 1995), pp. 7–27, citation from p. 7.

I will start with an explanation of how civil society came to be a target of the authoritarian regime of Uzbekistan (Part 1). What is crucial to civil society put forward by the administrators in this country is the legacy of power relations operating at the lower level of society. Therefore, I will shed light on the legacy of the associational life of citizens typical to Uzbekistan, specifically addressing the neo-traditional community (the *mahalla*) (Part 2). Next, an explanation that past external attempts to nurture civil society through the intermediary of NGOs in Uzbekistan have been largely unsuccessful will illustrate that today's arguments on civil society in Uzbekistan have shifted attention to intermediary government organised non-governmental structures, primarily *mahallas* (Part 3). Part 4 will present the argument that the conception of civil society is increasingly associated with discourse on 'Eastern democracy' because organisations supported by the state and (ideally) work *under* the state are preferred in Uzbekistan. The final part of this paper presents the conclusions of this study.

## Civil Society as a Target of an Authoritarian Regime

Today, like the word 'democracy', the reach of 'civil society' knows no limit. It has often been said with a certain irony that 'we are all democrats' because any regime might claim legitimacy by asserting internally and externally that they are 'democratic'. Similarly, we might now say that any given administrator could be an active promoter of a version of 'civil society'. For, in post-Soviet Central Asia, a vocal advocate for a 'step-by-step, shortest-route-possible transition to democracy'<sup>10</sup> and 'formation of an open civil society and civil self-government'<sup>11</sup> is, oddly enough, the self-acknowledged authoritarian President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I.A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: Ugrozy bezopasnosti, usloviia i garantii progressa* (Moscow, 1997), p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> Karimov has certainly not deviated from his 'transitory rhetoric' of authoritarian methods. 'I acknowledge that there are signs of authoritarianism in my actions. However, [...] at one period of history, at the time of appearance of a statehood, particularly in the time of transition from one system to another, there is a need for a strong executive administration. Such administration is necessary to avoid bloodshed and conflict, and to maintain regional

Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state.<sup>13</sup> Its regime type is *non-competitively* authoritarian, in contrast to *competitive* authoritarian regimes found more commonly in the post-Soviet space (the Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia in the 1990s).<sup>14</sup> Whereas in competitive authoritarian regimes elections are bitterly fought with major opposition parties and candidates that regularly participate in politics, competition with challenging political forces is eliminated and ‘façade’ electoral institutions serve mainly to legitimise the leadership in *non-competitive* regimes. In such regimes, the leaders claim to distribute material values and integrate the population, while concealing conflicts of distribution, minorities and citizens vis-à-vis administrators. In the case of Uzbekistan, the fact that its neighbors Tajikistan and Afghanistan were mired in civil war reinforced claims that states with political stability were necessary for development of society.<sup>15</sup> In the early years of independence, Uzbekistani administrators

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interethnic and civic harmony [...]. If you like, this is necessary for the movement towards democracy’. See: N. Mishin, *Islom Karimov: O‘zbekiston Respublikasining birinchi Prezidenti* (Toshkent, 1997), pp. 52–53. Similarly, after winning a high vote of 91.78 per cent for a constitutional amendment extending the Presidential term (from 5 to 7 years) in 2002, he claimed that ‘at a certain stage of historic change, you need a strong will and a certain figure [...] and you have to use some authoritarian methods at times’. <<http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2002/01/280102.asp>>, accessed 26 April 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Linz, from his study of Francoism, defined authoritarianism as ‘political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilisation, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones’. See: Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, 2000), p. 159. However, his classic definition may have a disadvantage for application to several post-Soviet regimes in which the administrators’ inclination toward ideology and demand for voluntary subjection of citizens remain considerably strong. I would like to stress that authoritarianism is, above all, an advocacy for an order based on an established authority, rather than on explicit and unforced consent of citizens. Unlike in democracies, authority is more of a precondition than an outcome of consent in authoritarian regimes. In such regimes, administrators direct and regulate the society by undermining the rights of citizens to resist or challenge the established authority. Authoritarianism should not be defined merely as the absence of totalitarian or democratic features.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, ‘The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism’, *Journal of Democracy* 13:2 (2002), pp. 51–65, esp. p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Such developmentalist views have been supported by Western academic circles in the past. Emphasising the importance of stability in development, some observers have suggested that strong (and possibly authoritarian) states are necessary to control social pressures and avoid excessive participation leading to crises of governability. See for example: Samuel P.

succeeded without much difficulty in undermining all independent political initiatives, ranging from civic-nationalist movements (Birlik and Erk) to independent Islamist movements (Islamic Renaissance Party and Adolat) that had emerged at the time of confusion and instability during the fall of the Soviet Union. As a result, Uzbekistan is arguably the quietest of the post-communist countries,<sup>16</sup> along with Turkmenistan and Belarus, distinct from Georgia and the Ukraine before their ‘colored revolutions’.

Since that time, the regime in Uzbekistan has taken on a somewhat developmentalistic appearance. However, it would be incorrect to say that it has succeeded in implementing integrated industrial policies. In contrast to its neighbor Kazakhstan, where the presiding oligarchs control vast oil and gas resources, Uzbekistan lacks the natural resources that allow it to act aggressively towards economic development. A laudable achievement of Karimov’s regime is the establishment of internal supply structure of energy resources, which are sufficient for long term self-sufficiency, but not for export-oriented industrialisation. More seriously, despite the fact that Uzbekistan has valuable human resources and a large professional bureaucracy, the actions taken by the government have been rather incoherent, partly reflecting the fact that Uzbekistan has yet to establish clear public decision-making procedures. Nevertheless, the very *imagery* of Uzbekistan as a developing country implementing step-by-step reforms<sup>17</sup>

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Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968). However, recent developments in democratisation of Asia undermine such claims by showing that democratic transition took place irrespective of regime type and performance in economic growth or modernisation. IWASAKI Ikuo, *Ajia Seiji o Miru Me: Kaihatsu Dokusai kara Shimin Shakai e* [A View towards Asian Politics: From Development Dictatorships to Civil Societies] (Tokyo, 2001), pp. 181–182. See also: TAKEDA Yasuhiro, *Minshuka no Hikaku Seiji: Higashi Ajia Shokoku no Taisei Hendo Katei* [Comperative Politics of Democratisation: Regime Transition in East Asia] (Kyoto, 2001), pp. 41–56, 243–246.

<sup>16</sup> No opposition parties or movements are registered in Uzbekistan. Executives and legislatures are chosen through elections in which oppositions do not participate. Neither the elected legislature nor the judiciary possess the competence to counter the executive: they are subject to the administration. Political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press and association, and freedom to criticise the government are badly protected. Few privately-owned media exist, and opposition web-sites are blocked from view within the country.

<sup>17</sup> Signboards disseminating the view that ‘Uzbekistan is a state with a great future (*O‘zbekiston—kelajagi buyuk davlat*)’ are abundant in schools, street corners, and government offices to give a sense of reality. Karimov has been portrayed as the leading ideologist, the philosopher-President of a developing country in reforms. Indeed, he is called

has profited the administrators by protecting to hold on to their office and maintain tight control over the populace.

Authoritarian regimes, of the *non-competitive* type in particular, should not be seen as incomplete forms of democracy, or as default positions for democracy. They are neither defunct nor transitory regimes: they enjoy a near monopoly of state resources, including the well-founded security forces of the state. However, if the relationship between political stability and development becomes empirically questionable to the population, then the ‘transitory rhetoric’ of justification can be shaken. In the case of Uzbekistan, the disparity between rival countries has become apparent after a decade, making it all the more difficult for administrators to convince the population of successful national development.<sup>18</sup> Although Uzbekistan exhibits higher levels of health and education than other countries with similar macroeconomic indices, worsening living standards are strongly felt among the population.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the administrators’ self-fulfilling prophecy of ‘Islamic extremism’ served to radicalise small groups of Islamist movements, and to help them re-emerge out of oppression in the latter half of the 1990s. They gained some degree of sympathy and support from the people, among them the young populations of the cities and densely populated Farg’ona (Ferghana) Valley,<sup>20</sup> which had suffered from unemployment and deteriorating living conditions.<sup>21</sup> Rumors of impending incursions of the

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the ‘*bosh islohotchi* (head reformer)’ and the ‘*yo’lboshimiz* (our leader of the path)’, and his five ‘well-known’ principles of reform (*bash ‘mashxur’ tamoyillar*) are recited by school children and intellectuals alike. The five principles are as follows: 1) economy above politics; 2) the state as the main reformer; 3) supremacy of law; 4) strong social policy; 5) step by step, continuous, and stable reform. See: I.A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan po puti uglublenniiia ekonomicheskikh reform* (Tashkent, 1995), pp. 10–11.

<sup>18</sup> Recent indicators show interesting differences among the Central Asian states. Particularly, the disparities of gross domestic product per capita and gross national income per capita of Kazakhstan and that of Uzbekistan have become apparent in recent years (see End Chart 1 of this paper).

<sup>19</sup> Visiting Tashkent in autumn 2004, I noticed people exchanging their words of envy of better living standards in neighboring Kazakhstan, something which was quite unheard of during my past stays in Uzbekistan.

<sup>20</sup> Around 35 per cent of Uzbekistan’s population is under 15 years, and roughly 60 per cent of the population is under 25. Farg’ona valley is home to 250 inhabitants per square kilometer, compared with the average of 14 inhabitants per square kilometer in Central Asia.

<sup>21</sup> Because of a shortage of reliable data, it has been difficult to measure people’s opinions accurately. However, Dadabaev, citing findings of an Asia Barometer survey conducted in



militant Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into Uzbekistan were widespread until September 2001 (although they concluded with the US military alliance with Uzbekistan in that fall). Because Uzbekistan cannot argue from the position of established success in development, nor continue to boast its ‘stability’ in transition, administrators faced growing discontent of the population and were compelled to reconsider their prior approach of justification.

