THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL REVOLUTION:
AN EXPLORATION OF POLITICS, IDENTITY, AND LIBERATION THROUGH
ISLAMIC RESURGENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

BY

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with love and gratitude,

[Signature]

SP
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This thesis is an exploration of the nature and causes of the resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia, specifically the region of the Fergana Valley, in the 1990s and beyond. Chapter One addresses the philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of Islamic resurgence worldwide. I narrow the focus of this chapter onto the term *jihad*, as well as the language we use to talk about political interpretations of Islam. Necessarily, the chapter delves into the writing of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, which ideologically inspired and validated resurgence both in Egypt and abroad. While talking about the language used in discussions of political manifestations of Islam, I also specifically address the terms and history that relate directly to the Central Asian environment upon which I am most focused.

Chapter Two is a discussion of the social, political, historical, and economic context that allowed for the rise of Central Asian political parties using Islamic rhetoric and ascribing to specific interpretations of Islamic values. To fully explain the trajectory of events, I describe the conditions of Islam and Muslims in Central Asia before, during, and after the Soviet Union. Chapter Three concludes this thesis with an investigation into the ideologies specifically excluded from political parties that self-identify as Islamic. Namely, I use a comparative framework based on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 to explain the ideological opposition of Islam and Marxism, and extend this discussion into a series of questions and larger themes around the relationship between politics, theologies, and “Islam and the West.”

The purpose of this thesis, however, extends beyond exploring the resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia. Careful attention has been given to the decolonization of narratives: I have sought to focus the major narrative of this thesis
upon the Muslims of Central Asia, who constitute a historically repressed and underrepresented group. I have done my best to let this group drive their own story forward, and labored to avoid the biases and pitfalls of Western perspective that often inadvertently create colonial and Islamophobic structures within an academic work.

I have also sought to incorporate a sense of emotion into particularly the latter half of this thesis. I am of the firm belief that academics need to make more space in their work for the confusing and emotional components of the identities and events they analyze. This thesis attempts to incorporate both self-reflections on identity and outsider-reflections upon the emotions present in political engagement. This is done with the hope of not reducing the complexities that lie at the intersection of even a single person’s feelings and actions surrounding politics, theologies, and identities. I also attempt to highlight the sense of emotion necessarily present in revolutionary political action, because I feel that few scholars studying politics truly take the emotional reality of political living into account.

A bit about your author and my path in the creation of this thesis: the only plan I had upon beginning this project was to learn as much as I could about Islamic resurgence in Central Asia. I began by researching the social, historical, and political context in which the resurgence occurred, and this eventually formed the basis of one of the following chapters. Questions that this research raised or gaps of understanding from the material became the topics explored in the other two body chapters of this work. It was absolutely crucial to me in the development of this thesis to maintain a solid and intellectually powerful framework of Islamic Studies. This was particularly so not only because I believe that strong foundations are the key to nuanced and thorough work, but also because I am relatively new to the discipline of Islamic Studies. This
thesis truly was an exploration, or even an adventure. I study religion, yes, but delving into something properly categorized as 'Islamic Studies' was still a change of lens for me. I am glad I did so, however—I sought a thesis topic and experience that would push me intellectually in ways that I had not been pushed before. Many theses deal with new, shiny ideas, but I wanted more to 'get back to basics' and solidify my own intellectual foundations: to labor most at the pillars of a large academic work. This was the area where I needed to improve my skillset the most, and where I would have the most to learn. I think I could have written an excellent thesis that was essentially an amalgamation of papers I had written previously for Swarthmore’s Religion Department, but I am not convinced that I would have grown particularly much during that process or gained more than praise. This thesis challenged my fundamental understanding of Islam, my grasp of theoretical frameworks regarding Islam, my knowledge and study of intellectual history, my sense and understanding of historicity, and my conceptions of the relationship between religion and politics. As such, I have tried to be incredibly careful about the language I have used in my writing and to maintain a stable theoretical basis.

The greatest challenge presented to me in the course of this writing was the lack of sources that shared my aspirations for solid frameworks. The only published works on political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia are written by political scientists or historians. While I respect the work these scholars have done, none of them are scholars of Islam and none of them demonstrate an understanding of Islam on a theoretical or foundational level. This is reflected in the ways in which they represent and describe Islam in Central Asia. Creating a work of Islamic Studies scholarship from these sources was not a simple task, as I had to reassess many of the assumptions and conclusions my
sources made. Furthermore, I had no book or paper to look to or even look up to while tinkering with my own frameworks and language.

Other challenges include my lack of Central Asian language skills—I should stipulate here that my previous assertion regarding the disciplines of scholars writing on Central Asia only applies to English language sources. I am woefully unable to read Arabic, Persian, Uzbek, Tajik, or Russian, and as such, I was limited in the number of sources available to me at large, regardless of their quality or theoretical frameworks. Research and writing on Islam in Central Asia is surprisingly slim in the English-language academic canon.

Yet, difficulties aside, here my thesis sits. I hope it challenges and intrigues you as much as it did me.
The Philosophical Background of Islamic Resurgence and its Terminology

What drives this thesis forward is a desire to develop an understanding of the social, political, historical, and intellectual factors that have led to Islamic resurgence in Central Asia, with a focus on the specific area of the Ferghana Valley. Such an understanding requires a break from a framework of thought based in popular or media-driven Western understandings of Islam and Islamic resurgence. Therefore, a dissection of the terminology frequently used in discussing Islamic resurgence is needed, as well as a study of the Islamic intellectual history from which Islamic resurgence draws its philosophical and theological backing.

This chapter, therefore, will first discuss the philosophical backbone of intellectual thought on Islamic resurgence and, concurrently, the term upon which both resurgence and Western conceptions of this resurgence hangs: jihad. Following that, this chapter will develop an understanding of what the language we use in talking about politicized forms of Islam actually means and its implications. Finally, this chapter will sharpen its focus to my particular area of interest and discuss terms and history necessary to understanding the subsequent social, political, and historical factors that contributed to Islamist resurgence in the Ferghana Valley.