Consequently, to substitute the *imagery* of development, and to counter both emergent radical Islamist organisations and international criticism of Uzbekistan’s human rights performance, transition to democracy and formation of civil society are now proclaimed *as targets* (however distant and slow the pace). Uzbekistani administrators are ever cautious not to denounce democracy *per se*: instead they criticise its radical form, which is alien to the land and its traditions. The conventional concept of civil society that requires an administrative state that institutionalises the normative prerequisites and guarantees public order has therefore been beneficial. President Karimov has particularly emphasised that under rule of law, *civil obedience* goes together with freedom in civil society.

For us, a civil society is a social space over which the law rules, and which not only opposes but also contributes to the self-development of a person, to the realisation of his interests, and to the maximum functioning of his rights and freedoms. But the infringement of other people’s rights and freedoms shall not be permitted. That is to say, legal freedom and legal obedience act together, complementing and claiming each other. In other words, the laws of the state must not harm the rights of Man and of the citizen, but the laws must be observed by all unconditionally.<sup>22</sup>

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seven cities of Uzbekistan in 2003 (800 respondents of different ethnic backgrounds), presents a valuable overview of people’s alarming mistrust of socio-economic policies of the central government (46.5 per cent partly distrust it and 32.8 per cent completely distrust it) in unemployment reduction measures (28.6 per cent and 66.2 per cent respectively), in public services improvement programs (44.1 per cent and 32.7 per cent), and in measures to fight corruption among government officials (37.7 per cent and 36.5 per cent). See: Timur Dadabaev, ‘Post-Soviet Realities of Society in Uzbekistan’, *Central Asian Survey* 23:2 (2004), pp. 141–166, esp. p. 162.

<sup>22</sup> Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka*, p. 166.

## The *Mahalla* and the Legacy of the Uzbekistani Citizen<sup>23</sup>

Amid calls for a ‘construction’ of the basis of civil society, considerable realignment of local administration has been introduced in Uzbekistan after independence. A policy of fusing the neo-traditional community (the *mahalla*) with the new ‘organs of self-government of citizens’ (residential organisations below the official district under the jurisdiction of local state administration bodies) has been employed. Indeed, a major administrative reform in post-Soviet Uzbekistan has been the promotion of the new *mahallas* into a ‘firm foundation of civil society’<sup>24</sup> and furthermore, a ‘national school of Eastern democracy’.<sup>25</sup> President Karimov has stressed that the *mahalla* is an indigenous form of self-government that might constitute a part of the foundation of civil society.

[...] [F]or our society to be developed and to be raised to a higher stage, the state’s varieties of duties, particularly its role and importance in the control duty, shall be reduced, and social and non-governmental organisations, citizens’ groups and offices should take its place. [...] We have such a rare, inimitable social office of administration that we can never compare it with anything else. It is the *mahalla* system, developed over hundreds of years’ time and made wholly anew in the period of independence, perfected for present requirements.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The content of this section is extracted from previous studies by the author. For the background of *mahalla* as institution, see: SUDA Masaru, ‘Uzbekisutan no Komyuniti ni okeru Jumin Soshiki no Keisei’ [The Formation of Residential Organisations in the Communities of Uzbekistan], *Yurashia no Heiwa to Funso: Akino Yutaka Sho Chosa Hokokushu* 4 (Tokyo, 2004), pp. 73–102. For power relations developed through the intermediary of the Soviet and post-Soviet *mahalla* institution, see: SUDA Masaru, “‘Shimin’ Tachi no Kanri to Jihatsuteki Fukuju: Uzbekisutan no Maharra’ [The Control and Voluntary Subjection of ‘Citizens’: Uzbekistan’s *Mahalla*], *Kokusai Seiji* 138 (2004), pp. 43–71. They are based on field research conducted by the author in 2000–2002, and in 2003 with kind assistance from the Akino Yutaka Foundation. The latter article contains more extensive historical analyses.

<sup>24</sup> I.A. Karimov, ‘Doklad na pervoi sessii Oliy Mazhlisa Respubliki Uzbekistan vtorigo sozyva’, in Karimov, *Nasha vysshaya tsel’—nezavisimost’ i protsvetanie rodiny, svoboda i blagopoluchie naroda* 8 (Tashkent, 2000), p. 325.

<sup>25</sup> I.A. Karimov, ‘Ideologiya natsional’noi nezavisimosti—ubezhdenie naroda i vera v velikoe budushchee’, *ibid.* p. 490.

<sup>26</sup> Islom Karimov, ‘Qonunga hurmat, qonunga itoat hayotimiz mezonini bo‘lsin. O‘zbekiston Konstitutsiyasining 9 yiliga bag‘ishlangan tantanali marosimida so‘zlangan nutuq’, in Karimov, *Xavfsizlik va tinchlik uchun kurashmoq kerak* 10 (Toshkent, 2002), pp. 157–158.

Notwithstanding the aspersions of human rights organisations and international press to imply that Uzbekistan is a vulgar state ruled by a(n) ('oriental') despot, a closer look shows that the country has a rich experience of associational life of citizens. Active engagement of citizens through groups that fall into the official category of '*social organisations*' as distinct from party or state organisations was encouraged under the Soviet regime.<sup>27</sup> One type of social organisation that was distinctive of Soviet Uzbekistan was the *mahalla* committee because the *mahalla* in itself was an indigenous, neo-traditional type of community, and participation through it was inclusive.

Historically, the *mahalla* had been important for solving various issues related to daily life as traditional street-level units of self rule in cities and large villages of sedentary Central Asia. In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, one community would have had 20–100 families. An *oqsoqol* (or *aksakal*. Elder, literally *whitebeard*) would be chosen by a gathering of the community. Together with his assistant female leader, and male and female handypersons, *oqsoqols* would organise and oversee communal activities, prepare for circumcision, wedding or funeral parties, care for orphans and widows, mediate internal conflicts, and arbitrate succession of property.

The work of *oqsoqol* was considered one of dutiful service (*xizmat*). An *oqsoqol* could be seen as a representative of a community defending the interests of *mahalla* residents by forestalling state interference.<sup>28</sup> In some cases, *oqsoqols* were dismissed as a result of community dissatisfaction.

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<sup>27</sup> According to a Soviet scholar, over 50 types of non-state (and usually non-Party) social organisations existed in Uzbekistan. They were classifiable into two groups: those organised according to industrial principles (comrades' courts and people's militia units in enterprises, pensioners' Soviets, library Soviets, clubs and other cultural enlightenment institutions), and others by territorial principles (street, apartment or *mahalla* committees, comrades' court, people's militia courts and parents' committees under such committees, etc.). See: K. Kamilov, *Uchastie narodnykh mass v upravlenii Sovetskimi gosudarstvom* (2nd edn., Tashkent, 1965), p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> To prevent fellow inhabitants from being summoned and judged by the authority, *oqsoqols* might have given bail. See: O.A. Sukhareva, *Kvartal'naia obshchina pozднефеодального города Бухары (в связи с историей кварталов)* (Moscow: 1976), p. 36. For a critical re-examination of communities (*guzars*) in Buxoro, see: KOMATSU Hisao, 'Buhara no Maharra ni kansuru Noto: O.A. Suharewa no Firudowaku kara' [Notes on the *Mahallas* of Bukhara: Based on the Ethnological Material Collected by O.A. Sukhareva], *Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyu* 16 (1978), pp. 178–215.

The development of administrative techniques and of a regular army, degree of feudal fissions, and activities of nomads considerably limited the control of the state and its reach in comparison with those of the modern nation-state. For rulers of pre-modern states, maintenance of traditional social order was most important for their rule. In very broad terms, local communities such as *mahallas* enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy.

Tsarist administrators who advanced to this land in the latter half of the 19th century put their efforts into gathering information on the life and tradition of the ‘natives’ and attempted to apply the obtained knowledge to govern them.<sup>29</sup> During this period, some colonial administrators were inclined to adopt a modern project of implanting *grazhdanstvennost’* (civil spirit) to the multi-ethnic subjects of Turkestan, thereby transforming the ‘natives’ into new citizens of an integrated empire.<sup>30</sup> Yet, hindsight reveals that the new rulers did not necessarily actively intervene in the daily affairs of the local population unless it was regarded as directly important to the Empire’s interests. In Turkestan, Russian or European ‘new cities’ were generally built apart from ‘Asian cities’, and the rulers and the ruled lived in quite separate spaces. Symbolised by such separation, Russian rule did not fully penetrate to the micro-level of local traditional life.

Full-fledged interests in controlling the daily life and behavior of the local population emerged after 1917. In July 1922, a circular ordering the establishment of *mahalla* commissions (to enhance tax collection) was

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, Colonel Geins, who participated in drawing up the projected Syrdarya statute investigated how Toshkent was ruled by the Qo‘qon Khanate before the Russian occupation. The city was divided into four districts and then into *mahallas*. Each *oqsoqol* (also called *mingboshi*, head of 1000 households) was a leader of one district. The *mahalla* leaders of several tens to hundreds of families were called *yuzboshis*. See: A.K. Geins, ‘Upravlenie Tashkentom pri kokandskom vladychestve kak kharakteristika administratsii sredneaziatskikh gorodov’, in Geins, *Sobranie literaturnykh trudov A.K. Geinsa 2* (Saint Petersburg, 1898), pp. 452–458. The projected statute designated that among sedentary populations, 10–50 families would participate in a gathering to elect *oqsoqols* of a village and city quarters. In Toshkent, gatherings of *ellikboshi* (head of 50 households) were held to elect *oqsoqols* (*mingboshis*) of the four *dahas* (districts). The Statute on the Administration of the Turkestan Region in 1886 required that the Russian military governor divide cities into quarters and have *oqsoqols* elected from household representatives, and villages elect *oqsoqols* through gathering of *ellikboshis*. In the case of one village not far away from Toshkent, an *ellikboshi* was a head of a village quarter. See: M.A. Abduraimov, ‘Perezhitki sel’skoi obshchiny v uzbekskom kishlake Khumsan (XIX – nachalo XX v.)’, *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 4 (1959), p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London, 2003).

issued by the People's Commissariat of the Interior of the Autonomous Republic of Turkestan.<sup>31</sup> Similar commissions were organised elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> In May 1926, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan recognised the importance of *mahalla* committees in attracting the residents of the old cities to the activities of Party and Soviet organs, while pointing out that instruction, supervision and records of activity were utterly lacking.<sup>33</sup>