Intellectual Underpinnings

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’ authored Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World, which fittingly discusses the intellectual origins of Islamic resurgence. I must note first off that the leaders of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia draw their philosophical underpinnings from the modern Arab intellectuals Abu-Rabi’ discusses, even if the Muslims of Central Asia are not Arabic in ethnicity. Abu-Rabi’
samantha pellegrino suggests that the major foundation of modern islamic resurgence stems from the intellectual and philosophical work of the egyptian sayyid qutb, whose philosophy is most closely associated with the ikhwan, known in english as the muslim brotherhood.

however, islamic resurgence cannot only be understood as an extrapolated cult of personality or as a political phenomenon (and this applies to the ikhwan itself, as well). “resurgence,” abu-rabi’ writes, “must be treated in philosophical terms as well, and it should be placed in the larger category of modern arab intellectual history.”1 this larger category of modern arab intellectual history and thought is inextricably linked to modernization, westernization, and colonialization—I would in fact argue that modern arab intellectual history is defined by the interactions of islamic intellectuals with the west and its political and ideological hegemony. post-nineteenth-century islamic thought is “…bewildered by the questions and issues which the west and colonialism have engendered in the modern muslim world.”2 abu-rabi’ thus notes, “one can see islamic resurgence, therefore, as a neo-traditional islamism, which, in many ways, has felt the impact of the west and has been compelled to forge a kind of an intellectual and political synthesis in order to respond to the formidable challenge of the west…in other words, islamic resurgence is not a strident assertion of old values in a condensed and purified form, but is a reaction to an aggressive western and capitalist modernity.”3

or, viewed from a slightly different perspective:

“western modernity has, thus, translated itself in the modern muslim world into a complex political, economic, and cultural phenomenon known as ‘colonialism,’ which possesses a radically different outlook than that of islam. that is what makes islamism, as a modern religious movement, a reaction to the onslaught of modernity and its philosophical outlook.”4

1 ibrahim m. abu-rabi’, intellectual origins of islamic resurgence in the modern arab world (albany: state U of new york, 1996) 11.
2 ibid, 37.
3 ibid, 44.
4 ibid, 50-1.
ISLAMIC RESURGENCE: POLITICS, IDENTITY, AND LIBERATION
Samantha Pellegrino

Is Islamic resurgence, however, a religious movement, even when understood as "a neo-traditional Islamism"? Abu-Rabi' does not think so, and expresses his views as such:

"...Islamic resurgence is undoubtedly a modern phenomenon—the product, to a large extent, of modern conditions which ironically enable it to use Islamic symbols to face the new situation...It seems to me that the resurgence is Islamic only to the extent that it has utilized and re-invented the main Islamic symbols of *tajdid* (renewal), *Islah* (reform), *ijtihad* (reasoning), and *harakiyya* (dynamism) in a modern setting. However, one must perceive Islamic resurgence as a socioreligious phenomenon evolving mainly in reaction to the Western thrust into the Muslim world."^5

It is key to understand the distinction Abu-Rabi' makes here between religious identities and political identities using religious idioms, as Mahmood Mamdani eloquently terms it. Islamic resurgence draws upon religious idioms, concepts, symbols, and terminology, but the movement of resurgence itself is political in nature, even though it is grown from modern Arab intellectual thought and not purely politics. I write that this understanding is key because of the Western tendency to conflate Islam as a religion with the politically motivated activities of Islamic resurgent groups. That conflation is fundamentally inaccurate and leads to disturbing conclusions about the nature of Islam and its adherents. Understanding that Islamic resurgence movements are idiomatically Islamic but derive from political aspirations is therefore crucial to a fair and non-discriminatory appraisal of the place of Islam in the 21st century.

Islamic resurgence is a political movement with a philosophical basis that stems from the interactions of the Muslim world and Western political and colonial hegemony. As previously mentioned, however, the work of Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb had a great effect on the philosophical development of Islamic resurgence. Qutb was peasant-

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^5 Ibid, 53-4.
^6 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004) 36.
born and began his intellectual career in the field of literary criticism. From 1933 to 1952, however, he developed ideas regarding Islam, social justice, and politics that have greatly influenced the Islamic resurgence movement today. Abu-Rabi’ feels that Qutb’s Islamic commitment crystallized in 1949 with the publication of his work *Social Justice in Islam*, and I am inclined to agree. As such, while the larger history of Qutb’s intellectual ideas is indeed fascinating, I will discuss Qutb’s contribution to Islamic resurgence movements beginning with his 1949 work.

*Social Justice in Islam* was a critical commentary on the conditions and policies of Egypt in the interwar period that focused specifically on the political, social, and economic problems of Egypt’s peasantry in light of Qutb’s understanding of “genuine Islam”. Qutb focused particularly on finding a true Islamic solution to the problems the working class was facing. This particular focus stemmed from Qutb’s belief that religion “...should be understood as *this-world*-oriented, and it is to be sought in works. Thus the believer must translate faith into meaningful social action.” He defines Islamic social justice as “(1) absolutely freedom of conscience; (2) complete equality of all men; and (3) the permanent mutual responsibility of society.”

Furthermore, there is no distinction for Qutb between social conditions and political theory and practice. Qutb sees Islam in the present era as ‘in decline’, particularly when compared to Islam of the past. Islam, he feels, is at a crossroads:

“It is not sufficient that Islam should have been a living force in the past; it is not enough that it produced a sound and well-constructed society in the time for the Prophet and in the age of the caliphate. Since that distant time there have been immense changes in life, mental, economic, political, and social: there have been material changes in the earth, and in the powers relative to man.”

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7 Abu-Rabi’, 112.
8 Ibid, 114.
9 Ibid, 117.
Qutb emerges, then, from *Social Justice in Islam* with what Abu-Rabi’ describes as a “radical Islamic agenda,” emerging from a sense of Islamic social justice once held by Islamic communities in the past, but now departed. After *Social Justice in Islam*, in the 1950s, Qutb began to develop a political Islamic ideology in his work. He understood Islam as an all-encompassing system that legislates the relationship both between God and man but also between man and man. Furthermore, Islam from its conception is a radical force of change:

“Islam appeared in order to change the reality of humanity [as a whole]. It is not here to change humanity’s beliefs, conceptions, terminologies, feelings, and rites only, but instead to create a new reality above and over that of the *jahiliyah* in which humanity lived and to which it may return... *Jahiliyah* is one condition of life which is not restricted to a certain phase, and it starts with the servitude of man to man...”

Qutb, in Abu-Rabi’s words, behaves like a true liberation theologian: he “…exhorts the weak, both men and women, to discover the immense sources of power which they possess, and to rise against the oppressive status quo.” And it is through an understanding of the Qur’an that one can begin this “personal and political revolution.”

This leads us to the point at which it is appropriate to discuss the Qutbian concept of *jihad*. *Jihad*, however, is an incredibly charged term that lies at the base of modern Islamic resurgence. It must be understood more thoroughly as a concept before we can discuss Qutb’s conception of it. The next section draws from Mahmood Mamdani’s *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* as well as Abu-Rabi’ to develop a nuanced

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10 Ibid, 120.
11 Ibid, 151.
12 Ibid, 153.
13 Ibid, 181.
14 Ibid.
understanding of exactly what *jihad* is. That section will conclude with a discussion of Qutbian *jihad* before proceeding onwards into a discussion about Islam, politicization, and radicalization.