To fully institutionalise and standardise the *mahallas*, the first official regulation of the *mahalla* (quarter) committees of the cities of Uzbek SSR appeared in 1932, which defined them as 'supplementary *social organisations* under the district or city Soviets'. The Chairman, Vice-chairman, and Secretary (3–5 persons) of the *mahalla* committee were to be elected from a general assembly of citizens under the guidance of the local Soviet.<sup>34</sup> Modern administrative intervention into myriad spheres of daily life was carried out through the *mahalla*, which were often regarded as traditional. Instead of traditional power, which intervened *after* people deviated from norms, modern *positive* power introduced in the Soviet period aimed at correcting the population *before* deviation occurred.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Tsirkuliarno vsem oblispolkomam i oblevkomam. 22 July 1922. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistan (hereafter: TsGA RUz), f. R-39 [Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del TASSR], op. 2, d. 86, ll. 82–82 ob. In August 1922, *mahalla* leaders of Toshkent were convened to the Executive Committee of the Old City to determine temporary tax collectors. See: *Turkestanskaia pravda*, 16 August 1922, p. 5. In addition, a central bureau controlling the *mahallas* was set up in the Executive Committee of the Old City. See: *Turkestanskaia Pravda*, 25 August 1922, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> In one community in Buxoro (Bukhara), 100 male and female representatives of 60 families attended a gathering of a *guzar* commission held at a small court of a remodeled neighborhood mosque and decided on the usage of the clubhouse, working conditions of a street-sprinkler man, collective subscription for a Government Industrial Loan, and who to be the club manager. For a description of the meeting by an American pro-Soviet journalist, see: Anna Louise Strong, *Red Star in Samarkand* (New York, 1929), pp. 166–171.

<sup>33</sup> Rezoliutsiia plenuma o sostoianii raboty v starykh gorodakh i blizhaishikh zadachakh. Samarkand, 14–19 May 1926. See: *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Uzbekistana v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s"ezdov i plenumov TsK 1 (1925–1937)* (Tashkent, 1987), pp. 229–238.

<sup>34</sup> Polozhenie o makhallinskikh (kvartal'nykh) komitetakh v gorodakh UzSSR. 17 April 1932. TsGA RUz, f. R-86 [Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet UzSSR], op. 1, d. 7427, ll. 303a–310.

<sup>35</sup> The activities of *mahalla* committees were stipulated in the regulation as follows: surveillance over implementation of laws and decrees; execution of the tasks and duties of

A series of decrees and resolutions aimed at internalising norms of citizens among the *mahalla* population followed in the Soviet period. A 1941 regulation clarified that main cities such as Toshkent (Tashkent), Andijon (Andijan), Namangan, Farg‘ona, Marg‘ilon (Margilan), Qo‘qon (Kokand), Samarqand (Samarkand), and Xiva (Khiva) would have *mahalla* committees under the Soviet executive committees.<sup>36</sup> They helped prepare the lists for conscription, provided labor force to factories and kolkhozes, allocated dwellings to the evacuees, and made solicitations to the Fund for the Defense of the Homeland in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>37</sup> After yet another regulation in 1953,<sup>38</sup> a 1961 regulation (following Khrushchev’s policy of reactivation of social self-governance through mass participation)<sup>39</sup>

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state organs and government officials; improvement of residents’ cultural enlightenment; repair and cleaning of roads and waterways; tree planting; installation of streetlights; tax collection and tax investigation; solicitation of public loans and savings; promotion of compulsory education; provision of information for unofficial schools; surveillance of coercive marriages, bride price and polygamy; women’s emancipation through organisation of day nurseries, washing places, canteens, women’s clubs and handicraft associations; conscription; surveillance of the cotton harvest; reporting and recording of residents’ information including family registration and surveys of financial standing; health and hygiene education; surveillance of residents’ health status (article 15 of the 1932 regulation).

<sup>36</sup> Polozhenie o makhallinskikh (kvartal’nykh) komitetakh v gorodakh UzSSR. 19 January 1941. TsGA RUz, f. R-837 [Upravlenie delami Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov—Soveta Ministrov Uzbekskoi SSR], op. 38, d. 2629, l. 218–249. I thank Dr. David Abramson, who kindly provided me with a copy of this resolution. For his pioneer work on Uzbekistan’s *mahalla*, see: David Abramson, ‘From Soviet to Mahalla: Community and Transition in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan’ (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> D. Kadyrova, ‘Rol’ makhallinskikh komitetov Tashkenta v patrioticheskom i internatsional’nom vospitanii trudiashchikhsia v gody voiny’, *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane* 5 (1985), pp. 42–44.

<sup>38</sup> Polozhenie o makhallinskikh (kvartal’nykh) komitetakh v gorodakh UzSSR. 3 April 1953. TsGA RUz, f. R-837, op. 38, d. 4770, l. 315–317v.

<sup>39</sup> According to a Soviet scholar’s claim, there were 2029 residentially based committees (including *mahalla* committees) in Uzbekistan as of July 1961, and by virtue of revitalisation policy of social organisations, 4343 as of January 1964. See: Kamilov, *Uchastie narodnykh mass*, p. 43. One study, which focuses on places of work (rather than places of residence) in Soviet Russia, goes as far as to say that ‘Stalin’s regime still allowed for the existence of random patches of individual freedom. Chaos and inefficiency frequently characterised the management of the “quicksand society” of Stalin’s days’. However, under Khrushchev, ‘[t]he disciplinary grid became faultless and ubiquitous: any degree of freedom in private was to be paid for by an inescapable participation in the mutual enforcement of unfreedom and humiliation in public’. See: Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, 1999), pp. 302–303.

stipulated that *mahalla* committees were to be established not only in cities, but also in rural areas. The number of committee members was increased from 3–5 to 9–21 persons.<sup>40</sup> Later, a 1983 regulation followed the previous regulation in general, but excluded *auls* from the area in which the committees shall be established.<sup>41</sup>

Just as important as the *control* from above was the ‘*subjectivation* (*assujettissement*)’ of citizens from below. It was in this Soviet Union Republic time that the (Soviet) Uzbekistani citizen was fully conceptualised. Introduction of the Russian word *grazhdanin* to Uzbek *grazdan* found its way already into the 1932 regulation; later it was replaced by the Uzbek word of Arabic origin *fuqaro* (originally used before 1917 to indicate the commoner, poor man, ‘who has not’ in contrast to the Islamic dignitary *Xo‘ja*). Consequently, the Uzbekistani citizen was conceptualised as closer to the *national*—one who possesses citizenship as a member of a sovereign state and who is entitled to some rights and burdened with some duties (*citizen-subject*).<sup>42</sup>

Although based on an established framework of control, a certain dependence on resident citizens’ initiatives pertained. Daily activities were conducted by unpaid volunteers. Members of the committee and subcommittees consisted of a few pensioners and those regularly employed in other work.<sup>43</sup> A labor force was provided by residents for building a

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<sup>40</sup> Polozhenie o makhallinskikh (kvartal’nykh) komitetakh v gorodakh, poselkakh, selakh i aulakh Uzbekskoi SSR. 30 August 1961. *Sbornik zakonov Uzbekskoi SSR i ukazov Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Uzbekskoi SSR 1938–1971* (Tashkent, 1972), pp. 265–270. Around this time, over 900 *mahalla* committees might have existed in Uzbekistan. See: K. Kamilov, ‘O roli makhallinskikh (kvartal’nykh) komitetov v sovremennyi period’, *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane 2* (1961), pp. 59–60.

<sup>41</sup> Polozhenie o makhallinskikh (kvartal’nykh) komitetakh v gorodakh, poselkakh, i kishlakakh Uzbekskoi SSR. 19 January 1983. *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta UzSSR* 20 (1983), pp. 33–38. Prior to independence, a Tashkent city resolution designated the *mahalla* committees ‘primary offices of local self-governance’. Tashkent shahridagi mahalla qo‘mitalar to‘g‘risidagi nizom (Tashkent, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> A book published after independence titled ‘The Thought of the Homeland’ gives a contemporary definition to the word citizen: ‘[a] person whose legal status is established by the law of a given country is called a citizen (*fuqaro*) of that country, irrespective to the fact that s/he is within or outside the country, a person who has such rights is called a citizen’. See: Abduqahhor Ibrohimov, Xayriddin Sultonov, and Narzulla Jo‘raev, *Vatan tuyg‘usi* (Tashkent, 1996), p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> Functional subcommittees were established as follows: Council of actives and *oqsoqols*; Fathers and Mothers Committee; Women’s Soviet; Comrades’ court; Tax collection and

*mahalla* clubhouse, graveling of streets, and planting trees in the area. In the cities, health checks were conducted by voluntary medical workers residing in the *mahalla*, and intellectuals and officials were invited to give lectures at the clubhouse. *Mahalla* committees, in which the inhabitants themselves served as active members, collected and provided resident information, cooperated with the police in observance of registration, issued certificates of domicile, and in some cases created area maps, thereby allowing the spatial prehension and organisation of households and individuals.<sup>44</sup> The residents of *mahallas* were not oppressed or mobilised one-sidedly; instead, they were *citizen-subjects* who enjoyed certain rights, fulfilled certain obligations and participated. For that reason, the *mahalla* was not just another quasi-official unit in support of Soviet bureaucracies, but one of the bases of the totality of power relations aside from places of work and families, etc.<sup>45</sup>

That is not to assert that the *mahalla* was a perfect and sufficient instrumental body in the formation of the modern *citizen-subject* in Uzbekistan. Instead, I claim that the *mahalla* was important not only because it had a traditional outlook, but because it was equipped with an institutional body in support of penetrating modern power into the daily life of the population. As Michel Foucault has asserted, power (understood properly as power relations) is distinct from domination because it never acts unilaterally, carrying always the possibility of resistance.<sup>46</sup>

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passport department; Voluntary fire prevention squad, etc.

<sup>44</sup> R. Nishanov, *Politicheskaya rabota v mahalle (iz opyta raboty partiinoy organizatsii Oktiabr'skogo raiona g. Tashkenta)* (Tashkent, 1960); K. Komilov, *Mahalla komitellari* (Toshkent, 1961); A. Rafiqov, *Mahallada* (Toshkent, 1964); Sh. Tohirov, *Mahalla komiteti va Kommunistik tarbiya* (Toshkent, 1971); also the author's field interviews in the *mahallas* of Shayxontohur district of Tashkent City.

<sup>45</sup> My study derives from that of Michel Foucault, who focused on what he called the problem of subjectivity, or the process by which individuals are made, and also make themselves, into subjects of the modern state. For an extensive work on a Soviet city based on a partial adaptation of Foucault's methods, see: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 208–226. In Uzbekistan, those associations without formal organisational structure such as *gap* (quasi-traditional meetings of friends and associates) have apparently been providing opportunities for a relatively free exchange of information and opinion. On the other hand, there has been a remarkable phenomenon of personalisation in apartment blocks of the large cities, in which individuals retire into the personal sphere despite the official recognition of



After independence, the significance of *mahallas* in governance was sufficient to require the new Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan (1992) to contain the phrase that '[r]esidents of settlements, *qishloqs* and *ovuls*,<sup>47</sup> as well as *mahallas* in cities, towns, settlements and villages shall decide all local matters at general meetings. These local self-governmental bodies shall elect a chairman (*oqsoqol*) and advisers for a term of 2.5 years' (article 105). During the following year, the first law on 'organs of self-government of citizens'<sup>48</sup> was adopted, stating that core activists, including the chairperson (*oqsoqol*), be paid a small salary from the state.<sup>49</sup>

Since that time, instructions were given from above to expand the *mahalla* institution.<sup>50</sup> Government-organised NGO (hereafter GONGO)<sup>51</sup> 'Mahalla' Foundation was created in 1993 to unify *mahallas* and control them under local administration bodies, primarily to locate families in need and provide financial support to them. Based on these changes, a new edition of the *mahalla* law was adopted in 1999<sup>52</sup> and partially amended in 2003. The 'organs of self-government of citizens' now specifically consist of 'citizens' meetings of *mahallas* in city, settlements, villages, and *ovul'* and 'citizens' meetings of towns, villages, and *ovul'*. However, it is not clear whether such autogenous 'citizens' meetings of *mahalla*' exist beyond the name. As a matter of fact, people regard the existing *mahalla* 'Council (*Kengash*)' (roughly, ex-*mahalla* committee) and its subcommittees as 'organs of self-government of citizens' and simply call

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those places as *mahallas*.

<sup>47</sup> *Qishloq* (kishlak): sedentary village. *Ovul* (aul): formerly nomadic/semi-nomadic village.

<sup>48</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi Qonuni. Fuqarolarning o'zi o'zini boshqarish organlari to'g'risida (2 September 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Therefore, they undertake their duty as officials (*mansabdor shaxs*). A salary of 14–22 dollars is paid from the state to the three core members of the council, plus the *mahalla* educator, and the head of *mahalla* guards (*posbonlar*).

<sup>50</sup> For a description by the Speaker of the Parliament on the process of *mahalla* legislations through parliamentary activities as one initiated by the President, see: E. Khalilov, 'Deiatel'nost' Oliy Mazhlisa po povysheniui roli organov samoupravleniia grazhdan v stroitel'stve pravovogo grazhdanskogo obshchestva', *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane* 1–2 (1999), pp. 3–10.

<sup>51</sup> Government-organised NGOs (GONGOs) are used here to denote those organisations formed by the initiative of the government, some of them directly formed on the basis of decrees. They receive funds overwhelmingly from the state or semi-governmental institutions and are staffed by former affiliates of state institutions.

<sup>52</sup> O'zbekiston Respublikasi Qonuni. Fuqarolarning o'zi o'zini boshqarish organlari to'g'risida (yangi tahriri) (14 April 1999).

them *mahalla*.<sup>53</sup> All districts in Uzbekistan have ‘organs of self-government of citizens’, and in common parlance, all Uzbekistani citizens live in *mahallas*, as reflected in Karimov’s remark that ‘we all grew up in the *mahalla*’.<sup>54</sup>

Today, the *mahalla* has been resurrected as a symbol of a well-ordered Muslim society with its *civil-ised* members bound by mutual reliance, while keeping out independent, radical or political Islam. In rare occasions where conflicts are exposed, they are seldom solved by overt action. The nature of modern civility as implanted to people was a courteous one, however active. As argued by Karimov as the ideal of Uzbekistani society, the *mahalla* is an ‘unchanging source of harmony and human enlightenment in the life of our society [...] valuable human qualities such as generosity and mercy are formed particularly in the *mahalla* environment’.<sup>55</sup> Yet, it is difficult to see whether solidarity and respectful compassion among the *mahalla* residents are discernible from the patronage and pity of their administrators. Citizens’ reliance upon law as a source of public order seems to remain low, whereas personalistic and arbitrary guardianship of administrators is emphasised.

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<sup>53</sup> The total number of ‘organs of self-government of citizens’ which includes non-*mahalla* citizens’ meetings) in Uzbekistan is 9,615, whereas the number of *mahalla* is 7,997 (as of August, 2003, See Table 2). Traditional and small-scale *mahallas* whose integration with ‘organ of self-government of citizens’ is still incomplete are called ‘social units’. Today, an average *mahalla* in Tashkent have a population of around 6,000. Small traditional *mahalla* with only 1,750 inhabitants coexist with gigantic apartment block *mahalla* with 17,700 inhabitants (end 2003). However, ‘organs of self-governance’ are established quite uniformly. The *mahalla* council (ex-*mahalla* committee) consists of *oqsoqol* advisers and other unpaid volunteers, and is divided into 8–9 subcommittees. In one *mahalla* in which I have stayed in Tashkent, out of 7,565 residents, a *mahalla* citizens’ meeting is first formed in which 18-years or older residents participate (in theory). From that group, citizens’ representatives are chosen at a rate determined by the regional administration (*hokimiyat*) (1 out of 50 persons, therefore 85 representatives are chosen for this *mahalla*; in reality). Under a new law, an *oqsoqol* and his advisors are chosen by a show of hands or closed votes at a general assembly of citizens, attended by government and NGO/NPO representatives. See: Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan ‘o vyborakh predsedatelia (aksakala) skhoda grazhdan i ego sovetnikov’ (29 April 2004).

<sup>54</sup> I.A. Karimov, ‘Chestnost’ i samootverzhennost’—osnovnye kriterii nashei deiatel’nosti’, in Karimov, *Nasha tsel’: svobodnaia i protsvetaiushchaia rodina* 2 (Tashkent, 1996), p. 281.

<sup>55</sup> I.A. Karimov, ‘Ideologiya natsional’noi nezavisimosti—ubezhdenie naroda i vera v velikoe budushchee: Otvety na voprosy korrespondenta gazety “Fidokor”’, in Karimov, *Nasha vysshaya tsel’*, p. 490.

Whereas authoritarian regimes exclusively hold the available resources to threaten or destroy associations pressing for a fundamental change, respect for public order and willingness to compromise (one undeniable aspect of *civic virtue*) nurtured to some extent by the *mahallas* in Uzbekistan seem unlikely to counter any regime. However, it should go without saying that the whole point of democratisation is to question the legitimacy of the existing regime.

## NGOs and Administrators' Concepts of Civil Society

Scholars and aid workers have claimed that fostering civil society promotes democracy; that NGOs as actors of civil society can promote democratic governance and liberalise authoritarian regimes by raising public consciousness, demanding transparency in policy making, monitoring state activity with national and international regulations, and exposing repression and corruption. However, such a claim seems optimistic under authoritarian conditions. If we examine the case of Uzbekistan, its own conception of 'construction' of civil society not only facilitates the administrators in *covering up* the authoritarian nature of the regime; it also generates a more comfortable atmosphere for foreign and international organisations to make compromises.

Activities of foreign and international organisations in Uzbekistan began when the US improved its relationship with Uzbekistan in 1995. However, local grass-roots NGOs that were formed under *Glasnost*' and *Perestroika* that united several people and were funded out of one or more members' pockets had already disappeared by this time.<sup>56</sup> To promote the reformation and capacity-building of local independent-from-government

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Sievers, *The Post-Soviet Decline of Central Asia: Sustainable Development and Comprehensive Capital* (London, 2004), pp. 106–108. However, there are separate claims that, except for the Business Women's Association (*Tadbikor Ayol uyushmasi*), and 'For Ecologically Clean Fergana' (*Ekologik toza Farg'ona uchun*), no local NGOs were established before 1995. This largely depends on how a researcher defines NGOs. See: Andrea Berg, 'Encountering Transition in Contemporary Uzbekistan: A Critical Perspective on Foreign Aid and Non-Governmental Organizations', in Mirka Dreger and Anke Huenninghaus (eds.), *Social Research on Transformation in Developing Countries* (IEE Working Papers 171, Bochum, 2003), pp. 51–65, esp. p. 55 <[http://dbs.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/iee/download/working\\_papers\\_171.pdf](http://dbs.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/iee/download/working_papers_171.pdf)>, accessed 26 April 2005.

organisations, foreign development organisations such as USAID provided the seed money for implementing NGOs that were committed to development of civil society, such as the Open Society Institute, Counterpart Consortium, and the Eurasia Foundation, whereas Japanese assistance was concentrated in more conventional forms of official development assistance in grants, loans, and technical assistance.<sup>57</sup>

Today, according to a sub-director of the Uzbekistani Institute for the Studies of Civil Society (a GONGO with its headquarters in the same building as the Strategic Institute under the President of Uzbekistan), around 2,500–4,000 NGOs exist in the country.<sup>58</sup> However, probably less than 200 are active, according to a Freedom House local staff member's estimate.<sup>59</sup> Several reasons explain Uzbekistan's NGOs' quantitative and qualitative underdevelopment. First, many NGOs seem to lack accountability and strict audits. At least some are set up chiefly as a means to acquire grant money.<sup>60</sup> Second, they lack representation of the population that they are engaged with through their activity. The local people seem to assume that NGO workers are well-paid white collar employees who work in well-equipped offices, take business trips to foreign countries, and help family members and friends in finding work.