**Jihad**

Literally speaking, *jihad* translates to ‘effort’ or ‘struggle’. *Al-jihad al-akbar*, the greater *jihad*, is understood as a struggle against oneself, the struggle to be a better person—it looks inward for its struggle. *Al-jihad al-asghar*, the lesser *jihad*, has more to do with defense and self-preservation. Mamdani notes that,

> The lesser *jihad*...is the source of Islamic notions of what Christians call ‘just war,’ rather than ‘holy war’. Modern Western thought, strongly influenced by Crusades-era ideas of ‘holy war,’ has tended to portray *jihad* as an Islamic war against unbelievers...Tomaz Mastnak has insisted, ‘*Jihad* cannot properly be defined as holy war’: ‘*Jihad* is a doctrine of spiritual effort of which military action is only one possible manifestation; the crusade and *jihad* are, strictly speaking, not comparable.’[15]

According to Reuven Firestone in *Jihad: The Origins of Holy War in Islam*, historically, *Qur’anic* exegesis has suggested an evolutionary theory of development for religiously authorized warring in Islam. However, Firestone feels that the conflicting views reflected in the verses of the *Qu’ran* around this topic (which he categorizes as a)

> “Verses expressing nonmilitant means of propagating or defending the faith”, b) “Verses expressing restrictions on fighting”, c) “Verses expressing conflict between God’s command and the reaction of Muhammad’s followers” and d) “Verses strongly advocating war for God’s religion”[16] make it impossible to prove an evolution of the concept from nonaggressive to militant. Instead, he suggests the contradictions in verses

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prove the existence of multiple factions within the early Muslim community with different takes on the justification for war. Firestone develops a new reading of the Qur’anic discourse on religiously authorized warring. He writes,

"Taken together, the verses among the four categories reveal how the transition from pre-Islamic to Islamic systems of personal and community identity, social structure, governance, and conduct towards outsiders was a painful process. Pre-Islamic fighting was nonideological and was conducted either for material gain or to retaliate or exact revenge on unrelated or distant kinship groups. Responsibility to engage in war was a necessary component of kinship responsibility and tribal solidarity. Fighting in the fully developed Islamic system, on the other hand, became a highly ideological issue despite the added benefit of material gain in the form of spoils. Motivation to engage in war moved from economic incentive and kinship commitment to the ideological responsibility of religious commitment, and it created the awkward situation in which new Muslims were commanded to fight against members of their own intimate kinship groups because of their new religious affiliation. Religious affiliation replaced kinship affiliation as the religious community replaced the tribe, but the transition was difficult and...never entirely successful."\(^{17}\)

In other words, the change in social and political structure with a greater emphasis given to religious affiliation shaped the evolution of justification for religiously motivated war. “Ideology (or if you wish, religion),” writes Firestone, “therefore, evolved into a more important determinant of identity and solidarity than kinship.”\(^{18}\)

Thus, “the point is not to prove the existence of a unified religious community engaging in holy war under the undisputed leadership of Muhammad but, rather, to suggest that religious ideological criteria became the dominant means of self-identification under the Medinan umma at the same time that the conflict with the Meccan Quraysh was being seen increasingly as a holy war that must be fought until victory.”\(^{19}\) Historically, then, the roots of jihad are in the construction of a new identity structure based on religious ideology instead of kinship.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 91.
\(^{18}\) Ibid, 133.
\(^{19}\) Ibid, 133-4.
In the historical period and the modern period, then, *jihad* and political action do not have to be contradictory forces. Rebellion against an unjust ruler, regardless of their religion, is sanctioned, and as such social and political struggle can be included under the definition of *al-jihad al-asghar*. However, while Khaled Abou El Fadl acknowledges the existence of the concept of ‘just war’ in the Qur’an, in his essay, ‘The Place of Tolerance in Islam’, he also notes that,

>"The Qur’anic text does not recognize the idea of unlimited warfare, and does not consider the simple fact of the belligerent’s Muslim identity to be sufficient to establish the justness of his cause... Moreover, while the Qur’an emphasizes that Muslims may fight those who fight them, it also insists that Muslims may not transgress. Transgression is an ambiguous term, but on several occasions the Qur’an intimates that in order not to transgress, Muslims must be constrained by a requirement of proportionality, even when the cause is just."20

Sayyid Qutb defines *jihad* in light of his understanding of Islam as “a revolutionary ‘aqidah or ideology that seeks to dismantle the status quo and rebuild anew on the bases of the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man from the servitude of other men.”21 This is because Qutb understands Islam as “a universal declaration of the freedom of man from [the] servitude of other men and [the] servitude to his own desires.”22 However, Qutb feels that nationalism, secularization, and orientalism have blurred the lines between physical war and *jihad*. The supreme aim of *jihad*, by his understanding, is always to preserve ‘*aqidah* and defend it in the case of danger. The expansion of Islam, however, is not fundamentally defensive: it is instead the logical follow-through of the spread of the Islamic message. Other scholars of Islam are not properly differentiating

22 Ibid.
between the principles of noncoercion in religion and annihilating *jahiliyah*. *Jihad*, Qutb thinks, is simply necessary to “elevate the divine banner.”\(^{(23)}\)

Perhaps the key factor in understanding how Qutb thinks about *jihad* is understanding how Qutb thinks of about Islam. To Qutb, Islam is not a conventional religion, nor a mere relationship between man and God. It certainly is not constrained by our modern definition of nation/state. Instead, “It is *‘aqidah* lived and practiced freely. In Qutb’s mind, *‘aqidah* is distinguished by realism, dynamism, and submission to God. Muslims must fight if these characteristics are blurred or barred, ‘The function of *jihad* is to protect *‘aqidah* from siege, *fitnah*, and to protect its method and system in life.’\(^{(24)}\)

The principle of *jihad* address man, not only doctrine and society. As such, “‘The principle of *jihad* is conditioned on the emancipation of man from the slavery of other men (194).’” Furthermore, Islam is not what the orientalists have made it out to be: it “is not a philosophical elucidation of a scholastic doctrine, or an explanation of a metaphysical proposition, but a call for an internal social revolution.’\(^{(25)}\) Qutb’s conception of *jihad*, then, is particularly well understood as a response to what he sees as the state of decline of modern Islam, and the necessity of emancipating both Islam itself and its adherents from the imperialist pressures of the West.

Qutb also derives much of his notion of *jihad* from the Pakistani journalist and politician Abul A’la Mawdudi, who conceived of *jihad* as “the ultimate struggle for the seizure of state power.”\(^{(26)}\) Mawdudi understood “the ultimate objective of Islam [as]
abolish[ing] the lordship of man over man and bring[ing] him under the rule of one God."27 He also added to that,

"To stake everything you have—including your lives—to achieve this purpose is called Jihad...So, I say to you: if you really want to rot out corruption now so widespread on God’s earth, stand up and fight against corrupt rule; take power and use it on God’s behalf. It is useless to think you can change things by preaching alone."28

Qutb’s thoughts on jihad, then, are strongly influenced by the founder of Pakistan’s Jamaat-i-Islami, Abul A’la Mawdudi. Qutb also does not see a contradiction in using force to realize freedom:

"Islam is a declaration of the freedom of every man or woman from servitude to other humans. It seeks to abolish all those systems and governments that are based on the rules of some men over others, or the servitude of some to others. When Islam liberates people from these external pressures and invites them to its spiritual message, it appeals to their reason, and gives them complete freedom to accept or reject it."29

The talk of jihad, especially in relation to the state and social revolution, necessarily raises questions about Islam and politicization. What is political Islam? And what does the language we use to talk about political manifestations of Islam imply or reify?

"Political Islam"

In Good Muslims, Bad Muslims, Mahmood Mamdani does an excellent job of explaining exactly what we mean when we say ‘political Islam’ and why certain variations of this term are deeply problematic. I previously commented on the distinction Mamdani makes between religious identities and political identities using religious idioms, which I personally find to be incredibly apt, when discussing Islamic resurgence. In discussing political variations of Islam, Mamdani first notes the Western

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid, 57.
tendency to categorize Muslims as 'good Muslims' or 'bad Muslims'. Doing so politicizes a cultural term, but culture itself is not political or territorial—only states are.

Mamdani first separates out the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'political'. Religious fundamentalism is a counterculture movement that emerges within religions, not between them, as "a critique of liberal forms of religion that religious conservatives saw as accommodating an aggressive secular power." Politicized religions, however, are not religious identities—they are the aforementioned "...political identities that use a religious idiom, such as political Christianity and political Islam, which are political identities formed through direct engagement with modern forms of power." The clue to distinguishing between a political or religious identity is its agenda, not its language.

Within the sphere of political identities, there are radical and reformist, or moderate, manifestations and representations. According to Mamdani, "The difference between moderate and radical political Islam lay in the following: whereas moderates fought for social reforms within the system, radicals were convinced that no meaningful social reform would be possible without taking over the state." Furthermore, radical movements can be society-centered or state-centered: society-centered radicals "link the problem of democracy in society with the state" whereas state-centered radicals "pose the problem of the state at the expense of democracy in society." Another important note is that society-centered radicals advocate the use of ijtihad, whereas state-centered

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31 Ibid, 36.
32 Ibid, 58.
33 Ibid, 38.
34 Ibid.
radicals prefer to keep those doors shut. Radical, state-centered political Islamist movements are those that have and continue to engage in acts of political terror.

I would add one further specification to Mamdani’s excellent system of classification. Islam must be understood as a set of transcendent and primordial moral and ethical principles. It is not articulated in what one does and Muslims do not embody it. To suggest there is a political variety of Islam as opposed to a non-political variety implies that Islam can be of many different types. I would argue for the use of terms such as ‘political manifestations of Islam’ or ‘political variants of Islam’ in order to make explicit our fundamental and initial understanding of what Islam is, at least from an Islamic Studies perspective.

We have discussed the development of political manifestations of Islam without using such explicit terminology: the history of Sayyid Qutb’s intellectual thought is essentially the history of the transition from a reformist to radical agenda within the Ikhwan. Mamdani adds a few important points to our discussion of Qutb: first, the development of political variants of Islam grew, at least in the case of the Ikhwan, from non-clerical political intellectuals who struggled to confront Western modernity and global dominance by looking within the Islamic tradition for solutions. This is nothing we do not already know, but it emphasizes exactly how important Qutb’s work was in its context. Second, Mamdani also emphasizes that “The shift from a reformist to a radical agenda in political Islam is best understood in the context of the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism.” This grants further validation to Abu-Rabi’s focus on the interaction between Muslim intellectuals and colonialization, westernization, and

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36 Ibid, 48.
imperialism. El Fadl adds his validation here, as well, commenting both on the influence of colonialism and imperialism in the radicalization of manifestations of Islam and also on the dually internal and external natures of *jihad*:

“Militant puritan groups, however, are both introverted and extroverted—they attempt to assert power against both Muslims and non-Muslims. As populist movements, they are a reaction to the disempowerment most Muslims have suffered in the modern age at the hands of harshly despotic governments, and at the hands of interventionist foreign powers.”

Mamdani also notes that Qutb was not the only reason the Ikhwan became more extreme, though he certainly was a part of it: the Ikhwan was strongly influenced by Marxism-Leninism alongside Qutb’s work, as Marxism-Leninism was considered “the most important alternative to political Islam in intellectual debates on how best to confront a repressive secular state that had closed off all possibilities of democratic change.”

With a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the terminology surrounding political manifestations of Islam, including buzzwords like *jihad* and *fundamentalism*, and having discussed the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of modern Islamic resurgence, we can now move forward to apply our newly-developed lens to the specific area of the Ferghana Valley. I will discuss key terms that become important in understanding the development of social, political, historical, and economic conditions in the Ferghana Valley, and begin to outline the history of colonialization and imperialism in the area, as well.

*The Ferghana Valley*

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37 El Fadl, 11.
38 Mamdani, 49-50.
I will demonstrate throughout this thesis that, alongside modern Islamic intellectual thought and philosophy, the social, economic, political, and historical context of Islam, especially the treatment of Muslims during the Soviet Union, all contributed to Islamic resurgence in Central Asia. To understand the effect of the Soviet Union, however, it is necessary to first understand the history of Islam in Central Asia before and during the Russian Empire.

I will begin with functional terminology, first exploring the idea of a ‘Soviet Muslim’ and then moving into a discussion of ‘Soviet Islam’ or ‘Central Asian Islam’. A discussion of Russia as colonial power and the history of Islam in different Central Asian countries (defined by our current borders) will necessarily be included in this conversation. I will then explain how the Russian Empire became involved with each country and the response of the colonized up until the Soviet period, and finally return to themes of nationalism in order to understand the schema used by the Soviet government to label and organize its Central Asia subjects prior to the establishment of anti-religious policies. This will provide the reader with the requisite background information to proceed forward into a study of how the Soviet Union created the conditions necessary to generate what eventually became violent Islamic resurgence.