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<sup>57</sup> The cumulative total of Japan's ODA to Uzbekistan ranks among the highest in Central Asia, on par with that to Kazakhstan. See End Chart 1 of this paper.

<sup>58</sup> Author's interview with Bahodir Ergashev (Sub-director, Institute for the Studies of Civil Society. *Fuqarolik jamiyati o'rganishi instituti*), 20 October 2004. All views expressed, including possible errors, in this paper are strictly those of the author and the responsibility does not rest upon the interviewees. As a reminder, all interviewees expressed their organisations' willingness to cooperate with the Uzbekistani government in their projects.

<sup>59</sup> Author's interview with Assol Rustamova (Program Assistant, Uzbekistan Human Rights Training and Support, Freedom House), 5 October 2004. According to USAID, the situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan looks better in Tajikistan and worse in Turkmenistan. See: USAID, 'The 2003 NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia'. For their estimates of the number of NGOs, see End Chart 1 of this paper.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, a UNDP program (Capacity Building of NGOs within the Framework of Social and Economic Development of Qashqadaryo and Qoraqalpog'iston) reportedly faced difficulties in its implementation. In Qashqadaryo, NGO boards were largely cosmetic entities set up to capture grants. The spirit of service to rural communities also appeared weak. The Qoraqalpog'iston branch of the Business Women's Association (charged with microcredit activities in that province) was afflicted with serious fraud. Money was embezzled by NGO personnel, who created fictitious loan contracts and invented clients. See: Deniz Kandiyoti, *Post-Soviet Institutional Design, NGOs and Rural Livelihoods in Uzbekistan*, (UNRISD Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper 11; Geneva, 2004), pp. 21–22.

Third, much dependence on international and foreign organisations exists because most national NGOs have no independent operational budget or stable funding.<sup>61</sup> The priorities of external agencies are valued over local initiatives because local NGOs were created rapidly and made to disappear by the common practice of development organisations' grant donations made on a specific-project basis.

In recent years, various development agencies have begun to shift from local NGOs to *mahallas* in their search for surrogate civil society organisations, because of their presumed familiarity with local needs as an indigenous, grass-roots, and long standing association of citizens. Whereas formal organisations representing business, laborers, and consumers connecting the public and private are largely underdeveloped, the *mahalla* has become virtually the most attractive alternative in Uzbekistan. Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which has been particularly active in promoting the concept of civil society, held conferences with the GONGO 'Mahalla' Foundation on *mahalla* reforms in 2003 (announced as *the Year of Flourishing Mahalla*).<sup>62</sup> Among others, those directly active in the field are Counterpart Consortium,<sup>63</sup> CHF,<sup>64</sup> and Mercy Corps International (all US-based NGOs supported by USAID funds).<sup>65</sup> They have been associated with the USAID supported Community Action Investment Program (CAIP) that was founded on an agreement between the

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<sup>61</sup> Author's interview with Igor' Vikhrov, NGO Youth and Society (Yoshlar va Jamiyat), 24 September 2004.

<sup>62</sup> The K. Adenauer Foundation's past activities related to the *mahalla* include: seminar on 'Citizen's Participation in Policy of Local Government' (September 2003); special conference on the 'Year of the Mahalla' (November 2003); seminar on 'Professional Management of Mahalla Administrators' (February, March, April 2004).

<sup>63</sup> The Mahalla Initiative Program has been in operation in Nukus (Qoraqalpog'iston), Buxoro, and Qo'qon. See their homepage <<http://www.cango.net.kg/uz/mahalla/Default.asp>>, accessed 26 April 2005. According to one of their report submitted to USAID, during the period October–December 2000, 20 NGOs receiving an average of 1,833 US dollars undertook work in 36 *mahallas* in Buxoro, Navoiy, Ferghana, Qo'qon, and Qarakalpog'iston. Counterpart International Quarterly Report (1 October – 31 December 2000), submitted to USAID/CAR, AWARD No. 122-0007-A-00-9019-00.

<sup>64</sup> Communities Habitat Finance (CHF) in partnership with Counterpart Consortium, Community Action Investment Program (CAIP) Semi-Annual Report (22 May – 22 November 2002).

<sup>65</sup> See their Quarterly Report (October 2001 – December 2001) on Peaceful Communities Initiative, USAID's Conflict Mitigation Initiative in the Ferghana Valley <<http://www.mercycorps.org/items/307>>, accessed 14 November 2005.

US Congress and the President of Uzbekistan, of which in the past over 60 communities in Farg‘ona Valley, and Surxondaryo and Qashqadaryo have been involved. USAID had earlier provided material assistance to several *mahallas* in Farg‘ona Valley for providing clean water to the rural population through its program in 1999.<sup>66</sup> Smaller undertakings include conferences with *mahalla* leaders on ecology and entrepreneurship sponsored by OSCE.<sup>67</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan has also provided aid to a few *mahalla* workshops targeted at women and computer learners in the Farg‘ona Valley, Chirchik, and Toshkent City through its grassroots assistance program.

What was convenient for the above tendency was the optimistic view of some foreign observers that in Uzbekistan, independent and unofficial Islam survived the Soviet years by fusing with the *mahallas* as intimate neighborhood organisations; therefore, it might now be expected to serve as a basis for civil organisation that is autonomous from the state.<sup>68</sup> Paradoxically, this was to benefit the Uzbekistani administrators, who in turn justify strong control of the population through the *mahalla* as an institution by exploiting the pessimistic argument of others that independent (and likely the most strong and active) Islamic movements calling for an Islamic state cannot coexist within a civil society founded on pluralism.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Damon Clyde, Zafar Oripov, and Mark McEuen, *Technical Report: Community Involvement Program in the Fergana Oblast* (Fergana Oblast, 2000) <[http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/20001056471215\\_56075.pdf](http://www.abtassociates.com/reports/20001056471215_56075.pdf)>, accessed 26 April 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Past activities have included three round-table discussions entitled ‘Mahallas and Environmental Protection’ in Jizzax, Namangan and Qashqadaryo Provinces, Uzbekistan, supported by OSCE Toshkent October 2002 – April 2003; Seminar for community leaders on ‘Mahallas: Promoting Entrepreneurship and Environmental Protection’ in Andijon (11 November 2004); and Conference on ‘Development of Communities through Mobilisation of Resources’ aimed at training with representatives of regional branches of Mahalla Foundation (27 May – 5 June 2004). The Economic and Environmental Officer at the OSCE Center in Toshkent focused on the positive side of the institutional *mahalla* on his project of environmental protection, while referring to ‘some criticism’ of human rights violation in policing the life of citizens carried out by the *mahalla*. He praises ‘a balanced rebuttal’ of the GONGO ‘Mahalla’ Foundation to the assertions of the international NGO Human Rights Watch. See: Douglas L. Tookey, ‘The Mahalla Associations of Uzbekistan: Catalysts for Environmental Protection?’, *Helsinki Monitor* 3 (2004), pp. 160–170, esp. pp. 164–165.

<sup>68</sup> Reul Hanks, ‘Civil Society and Identity in Uzbekistan: The Emergent Role of Islam’, in Ruffin and Waugh (eds.), *Civil Society in Central Asia*, pp. 158–179.

<sup>69</sup> For an argument on this matter, see: Sergei Gretskey, ‘In Search of Civil Society’, in

Whereas independent political initiatives that challenge from below are readily suppressed by the regime, Uzbekistani officials and intellectuals are now making reformist compositions on ‘further democratisation of society’ in their support for political stability. Many investigators agree that two currents exist in the history of ideas of civil society. Hobbes and Locke view civil society as a polity that is based on the rule of law and personal freedoms, with freedom of association leading to the emergence of civic organisations that promote the common good; Hegel and de Tocqueville offer a separate conception by limiting the notion of civil society to the non-state component of the polity. It has been repeated in transition literature on Eastern Europe that people have redeveloped the Hegelian separation of state and society and politicised it for their movements. Strange as it might seem, it is mainly *this* civil society of Hegelian descent that is being introduced by authoritarian administrators in Uzbekistan, through Russian translation of Hegel’s work, and by Uzbekistani intellectuals’ new interpretation of Hegel.

Local studies on adaptation of the Hegelian concept of civil society in connection with the actual political demands of Uzbekistan are rapidly appearing. For example, Sharifxo‘jaev’s book on *the formation of Open Civil Society in Uzbekistan* claims that the state is the guiding force in reforms of the society, echoing Karimov. He says that three ‘classic’ fundamental characteristics exist in civil society, and that before the ‘political’ (which includes the media) and the ‘spiritual’ (which includes democracy and international law), the ‘constitutional-legal’ characteristic *should* come first in civil society, after asserting that ‘[...] completely different from the society of Hegel’s time [...] today’s world of democracy is not without constitution and laws’.<sup>70</sup>

If Uzbekistani versions of civil society are influenced by Hegel, then it is worthwhile to reexamine the late 18th–early 19th century philosopher’s thought. Originally, for Hegel, civil society was a ‘system of needs’ with contradictions that could only be resolved by the institution of the state, which embodies the *highest ethical ideals* of society. He saw importance in the role of a mature bureaucracy and of the crown as the final authority.<sup>71</sup> In

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Cummings (ed.), *Oil, Transition and Security*, pp. 84–95, esp. pp. 92–93.

<sup>70</sup> Murod Sharifxo‘jaev, *O‘zbekistonda ochiq fuqarolik jamiyatining shakllanishi* (Toshkent, 2003), p. 14. I will not attempt here to distinguish which are pure propaganda efforts, and which are presented as serious arguments. All readings are contested.

<sup>71</sup> ‘So opposed to the sovereignty of the monarch, the sovereignty of the people is one of the

addition, for Hegel, individuals in civil society were heavily structured into corporations, which are *compulsory* rather than *voluntary* associations,<sup>72</sup> a reminder to Uzbekistani administrators' attitudes toward the *mahalla*.