Functional Terminology

To begin, there is no such thing as a ‘Soviet Muslim’. As scholar Yaacov Ro’i states simply, Muslims in Central Asia are not a homogenous group. The term implies a lack of understanding of the diversity of Muslim communities in the Central Asia region. However, the Russian Empire understood itself in relation to its religiosity: the Russian state was fundamentally Russian Orthodox. As scholar Yuri Slezkine notes, “Not all of
the tsar’s subjects and not all Orthodox believers were Russians, but all Russians were expected to be Orthodox subjects of their Orthodox tsar.” As such, Muslims of Central Asia were lumped together categorically under the umbrella of ‘Soviet Muslims’ during the Russian Empire. Soviet policies towards Muslims in Central Asia grew in response to this previous categorization. Furthermore, this extreme otherizing shaped dominant cultural attitudes towards Muslims in Russia and encouraged a sense of hostility to Islam, which persisted and manifested itself even after the attempted establishment of a purely Soviet culture.

Of course, this attitude was developed over time and evolved greatly in relation to the contact the Russian Empire had with the non-Christian peoples of Central Asia. It was simultaneously a process of the Russians constructing Russian identity and also constructing non-Russian, non-Christian identities. This was process was also fundamentally colonial and orientalist. It is perhaps necessary here to stipulate that this thesis posits a relationship of colonial lands and empire between the territories of Central Asian peoples and Russia proper. As Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini understand in the introduction of their excellent collection, *Russia’s Orient*:

"Implicit in our approach to the Russian Empire is the idea that the relations between eastern and southern regions and the state were those of colonial lands and empire. Their peoples were dominated politically and militarily by an imperial center and were considered backward as gauged by customary eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian (Western) measures of civilization. Their status resembled that of the peoples in the overseas colonies of the French and British empires. European rulers distanced themselves from these peoples by emphasizing their exotic, oriental character. By analogy, St. Petersburg ruled its own Russian Orient."  

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Furthermore, this colonial relationship is demonstrated by consistent conceptual similarities in government policy towards the peoples of Central Asia that operated with an understanding of the existence of a savage-civilized/Central Asian-Russian binary.\textsuperscript{41}

Scholar Michael Khodarkovsky describes the process of encounter, contact, and incorporation of non-Christians into the Russian Empire from the Russian perspective:

"First, their identity as the ‘other’, the stranger and the alien, was constructed, as they were seen and described in opposition to the Russians. Then they had to undergo transitional rites of swearing political allegiance and accepting a separate economic status. By classifying the non-Christian peoples and by creating a special status for them, whether preferential or discriminatory, the government set them apart from others and confirmed their separate identity. Finally, religious conversion ended their ‘otherness’. It served as the ultimate rite of incorporation leading to a change of customs, as well as legal and economic integration."\textsuperscript{42}

Yet this was a process that occurred later in the Russian Empire. Initially, Russians and Central Asians had very minimal contact. The Russian Empire did not view its Central Asian neighbors as subjects until the mid 16\textsuperscript{th} century, after Moscow conquered the city-states of Kazan and Astrakhan. These city-states were heirs of the Golden Horde, and this Mongol defeat by proxy proved to Russian contemporaries that the Russian Orthodox state was simply supreme over its Muslim neighbors. From this point forward, "The Russian state could codify its relationship with the disparate non-Christian and non-state-organized peoples along its expanding frontiers only in terms of a suzerain-subject modus operandi."\textsuperscript{43}

Galina M Yemelianova, writer of \textit{Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey} emphasizes the idea of Russian self-elevation over formerly Mongol territory:


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 10.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 11.
"Moscow’s initial policy towards its new Muslim subjects was volatile and combined elements of the eastern Slavic, Great Steppe, Rurik and Byzantine political traditions. In order to elevate themselves over their Geghizid counterparts, the Russia rulers emphasized their adherence to the Byzantine political culture. This accounted for the increasing Byzantine trend in Russia’s historical development...Byzantine Orthodox Christianity was supposed to enhance the divine and sacral authority of the Russian tsar over his multi-ethnic and poly-confessional subjects. Therefore, the enforced comprehensive Christianization of Russia’s population was regarded as a vital condition for the stability of the state."44

There is a degree of irony in that, while the Russians understood themselves as sovereign to the Central Asian peoples and civilizations they encountered, these ‘Others’ did not regard themselves as Russian subjects. For example, Moscow conducted shert’, or peace treaties, with the peoples south and east of Moscow; however, the Russian understanding of shert’ was less a mutual treaty and more “...an allegiance sworn by a non-Christian people to their Muscovite sovereign.”45 Russia’s intention and obsession with the subjugation of these peoples spun around a desperation to incorporate them as loyal members into the Russian state. Khodarkovsky notes, “Either induced by the offers of gifts and payments or intimidated by the force of the Russian army, Russia’s ‘infidel’ neighbors had to be made loyal, to be forced into submission, and eventually to become a part of the Russian state. Their political identity as subjects of the Russian crown had to be constructed and reaffirmed through a peace treaty—a rite intended to change their status from independence to transitional.”46

Moscow also plastered its own names over the indigenous names of the Central Asian population. This led to an understanding of the Central Asian population as a multitude of large ethnolinguistic groups, which became the basis for the organization

46 Khodarkovsky, 13-14.
of Central Asian peoples in the Soviet Union. Russians also had the tendency to refer to non-Christian peoples by one of two terms: *inorodets* and *inoverets*, translating literally to ‘of a different kin’ and ‘of a different faith’, respectively. These terms became popular in the 17th century and were reserved for non-Christian peoples in newly conquered territories. This implies that even with a term like *inorodet* that suggests kinship as a defining factor of difference, the Russians were more preoccupied with religion as a dividing basis. Khodarkovsky notes, “The encounter with numerous non-Christian peoples crystallized Moscow’s self-image as an Orthodox Christian state, and the choice of terms clearly reflected a change in Moscow’s self-perception. Religion became the most important marker separating Russians from the Muslim, Buddhist, or pagan subjects of the growing Russian Empire.”

Moscow also exercised its domination over Central Asia peoples through *iasak*, or levies imposed by the state on specifically non-Christian peoples. This served as a more tangible manifestation of the subjugated status of the indigenous peoples of Central Asia to the Russian Empire, though that was only through Russian eyes: *iasak* was often conceptualized as simply a trade transaction by the ‘colonized’. Furthermore, the economic status of a Central Asian convert to Christianity could be raised: “Upon conversion, non-Christians were given a three-to-give year exemption from *iasak* payment and then joined the regular tax rolls. Like other social categories constructed by Moscow to set the non-Christian apart from the Russian Orthodox, economic identity was inseparable from the religious one.”

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48 Ibid, 15.
49 Ibid, 17.
Religious identity was so important to the Russians because they conceptualized ‘being a Russian’ as synonymous with ‘being Russian Orthodox’. ‘Soviet Muslims’ were all the same thing to the Russian Empire: disloyal subjects who defied the very essence of what it meant to be a Russian citizen. “Ultimately, conversion was the only means by which the government could ensure the non-Russians’ loyalty and their acceptance into Russian society. Their racial characteristics mattered less than their religious affiliation.”

It is important to note, as well, that the Russian Empire did fear the emergence of an untied front of various Soviet Muslims under the umbrella of Turkism against Russia. So conversion served to incorporate Russian-identified subjects into the Russian state (and Russian definition of fundamental Russianness) and also to diffuse the threat of an Islamic uprising.

Scholar Dov Yaroshevski also notes that the process of citizenship (or, in the words of Daniel Brower, “…the time-honored formula of conquest, subjugation, administrative integration, and conversion to Orthodox Christianity”) in the Russian borderlands or Central Asia was envisioned by Russia as “…a kind of cultural revolution which would reform a new social order and would turn rebellious natives into loyal citizens.” This was accomplished not only by conversion, but also by the undermining of the traditional kinship-based aristocracy, through the promotion of local self-government, and through the reformation of native court systems. The systematic nature of this process indicates what we have already seen: a government generalization

50 Ibid, 18.
suggesting that all non-Christian, Central Asian peoples were the same, and severe government anxiety surrounding ideas of empire, statehood, and loyal subjectivity in relation to national identity.

The concept of a ‘Soviet Muslim’, then, was born from the use of ethnicity as a tool of colonialism. Central Asian peoples were defined on the basis of their Otherness, their non-Christianity, in relation to the dominant understanding of Russianness by the Russian Empire. The underlying fixation here, however, is state loyalty — if Orthodox Christianity made a Russian, and Russians were of course loyal subjects to their empire, then the way to assure loyalty in Russia’s newly conquered territories was to make the peoples of these territories Russian, which was defined as Christian.

Functionally speaking, then, the term ‘Soviet Muslim’ carries a history of orientalism and colonialism behind it. When speaking in broad strokes, I will prefer to use the term ‘Central Asian Muslims’, which by virtue of its plurality at least attempts to express the myriad of varieties of Muslim people in Central Asia. Preferably, though, I will not make generalizations about the entire Muslim population of Central Asia in such a way — I will instead refer to more specific cultural groups, and do so only after a discussion of what being a Muslim in each of those cultural contexts specifically means. There is no functional use, then, for the term ‘Soviet Muslim’ in this paper. Yet even in the midst of this declaration, Edward Lazzerini reminds us not to reproduce colonial discourse in our understanding of these events:

“...borderlands are not just arenas of civilizational struggles, of semiotic inequality, that produce and reflect relations of power where the colonizer seeks to define and program the borderland as ‘other’ and ‘same’ and, as Ashis Nandy
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argues, its inhabitants as an ‘intimate enemy,’ but are sites subject to peculiar social contradictions and interactions.”

The peoples of Central Asia are not merely colonial subjects and it is important to not represent them solely as such.

I want now to explore the idea of ‘Central Asian Islam’ or ‘Soviet Islam’ through a discussion of the local flavors of Islam in the region as well as the incorporation of Islam into Central Asian territory. As I have previously mentioned, it is crucial to understand Islam as a static set of transcendent principles. Beginning from there, is there an identifiable manifestation of Islam that is unique to the Soviet Union or Central Asia, or are there multiple local variations of Islam that differ too drastically from one another to label them together? Scholar Yaacov Ro’i writes that there is “...a general picture, a single Islam which existed throughout the Soviet Union. It existed by definition within a single body politic and this polity...both provided a unique political framework with which Islam had to constantly contend and imposed its own special institutions to serve as a conduit between the regime and Islam.” Ro’i therefore champions the idea that the variations of Islam we see in the Soviet Union are all linked to one another and can be culturally identified as a common Soviet Islam.

I agree with Ro’i—it is my opinion that the conditions created by the Soviet Union throughout Central Asia condensed more locally based variants of Islam into one larger bloc. However, it is valuable to know that historically, Islam was not introduced


simultaneously throughout all of Central Asia, and different local populations had different understandings of what being Muslim or practicing Islam meant to them. Again, there is no singular ‘Soviet Muslim’.

This chapter has discussed the major patterns in modern Islamic intellectual thought that have contributed to an Islamic resurgence in Central Asia; the terminology and framework necessary in a study on these topics; and themes of the history of Islam in Central Asia. The next chapter will explore the specific social, political, and economic conditions created by the Soviet Union and its collapse that contributed to Islamic resurgence in the area.
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Works Cited


The Context of Islamic Resurgence in Central Asia

Islamic resurgence does not have a single motivating factor. The phenomenon cannot be explained away by a single event or cultural value or economic hardship. As I have come to understand it, resurgence is born from specific social, political, economic, intellectual, and historical conditions interacting with one another. In the case of Central Asia, and the Ferghana Valley specifically, modern Islamic intellectual thought lay the ideological background for resurgence, but the historical, economic, and political interactions of Islam with its environment created, first, the conditions upon which specific catalytic events played out, encouraging resurgence, and second, the collective memory of the peoples of Central Asia which influenced specific responses to the aforementioned catalytic events.

To demonstrate this, I will discuss the social, economic, political, and historical conditions of Islam and Muslims in the periods before, during, and after the Soviet Union, with a special focus on the Ferghana Valley particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet state. I will work chronologically as I find this is a story that needs preexisting context for all of its parts. I will begin with the history of Islam in what are now Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

A few notes first: the country names as we understand them today (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc) did not exist for the majority of Central Asian history. Our conceptions of those areas of land do not always line up with the historical division of political power. I have done my best to sort out what happened to each of the land regions of these modern countries and their peoples over the course of history, but it can prove confusing at times. Second, this thesis is about Islamic resurgence in Central Asia, and as
such, I am choosing not to address the Tatar people of Russia, even though they are Muslims and had great impact on the region. Occasionally, they will come up—this is invariably the case in history played out in close quarters—but simply due to the amount of information, it has been necessary to focus this work on Central Asian peoples specifically, defined by me using our modern political boundaries to mark out Central Asia.

There is also some necessary historical context here. Most pressingly, it is important to understand that in the 1860s,

"St Petersburg opted for a military campaign to achieve the annexation of Central Asia. It was driven by the logic of the ‘Great Game’ between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain and economic changes within Russia, generated by the bourgeois reforms of Alexander II. The Game acquired a new turn after Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War and British activities in Afghanistan, which was adjacent to Central Asia. Russia was forced to withdraw from active politics in the Middle East and the Balkans and to focus on Central Asia. Following its Western European counterparts, Russian policy-makers preceded the military campaign in Central Asia with intensive ideological propaganda presenting its actions as a civilizing mission."  