In accordance with the Hegelian separation of state and civil society, and perhaps also with his commitment to an accommodation of the *status quo* ('*what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational*'<sup>73</sup>), most Uzbekistani studies caution that civil society shall not contest against the state. For example, after citing Hegel, Z. Islamov insists that 'the demarcation between civil society and the state does not mean confrontation between them'.<sup>74</sup> Apparently, it is obvious to him that '[...] the emphasis in the category of "civil society" does not engender confrontation with the state, but integration of society—territorial and national integration: integration of the elite and the masses; integration according to interests; and finally, behavioral integration with the aim of clarifying the aims of the activities of the state'.<sup>75</sup> It seems that his argument on civil society is centered on promoting of the role of the state (hailed by both Hegel and Karimov), when he claims that '[b]efore the appearance of civil society, and today, the state has always presented itself not only as a strong, independent and active participant, but also as an initiator and organiser of reform'.<sup>76</sup>

Some studies focus less on independent NGOs that work in partnership with the state, but more on state organs and political parties,<sup>77</sup> or on organisations that work *under* the state, foremostly the *mahallas* as

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confused notions based on the wild idea of the "people". Taken without its monarch and the articulation of the whole is the indispensable and direct concomitant of monarchy, the people is a formless mass and no longer a state'. Georg W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* [Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts], trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford, 1942), paragraph 279 (commentary), pp. 182–183.

<sup>72</sup> 'Of course Corporations must fall under the higher surveillance of the state'. *Ibid.*, paragraph 255 (addition), p. 278.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, (preface), p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Z. Islamov, 'Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo: Vchera, segodnia, zavtra', in Alimov (ed.), *O'zbekiston: fuqarolik jamiyati sari*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Muqminjon Qirg'izboev, *Fuqarolik jamiyati: siyosiy partiyalar, mafquralar, madaniyatlar* (Toshket, 1998); V. Dubkov, 'Mnogopartiinost' kak institut formiruiushchegosia v Uzbekistane grazhdanskogo obshchestva', *Obshchestvennoe mnenie: Prava cheloveka* 1 (2004), pp. 88–95.



‘organs of self-government’.<sup>78</sup> For example, To‘raqulov’s article on the ‘Process of Formation of the Basis of Civil Society in Uzbekistan’ which was published in a major academic journal, *Social Sciences in Uzbekistan* refers little to NGOs. It mostly examines public structures (*jamoat tuzilma*) which include local administration bodies and *mahallas*, asserting that local administrative organs must not only reflect different opinions of the population, but also actively *influence* the formation of public opinion (*jamoatchilik fikri*).<sup>79</sup> Such a tendency of authorising publicness from above is reminiscent of Hegel, who discredited free opinion as a mere formality and demoted the public sphere as a means of education.<sup>80</sup>

Such views are repeated by leading Uzbekistani intellectuals including Akmal Saidov, a Parliamentary Deputy and the Director of National Center of Human Rights. Writing about civil society, and about the *mahalla* as a national democratic institution, he asserts that ‘[w]hile encouraging the attachment to all individuals’ *mahalla*, home, and city, it is necessary to turn the attachment also to the homeland’. Individuals, then, must be citizens with political solidarity that transcends ethnic divisions, regions and center-periphery divisions. Such citizens with virtue are never autogenous: they must be created. ‘Education of a healthy generation must be carried out based on the national tradition and life experience of our ancestors’.<sup>81</sup> Devotion and discipline, rather than the rights of the individual citizen,<sup>82</sup> civil *obligation* more than civil *rights* are valued as ethics.

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<sup>78</sup> Having said that, at least some pro-government intellectuals seem skeptical of the role of *mahalla* in civil society. When asked about the role that *mahalla* play in the construction of civil society in Uzbekistan, A sub-director of a GONGO replied: ‘I have my personal views, but no comment’. Author’s interview, 20 October 2004.

<sup>79</sup> M. Turakulov, ‘O‘zbekistonda fuqarolik jamiyati asoslarining shakllantirish jarayonlari’, *O‘zbekistonda ijtimoiy fanlar* 1–2 (2003), pp. 3–8, esp. p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Hegel, paragraphs 315–319, pp. 203–208. For a critique of Hegel, see: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Berger with the assistance of Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 117–123.

<sup>81</sup> A. Saidov, ‘Mahalla: National Democratic Institution’, *Demokratlashtirish va inson huquqlari* 1 (2003), pp. 96–103.

<sup>82</sup> An Uzbekistani survey covering 1,040 women (ages 18–45, 90 per cent Uzbek) in 48 *mahallas* of five provinces presents a rather embarrassing result in which the respondents said the *mahalla* has rendered little aid in ‘[solving] employment problems’ (22.1 per cent), ‘prevention of violation of human rights by law enforcement agencies, local authorities, and social welfare services’ (26.9 per cent), ‘[solving] material, financial problems’ (36.3 per cent), ‘providing pure potable water for families’ (34.9 per cent), compared to ‘organising mass events and celebrations’ (88.3 per cent), ‘[mediating] conflicts, quarrels, and discord

In Uzbekistan, NGOs are increasingly seen as Trojan horses that hide anti-governmental forces from abroad. Already, amid calls by Karimov for a more ‘open civil society (*ochiq fuqarolik jamiyati*)’, the government concluded in April 2004 a controversial re-registration process of NGOs / NPOs. It is likely that a reproduction of a ‘colored revolution’, in which NGOs and social movements reportedly played an important role, was feared by the government,<sup>83</sup> because it engendered the ouster of the Open Society Assistance Foundation (a highly influential NGO in Uzbekistan), and suspension of the activities of Internews-Uzbekistan. Three other US-based NGOs (the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and Freedom House) were cautioned to refrain from collaborating with non-registered organisations. This trend continued into September 2005, when a US-based International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) was ordered to suspend its activities. In addition, re-registration engendered much closer monitoring and control of national NGOs/NPOs, some reportedly pressured to close voluntarily.<sup>84</sup> Finally in June 2005, a National Association of NGOs/NPOs of Uzbekistan was created by a presidential resolution, claiming a need for coordination of activities of NGOs/NPOs.<sup>85</sup>

If the new civic organisations must depend so much on the framework provided by the bureaucracy, then it becomes questionable whether they are associations that fall into the casual category of civil society. Through a

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among neighbors’ (83.4 per cent), ‘[mediating] conflicts, quarrels and discords among family members’ (72.0 per cent). ‘Public Opinion Center Reports’, *Ijtimoiy fikr: Inson huquqlari* 3–4 (1999), pp. 189–195, esp. p. 195.

<sup>83</sup> Referring to the ‘revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine, President Karimov said in a speech at the legislative body: ‘We will rein in those who move outside the framework of law. We have the necessary forces for that’. Looking to foreign ambassadors who were present, he added ‘I don’t want to delve too deeply into this matter. But those sitting up there in the balcony ought to understand that better’. <<http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2005/01/310105.asp>>, accessed 5 April 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Aside from ordering the re-registration of NGOs/NPOs, in February 2004, a resolution of Cabinet Ministers of Uzbekistan (No. 56) determined that grants must be channeled through the Central Bank of Uzbekistan or state bank ‘Asaka’ and reimbursed only after the approval of the Special Committee in charge. Information given to the author during research conducted in September–October 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Postanovlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan ‘O merakh po okazaniiu sodeistviia razvitiuu institutov grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Uzbekistane’, 23 June 2005. cf. ‘Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo i negosudarstvennyye organizatsii’, *UzA* 6 October 2005 <<http://www.uza.uz/society/index.php?id1=5478>>, accessed 14 October 2005.

simple conception of civil society as a society that is separate from the state, a good possibility remains that civil organisations might be turned into mere clients taken care of by the paternalistic administrators of the authoritarian regime, rather than forces that oppose it.<sup>86</sup> The Tocquevillian moment of civil society, which follows Hegel's separation of civil society from the state but which focuses on the inherent relation of uncoerced organisations of society (especially townships) to democracy, might be brought into consideration. As de Tocqueville rightly wrote in his consideration of voluntary associations of civil society to control the risk of falling into dictatorship under the name of democracy:

There are no countries in which associations are more needed to prevent the despotism of faction or the arbitrary power of the prince than those which are democratically constituted. In aristocratic nations the body of the nobles and the wealthy are in themselves natural associations which check the abuses of power. In countries where such associations do not exist, if private individuals cannot create an artificial and temporary substitute for them, I can see no permanent protection against the most galling tyranny; and a great people might be oppressed with impunity by a small faction or by a single individual.<sup>87</sup>

## **Towards a Democracy, but of an 'Eastern' Kind?**

After independence, a trend of associating the local usage of 'civil society' with the idea of 'Eastern democracy (*Sharqona demokratiya*)', roughly founded on 'Eastern spirituality (*Sharqona ma'naviyat*)', argued as embodied in the *mahalla*, has appeared in Uzbekistan. The conception of the Eastern type of democratic civil society has been advanced by President Karimov, and is propagated by intellectuals and the media.

Democratic institutions must reflect the mentality and peculiarity of the culture of our people. It is known that the Western model of democracy

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<sup>86</sup> One of the largest and most active NGOs in good relations with the government hung upon its Toshkent city office room wall a large carpet with an engraved portrait of President Karimov. Witnessed by the author during research conducted in September–October 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* 1 (3rd edn., Paris, 1951), pp. 197–198.

is founded on the philosophy of the individual and excessive politicisation of the masses. On the other hand, the East assumes democracy based the idea of collectivism, paternalism, and priority of social opinion [...]. We are aspiring for the construction of not only a democratic society, but a just democratic society [...] We will build a civil society. That means, as we form our statehood, diverse functions of governance will be transferred to the people themselves, by way of social organs of self-government [*mahallas*].<sup>88</sup>

As expressed in the above argument, the specifically ‘Eastern’ (or ‘Uzbek’, ‘local’—these essentially different terms are used interchangeably) conception of civil society has been manifested to claim collectivity, order, and respect towards authority as a unique tradition of the ‘Eastern’ society that shall be defended. According to such argument, ‘Eastern’ people are more group-conscious than those of the liberal and individualistic ‘West’ because they unite for the common good of the society, are less selfish, and accept that social cohesion and stability are most important.

Karimov has said that ‘in fact, the traditional Oriental culture, which our people have been nurturing for thousands of years, and which are seen to retain, differs a great deal from its Western counterpart’<sup>89</sup> and that an ‘ideology of national independence [...] is able to oppose the harmful influence of individualism... formation of a citizen of high moral standards is a work for all’.<sup>90</sup> On the eve of 10th anniversary of the Constitution, he announced 2003 as the *Year of the Flourishing Mahalla*, saying that ‘every one of you understands well that the proverb ‘the *mahalla* is your father, and mother too (*otang—mahalla, onang—mahalla*)’ has a profound meaning [...]. People find in Eastern philosophy how important are affection and compassion among the people in *mahalla* in preserving peace and stability in society’.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> I.A. Karimov, ‘Osnovnye printsipy obshchestvenno-politicheskogo i ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Uzbekistana: Doklad na pervoi sessii Oliy Mazhlisa Respubliki Uzbekistan’ (25 February 1995), *Rodina sviashchenna dlia kazhdogo* 3 (Tashkent, 1996), pp. 8–9.

<sup>89</sup> Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka*, p. 177.

<sup>90</sup> Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka*, pp. 179–180.

<sup>91</sup> Islom Karimov, ‘Hayotimizning, taraqqiyotimizning huquqiy asosi: O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Konstitutsiyasi o‘n yilligiga tantanali marosimdagi nutq’ (5 December 2002), *Biz tanlagan yo‘l—demokratik taraqqiyot va ma‘rifiy dunyo bilan hamkorlik yo‘li* 11 (Toshkent, 2003), pp. 109–112.

Similar views are shared by O‘tkir Hoshimov, a People’s Writer of Uzbekistan and the Chairman of the Press and Information Committee of the Oliy Majlis (the legislature), who claim that:

The *mahalla*’s destiny has become closely tied with the country’s destiny. If the *mahalla* is prosperous, then the country is prosperous. The country will be calm if the *mahalla* is calm. It goes without saying that if the *mahalla* is not calm, troubles might come [...]. In the West, individualism is strong. Everyone seeks to show oneself as an individual person. In short, everyone strives to live for oneself, for one’s own interests. In the East, collectivism is strong. People are accustomed to support and be supported.<sup>92</sup>

Karimov made a clear expression in his speech summing up the *Year of the Flourishing Mahalla* that foreign NGO’s criticism against *mahalla* institution’s failure in protection of women’s rights shall not be tolerated. ‘[T]hey say that women’s rights are violated by the *mahalla* [...]. [However, s]ome things can be solved without exchange of slander and blame, or big scandal. Experienced *oqsoqols*, parents, and *imoms* of the *mahalla* are making religion understood to make people modest and behave correctly in all fields of life’.<sup>93</sup>

Such expressions are reminiscent of similar advocacy in the past by other authoritarian regimes in Asia. One salient example is Singapore, which introduced its own model of ‘civic society’<sup>94</sup> in the 1990s, asserting that for a strong state, a strong society is necessary. In that country,

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<sup>92</sup> O‘tkir Hoshimov, ‘Mening mahallam—mening oilam’, in O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy Majlisi, *Fuqarolarning o‘zini o‘zi boshqarish organlariga saylovga tayyorgarlik ko‘rish va saylovni o‘tkazishga doir Respublika seminar-kengashining materiallar* (Toshkent, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>93</sup> *BBC Monitoring: Inside Central Asia* CAU071203. Such views are then proliferated by the media. An editorial titled ‘loyalty to the national spirit’ in the main newspaper following this speech appeared soon, which asserted that ‘national values, tradition, sensibility, human norms of conduct’ which ‘probably cannot be understood by those not born an Uzbek’ exist, the writer severely criticised ‘Western democracy’ and interventionist organisations. See: *Narodnoe slovo*, 16 December 2003, pp. 2–3.

<sup>94</sup> IWASAKI Ikuo, ‘Shingaporu: Itto Shihai Taiseika no Kibishii Seiyaku’ [Shingapore: Harsh Restrictions under the People’s Action Party Regime], in Iwasaki (ed.), *Ajia to Shimin Shakai: Kokka to Shakai no Seiji Rikigaku* [Asia and Civil Society: The Political Dynamics between State and Society] (Tokyo, 1998), pp. 77–108, esp. p. 99.

formation of non-political social organisations based on ethnic groupings, cultural organisations, and experts' organisations was encouraged. Whereas the economically competitive edge of such an 'Asian' model was rocked by financial crises of the late 1990s, an emerging trend in Central Asia might be 'our own model' of civil society. It is a good reflection of the emergence of a *reverse Orientalism* (or *Occidentalism*), a tendency in which a certain identity is considered traditional thus natural for the people, and existing differences among the population are dismissed as unauthentic or impure.

The fact that most individuals and organisations that have actively criticised the condition of rights of Uzbekistan were European or American might have evoked the administrators' objection that liberal civic values are after all 'Western' values that have no roots in 'Eastern' soil. Anecdotal evidence shows that Japan is increasingly welcomed more than other countries that openly criticise Uzbekistan's rights violations or delay in democratisation. The new inclination of the Uzbekistanis to refer to the so-called 'Japanese model' of bureaucratic control of industry in their attempts to justify strong state control in the 'construction' of civil society<sup>95</sup> is, to be sure, a good example of an abuse of the 'Eastern' experience. A counter-argument might be found in the works of Maruyama, an influential political theorist of post-war Japan, who claimed that '[d]aily morale of modern citizens—that is [raising] a *political* voice from *non-political* sphere—can be expected to be fostered in those places where traditions take root of voluntary associations with *non-political* aims from their very grounds are constantly critical of the important issues including the politics of the era'.<sup>96</sup>

In relation to the *mahalla*, Japan's dark past of institutionalising the *chonaikai* (residential associations) under state control and demanding residents' voluntary subjection in carrying out war could be introduced to Uzbekistan. Japan's regime during wartime positioned itself to maintain power not through the absence of civic organisations, but promoting their activity under state control and taking advantage of its associational

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<sup>95</sup> For example, see: A. O'tamurodov and Sh. Azizov, 'O'zbekistonda fuqarolik jamiyati barpo etilishining tsivilizatsiyaviy paradigmalarini ta'riflash', in Alimov (ed.), *O'zbekiston: fuqarolik jamiyati sari*, p. 71.

<sup>96</sup> MARUYAMA Masao, 'Kaikoku' [The Opening Up of the Country], in Maruyama, *Maruyama Masao Shu* [Maruyama Collected Works] 8 (Tokyo, 1996), p. 83.

networks.<sup>97</sup> If we look at Uzbekistan today, it is not a rare event that *mahalla* activists and the police work in cooperation inside the same *mahalla* office building. In the aftermath of massive Tashkent bomb explosions in February 1999 (apparently a failed attempt to assassinate Karimov), a Cabinet of Ministers' decree in April that year established the institution of 'mahalla guards (*mahalla posbonlari*)' (for the number of its members, see end Chart 2). Campaigns against suspected Islamists through the *mahalla* institutional networks have led to thousands of arrests.

After attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, to some it seemed that peace and stability were finally brought to Uzbekistan thanks to the military alliance with the US after IMU's leader Namangoni, who took sides to the Taliban, was killed in a battle in northern Afghanistan. However, this proved wrong. 47 people died in a series of bombings and exchange of fire in Tashkent and Bukhara in March–April 2004. In their aftermath, *mahalla* activists called for vigilance and checked residents' passports together with the police. The Tashkent city administration held meetings with the 'Mahalla' Foundation and other GONGOs, whereas student groups asserted that 'organisation of voluntary duties to strengthen the watchout' is necessary. Notwithstanding, another bombing followed in the same year in July, this time aimed at US and Israeli Embassies together with the High Prosecutor's Office.

Such a tendency was reinforced by the manner in which the United States intervenes in Central Asia. People's faint expectations in democracy were betrayed by the US' abrupt change of policy that give preference to military alliance and moderate its democratisation pressure on Uzbekistan.

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<sup>97</sup> Regarding Japanese neighborhood organisations during the Second World War, see: TORIGOE Hiroyuki, *Chiiki Jichikai no Kenkyu: Burakukai, Chonakai, Jichikai no Tenkai Katei* [Studies on Local Residents' Associations: The Evolutions of Burakukai, Chonakai, and Jichikai] (Kyoto 1994), pp. 137–163. For the adopted organisations that were introduced in Japan-occupied parts of China, Singapore and Indonesia, see: YOSHIHARA Naoki, *Ajia no Chiiki Jumin Soshiki: Chonakai, Kaibokai, RT/RW* [Residential Organisations of Asia: The Chonakai, Kaifong, and RT/RW] (Tokyo, 2000). After the war, the Occupation Administration in Japan decided to abolish the neighborhood organisations. For their research and policy justifications, see: GHQ/SCAP, CIE, A Preliminary Study of the Neighborhood Associations of Japan, 1948. The neighborhood organisations which continue to exist in Japan today should be differentiated from the *mahalla* type, as 1) they are not regulated by direct laws and decrees, but by their own charters; 2) the board members do not receive a state salary; 3) they do not undertake duties of the state and do not report to the state of their activity.

The fact that US President George W. Bush himself employed the dichotomy of a coalition against ‘evil’ in the war cannot escape criticism because it might have served to further encourage disaffected elements to approach anti-US international networks and engender regional destabilisation. It is an irony that Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist association and a fervent enemy of Karimov, has also been presenting a dichotomy of so-called ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ values, in its assertion of ‘the inescapable nature of the Clash of Civilisations’ to counter the new global power relations.

## Conclusions

In spite of President Karimov’s official commitment to ‘transition’ to democracy and ‘construction’ of civil society, and despite international pressure on the government to live up to that commitment, much less confidence exists after a decade that Uzbekistan’s transition has been towards liberal democracy.