With that clear, we can begin a discussion of the varieties of Islam in each of the five Central Asia countries. The major idea this section has to offer, however, is expressed eloquently by Glenn E. Curtis, editor of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies:

"The most important single cultural commonality among the republics is the practice of Sunni Islam, which is the professed religion of a very large majority of the peoples of the five republics and which has experienced a significant revival throughout the region in the 1990s. Propaganda from Russia and from the ruling regimes in the republics identifies Islamic political activity as a vague, monolithic threat to political stability everywhere in the region. However, the role of Islam in the five cultures is far from uniform, and its role in politics has been minimal everywhere except in Tajikistan. For Kazaks, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen, whose society was based on a nomadic life-style that carried on many traditional tribal beliefs after their nominal conversion, Islam has had a less profound influence on

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culture than for the sedentary Tajik and Uzbek Muslims, who have a conventional religious hierarchy.”

To begin with Kazakhstan, Islam first entered the region of modern-day Kazakhstan and its people in the 8th and 9th century after the Arabs conquered a portion of southern Kazakhstan. However, most Kazakh nomads were not introduced to Islam until the 17th and 18th centuries, and even then, the religion was not fully assimilated until the 18th and 19th centuries. Much of this assimilation occurred under Catherine the Great. Catherine

“...facilitated the proliferation of Islam among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyzes and encouraged the Volga Tatars to act as the agents of Islamization there. Tatar merchants established their trade centre near Orenburg, in Kagralinsk, which oversaw Russia’s trade with Kazakhstan and Central Asia. In 1748, Catherine decreed the building in the Kazakh Steppe of mosques, medresses and caravansarais and their staffing with Volga Tatars. Also, the Orenburg Muftiyat was entrusted with a proselytizing mission among Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads. This mission was relatively successful and by the beginning of the nineteenth century Islam turned into the dominant religion among the Kazakhs and Kyrgyzes.”

Islam coexisted in the region with earlier shamanistic and animistic religious elements.

According to Martha Brill Olcott, traditional Kazakh belief “...held that separate spirits inhabited and animated the earth, sky, water, and fire, as well as domestic animals.”

Curses and blessings were also a part of pre-Islamic Kazakh culture. At the time of the writing of the Country Studies, Urban Russified Kazakhs (identified as maybe 40% of the indigenous population) “...profess discomfort with some aspects of the religion even as they recognize it as part of their national heritage.”


57 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 58.


The Kyrgyz people also adopted Islam comparatively late. While Islam was technically introduced in the 9th and 12th centuries, it was not until the 17th century, when the Jungars drove the Kyrgyz of the Tian Shah region to the Ferghana Valley, that the majority of the nomadic population was intensely exposed to Islam. This intense exposure occurred because the population of the Ferghana Valley was entirely Islamic at the point of Kyrgyz migration. According to Olcott,

"The separation of north and south is clearly visible in the culture mores of the two regions, although both are dominated by ethnic Kyrgyz. Society in the Ferghana Valley is much more traditional than in the Chu Valley, and the practice of Islam is more pervasive. The people of the Chu Valley are closely integrated with Kazakhstan...The people of the south are more oriented, by location and by culture, to Uzbekistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and the other Muslim countries to the south...both groups (north and south) came to accept Islam late, but practice in the north tends to be much less influenced by Islamic doctrine and reflects considerable influence from pre-Islamic animist beliefs. The southerners have a more solid basis of religious knowledge and practice."

However, when the Kyrgyz groups left the Ferghana Valley and returned to old territory, the influence of Islam lessened. At the conquering of the Quqon Khanate in the 18th century, the majority of the nomadic Kyrgyz were still aloof to Islamic practices of the regime. It was only by the end of the 19th century that the most of the Kyrgyz had converted at least superficially to Islam. Olcott notes that traces of totemism, which was practiced by the Kyrgyz before and during their contact with Islam, still existed in Kyrgyz practices. Specifically, "Religious practice in the north is more heavily mixed with animism...and shamanist practices, giving worship there a resemblance to Siberian religious practice."

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In contrast to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, by the 9th century, Islam was the prevalent religion of the area we now call Tajikistan. Traditionally, the sedentary peoples of Central Asia, including the Tajiks, were Sunni Muslims, although a small minority of Pamiris in Tajikistan practiced Ismailism. According to Muriel Atkin,

"Long before the Soviet era, rural Central Asians, including inhabitants of what became Tajikistan, had access to their own holy places. There were also small, local religious schools and individuals within their communities who were venerated for religious knowledge and piety. These elements sustained religion in the countryside, independent of outside events."\(^\text{62}\)

Furthermore, Sufism was widely practiced in Tajikistan, the most important form being the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order. There also exist other ‘popular’ manifestations of Islam associated with the abovementioned holy places or with particularly knowledgeable individuals.

Islam came to the Turkmen people primarily through Sufism. According to Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson,

"Islam came to the Turkmen primarily through the activities of Sufi shaykhs rather than through the mosque and the ‘high’ written tradition of sedentary culture. These shaykhs were holy men critical in the process of reconciling Islamic beliefs with pre-Islamic belief systems; they often were adopted as ‘patron saints’ of particular clans or tribal groups, thereby becoming their ‘founders’. Reformulation of communal identity around such figures accounts for one of the highly localized developments of Islamic practice in Turkmenistan."\(^\text{63}\)

Embedded within Turkmen tribal structure is the notion of a holy tribe called öolat. The öolat tribes are said to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad through one of the Four Caliphs. These tribes are accorded a special status because of belief in their

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spiritual powers by means of their sacred origin. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the ovlat tribes dispersed in small, compact groups across Turkmenistan, participating in community and life-cycle events and acting as mediators between clans and tribes.

Clark, Thurman, and Tyson specifically make a point of mentioning the role of women in Turkmen society. They write, “The role of women in Turkmen society has never conformed to Western stereotypes about ‘Muslim women.’ Although a division of labor has existed and women usually were not visible actors in political affairs outside the home, Turkmen women never wore the veil or practiced strict seclusion...During the Soviet period, women assumed responsibility for the observance of some Muslim rites to protect their husbands’ careers.”

Islam was also incredibly present in the area of Uzbekistan. The Arab conquest of the 8th century brought Islam to Uzbekistan and it spread slowly but surely. In Bukhara, the land was organized such that the spiritual and social centers of a commune of people were mosques, headed by mullahs, and mazars, the burial place of a local Islamic saint. A Sufi pir, or sheikh, who was thought to have supernatural or mystical abilities, guarded each mazar.