The *tragicomedy* of Uzbekistan is in the following fact: if Uzbekistanis claim a meaningful transition from a ‘totalitarian system to a free society’,<sup>98</sup> there could probably be only one alternative to democratic centrism: that is liberal democracy of a polyarchic type in which citizens’ rights of participation and contestation are guaranteed through uncoerced associations. Nevertheless, the gap between the advocated target and the authoritarian reality is widening, making it all the more difficult for the regime to justify itself.

However, ‘civil society’ might still earn the people’s belief that it is a word that is worthy of trust, in contrast to ‘democracy’, a heavily worn-out word of the Soviet period. Its legacy is evident: there seems to be a shared notion among administrators that democracy is attainable by more or less *inclusive participation*, but without meaningful *contestation*,<sup>99</sup> which might

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<sup>98</sup> Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka*, p. 169.

<sup>99</sup> An article on democracy in a popular Uzbekistani handbook on political thought provides reflections on its history, its essential equality, its nature as a people’s government, its possible compromise, and people’s participation (direct or indirect). It also gives a citation of Karimov on Eastern democracy, but says nothing about contestation. See: Abdulhafiz Jalolov and Ko‘chqor Xonozarov (eds.), *Mustaqillik: izohli ilmiy-ommabop lug‘at* (Toshkent, 2000). Public contestation is one of two axes, together with participation, which



be observed from top (presidential elections) to bottom (*mahalla oqsoqoli* elections). Entrusting the *mahalla* with greater responsibilities has been possible because it is not a formal part of the political system, and little chance exists of seeing them linking up horizontally and contesting vertically for policy concessions. The *mahalla* is designed to foster civic obligation, rather than to directly engage citizens in contested political activity.

However, people seem more willing to complain and protest. The events in Andijon in September 2004, where thousands reportedly took to the streets to halt traffic in protest to the increasing economic hardship,<sup>100</sup> Qo‘qon in November 2004 to protest police confiscation of merchandise,<sup>101</sup> in Jizzax Province in April 2005, where a smaller crowd gathered to protest the abduction and beating of an activist, and Marxamat District of Andijon to protest a crackdown on business and arbitrary taxation, might all indicate that people are becoming less mobilised by mere calls for ‘construction’ of civil society, than by *individual interests* that call for rights to overcome actual problems in life. But then, such manifestations (albeit voluntary) lack leadership or integrated strategy of a political association and fall prey to severe armed crackdown, when lumped together with militants (as events of Andijon in May 2005 where reportedly several hundred people were killed emphasise).

Further divisions of interests triggered by privatisation might engender internal differences among administrators in preference to executing policies. These differences, in turn, might engender personnel changes in administration, but this too will not necessarily induce democratisation. In Uzbekistan, it is difficult to imagine in the near future that the *civil* public will transform itself into the *political* public, exercising its rights to dismiss regimes that failed to respond to the people’s aspirations. People tend to regard politics as something to avoid, as an ethically corrupt business.

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are respected in the measurement of liberal democracy. See: Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, 1971).

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Kimmage, ‘Analysis: Taking to the Streets in Uzbekistan’ posted on 28 September 2004 <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/9/73FA4EE3-64EB-4A92-ADC1-CC05FB56875F.html>>, accessed 5 April 2005.

<sup>101</sup> RFE/RL Uzbek Service/AFP report ‘Rioting Reported in Eastern Uzbek City’ posted on 1 November 2004 <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/11/5EC130DC-9553-4DB6-B742-EC3E177B3376.html>>, accessed 5 April 2005.

The experience in Uzbekistan demonstrates that the new politics of civil society can be hijacked to justify the continuation of the arbitrary control of administrators who are not accountable to citizens. Plainly, calls for civil society can be useful in containing or hampering opposition.<sup>102</sup> Post-Soviet administrators' discourse on the *mahalla* as a foundation of civil society in Uzbekistan is transparent as an expression of a desire to maintain control and voluntary subjection of citizens under the reorganising administration.

The politics of 'constructing' or 'fostering' a civil society, played by both actors and researchers in civil society alike, irrespective of their original intentions, should be cautioned and reexamined, because 'civil society' could be used to *cover up* the nature of underlying power relations and to acknowledge, either implicitly or explicitly, the necessity of interventionist administrative control from above. Endogenous formation of responsive institutions that guarantee the rights of the citizenry, such as independent political parties, fair and functioning judiciary institutions, free and professional media, and a truly open market economy, is a long and arduous process. However, only through such a formation of stable democracy can a democratic civil society be achieved in the region. After all, individual rights are only effectively protected by one's status as a citizen of a democratic state. Walzer's suggestion that 'only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state'<sup>103</sup> sounds all the more true in the environment surrounding Uzbekistan.

Rather than presenting 'the great objective of ending tyranny' and acting against violations of rights in an impromptu manner, or intervening through the intermediary of donor-sided assistance organisations, sustained commitment should be made to an indigenous effort, however humble in its appearance, to building a state that is equipped with the political capability to defend its own civil rights and nurture its critical public sphere.

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<sup>102</sup> In Uzbekistan's neighbor, Kazakhstan, a 'consultative body' works out proposals for 'further democratisation of civil society'. It comprises deputies of the legislative body, members of the governmental presidential administration and representatives of political parties and NGOs. It was created in 2002 in order 'to see who really wants to improve the life of society and make useful proposals, and who simply shouts about in the streets' (President Nazarbaev). 'Kazakhstan to Further Democratised Civil Society', article posted on Pravda.ru. <<http://english.pravda.ru/cis/2002/11/15/39549.html>>, accessed 5 April 2005.

<sup>103</sup> Walzer, 'The Concept of Civil Society', p. 24.

**Chart 1 Post-Soviet Central Asia States at a Glance**

Country	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (2003)	Urban population (per cent of total)	Annual population growth rate (1975-2002)	Population under 15 (per cent of total, 2002)	Life expectancy at birth (years, 2002)	Adult literacy rate (per cent of age 15 and above, 2002)	Combined gross enrollment ratio for primary, secondary, and tertiary schools (per cent, 2001/02)	GDP per capita (PPP US\$, 2002)	Gross national income per capita (US\$, 2002)	Population below \$2 a day (per cent)*	UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) rank (2004)**	Number of NGOs***	Combined average of Freedom House's political rights and civil liberty ratings (2004)****	Cumulative total of Japan's ODA (to 2002, million Yen)				
															Donation		Total	Loan aid	
															Grant aid	Technical aid			
Uzbekistan	425,400	25,604,000	36.8	2.3	34.5	69.5	99.3	76	1,670	310	77.5	107	ca. 3,000	6.5	13,542	5,296	18,838	81,193	100,031
Kyrgyzstan	191,300	5,052,000	34.0	1.6	32.6	68.4	97.0	81	1,620	290	27.2	110	ca. 1,050	5.5	8,185	4,106	12,291	25,665	37,956
Tajikistan	142,700	6,305,000	25.0	2.2	37.4	68.6	99.5	73	980	180	50.8	116	ca. 1,250	5.5	4,981	945	5,926	0	5,926
Turkmenistan	488,100	4,863,000	45.1	2.4	34.6	66.9	98.8	81	4,300	n.a.	44.0	86	ca. 270	7.0	600	350	950	4,505	5,455
Kazakhstan	2,669,800	14,908,190	55.8	0.3	26.0	66.2	99.4	81	5,870	1,520	8.5	78	ca. 4,000	5.5	4,126	7,785	11,911	88,788	100,699

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004*; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*; World Bank, *Country Briefs 2004*; World Bank, *Making Transition Work for Everyone, 2000*; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2004*; USAID, *NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia 2003*; MoFA Japan, *ODA White Book 2003* and other MoFA materials.

Notes:

\* Percentage of the population living on less than \$2.15 a day at 1993 international prices. Survey years are: Kazakhstan & Kyrgyz Republic (2001), Tajikistan & Turkmenistan (1998), Uzbekistan (2000) (World Bank).

\*\* The HDI is a composite index that measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, as measured using life expectancy at birth; knowledge, as measured using the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrollment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools; and a decent standard of living, as measured using GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars (UNDP).

\*\*\* USAID 2003 estimates according to governmental and NGO Counterpart Consortium sources.

\*\*\*\* Freedom House *Freedom in the World* ratings based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level and 7 the lowest level of freedom.

**Chart 2 Statistical data on the ‘Organs of self-government of citizens’ (*mahalla*) in Uzbekistan (as of August 1, 2003)**

	Administrative districts	City (shahar)		Settlement (shaharcha)		‘Qishloq’-type village		‘Oval’-type village		Organs of self-government of citizens (total)	Mahallas (total)	Mahallas as ‘social units’ (total)	Mahalla guard associations (total)	Mahalla guard members (total)
		Mahallas	Mahallas as ‘social units’	Citizens’ meetings	Mahallas	Mahallas as ‘social units’	Citizens’ meetings	Mahallas	Mahallas as ‘social units’					
Andijon Province	14	91	5	20	95	707	28			918	818	28	790	4080
Namangan Province	12	167	12	48	99	521	40			847	736	40	736	5046
Farg‘ona Province	16	174	11	78	163	546				972	798		972	5808
Toshkent Province	15	194	18	154	164	901	384			1431	1249	449	747	6649
Toshkent City	11	448	5							448	448	5	448	3896
Sirdaryo Province	9	5	5	5	77	278	104	16		370	288	104	220	1250
Jizzax Province	12	61	8	30	104	187	130			390	278	141	148	619
Samarqand Province	19	288	6	46	125	678	51			1149	1012	63	1012	7147
Novoyt Province	9	81	5	6	40	181				329	268		271	963
Buxoro Province	13	115	2	3	121	147				388	265		298	2384
Qashqadaryo Province	14	200	5	9	152	159				525	368		514	3080
Surxondaryo Province	14	92	5	15	115	571	34			798	678	34	678	4406
Xorazm Province	10	52	7	59	112	505	379			736	617	398	181	465
Republic of Qoraqalpog‘iston	15	133	16	30				124	11	314	174		303	2118
Total	183	2101	22	111	1367	5381	1150	140	11	9615	7997	1262	7318	47911

Source: Q. Tillabekov (ed.), ‘Mahalla’ Foundation (unpublished material provided by Chairperson A. Gadoyboev)