Bukharans have traditionally been associated with greater performative religiosity than other peoples of the Central Asian area. This association, however, neglects the religiosity present in manifestations of Islam that either occur in nomadic cultures and that are not associated with “high civilization” —Bukhara became a wealthy area populated with material representations of devotion to Islam, such as highly stylized mosques and madrasas. These representations have great visibility and

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64 Ibid, 317.
so are more easily accorded the label ‘religious’ than other manifestations of Islamic practice, such as those in more nomadic societies throughout Central Asia.

Nonetheless, speaking to the particular characteristics of Islam in Bukhara, Yemelianova notes that, “The remoteness of Bukhara, as well as of other Central Asian cities, from the Islamic heartland in the Middle East, and its encirclement by Russian and Chinese ‘infidels’ defined the specific characteristics of regional Islam which incorporated various local pre-Islamic beliefs and adat norms. Iranian religious influence accounted for elements of Shiism in the Turkmens’ Islamic beliefs and practices...”

Many Bukharans were also Sufis, as perhaps indicated by the importance of pirs and mazars above. Bukhara was considered a regional center of Islamic learning and mysticism from the 10th century onwards, and Sufi authorities their enjoyed great influence.

This past section has demonstrated the great difference between and variety of “Soviet Muslims” in Central Asia. At this juncture, I would like to backtrack somewhat and inform the reader of the larger history of each of the Central Asian countries. This is for two reasons: first, to negate the colonial perspective of work done from the perspective of Russian conquerors and colonizers by writing the stories of the indigenous populations of Central Asia; second, to present for the reader the history of how the Soviet Union came into control of Muslim Central Asia before discussing how Islam continued to exist under the Soviet Union. I will discuss in brief the history of each of the five Central Asian countries up to the point of Russian conquest. After, I will note resistance against Russian colonization or rule.

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65 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 61.
Turkish tribes and states in the area of southern modern Kazakhstan were conquered in the 8th and 9th centuries by the invading Islamic Arabs; meanwhile, the Oghuz Turks controlled Western Kazakhstan from the 9th to 11th centuries. After the Mongol invasion of the 13th century, Kazakhstan was ruled by a succession of Mongolian Golden Horde rulers. The area was split into several khanates by the early 15th century, at which point the present-day Kazakhs become a recognizable group. The Kazakhs broke from the Uzbeks, took territory of their own, and in the 16th century, split into three hordes: the Great Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Little Horde.

In the process of expanding eastwards, Russia had been building fortification towns along its borders, and these had become centers of trade and diplomatic contact between Russia, the Kazakh Hordes, and other state formations of Central Asia. The Russians were slowly encroaching upon and seizing Kazakh territory as the khanates were preoccupied with the invading Kalmyks. Faced with Kalmyk invasion and Chinese expansionism in the 18th century, some Kazakh and Kyrgyz khans and chieftains turned to Russia for protections. The deal that followed was,

"The Khans of the Small and Middle Hordes were to pay an annual tribute of fur skins to St Petersburg. They were also obliged to guard the eastern borders of the Russian empire and to enhance Russian military, political and economic interests on the territory of both Hordes. However, the Russian protectorate lasted only during the lifetime of the khans who agreed to it. Their successors changed their allegiance from Russia to Jungaria and subsequently to China. As for the Great Horde, the bulk of its clans accepted Chinese suzerainty after the Jungar defeats in 1758."

Regardless of this, Russia and Russian companies controlled the vast majority of trade coming from Kazakhstan and Central Asia. During the 19th century, the Russian advance

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67 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 57.
towards Kazakhstan picked up speed due to concerns over the political and economic activity of Britain in the region. It was then that the Russians secured their dominance over the Small and Middle Hordes of Kazakhstan, the Great Horde having already accepted Chinese suzerainty. According to Yemelianova, “The subjugation of Kazakhstan facilitated the Russian advance into Central Asia which, as noted earlier, was not entirely a terra incognita for the Russians. Between the 13th and 15th century, both Russians and Central Asians were under the Genghizid rule.”

Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz were originally a nomadic people; however the first Kyrgyz state, Kyrgyz Khanate, existed from the 6th century AD until the 13th century AD, along with extensive commercial contacts in China, Tibet, Central Asia, and Persia. The Mongols took over the Kyrgyz Khanate, following which the Kyrgyz tribes regained independence in 1510, following which they were overrun successively in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries by the Kalmyks, the Manchus, and the Uzbeks, respectively. Throughout this period, Kyrgyz tribes sought protection from their powerful neighbor states, China and Russia, with assistance sought from Russia first in 1785. After the defeat of the Kyrgyz by the Uzbek, the Kyrgyz became increasingly willing to seek Russian protection. By 1876 Russian troops occupied northern Kyrgyzstan, and within five years “all Kyrgyzstan had become part of the Russian empire, and the Kyrgyz slowly began to integrate themselves into the economic and political life of Russia.”

The Kyrgyz suffered greatly from Russian taxation, forced labor, land confiscation, and

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68 Ibid, 60.
69 Ibid, 112.
so forth, eventually leading to an expression of resistance in 1916 that culminated in one third of the Kyrgyz population fleeing to China. It is worth noting that the majority of the Kyrgyz continued a nomadic lifestyle into the Soviet government forced them to settle in the 1930s.

Alexander O. Filonyk, writing on Kyrgyzstan in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, provides a summary but valuable description about the Islamization of the Kyrgyz. He writes,

"The Islamization of the Kyrgyz underwent different stages, and Islam acquired different forms in the state's various regions. In the south, primarily in the Ferghana Valley, where the population was sedentary, Islam was established as early as the eighth and ninth centuries. In the tenth and eleventh centuries splendid mosques and mausoleums were built, and the Arabic script was introduced. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the development of Islamic culture suffered major setbacks under the Mongol conquerors. From the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries the Kokand rulers implemented a policy of forced Islamization that was extended to the northern regions of present-day Kyrgyzstan. The nomads in the north resisted Islamization for over three centuries and were conquered not by the sword but rather through the work of Muslim missionaries."70

It is also worth speaking for a moment about gender in Kyrgyz society, as the issue of gender in relationship to Islam was certainly a point the Soviet imagination fixated upon. Olcott notes,

"In traditional Kyrgyz society, women had assigned roles, although only the religious elite sequestered women as was done in other Muslim societies. Because of the demands of the nomadic economy, women worked as virtual equals with men, having responsibility for chores such as milking as well as childrearing and the preparation and storage of food. In the ordinary family, women enjoyed approximately equal status with their husbands."71

*Tajikistan*

71 Olcott, 'Kyrgyzstan', 134.
Unlike Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan was never an independent state before the Soviet decrees establishing its existence. “Tajikistan was part of the Soviet policy of giving the outward trappings of political representation to minority nationalities in Central Asia while simultaneously reorganizing or fragmenting communities and political entities.”

The Tajiks are instead descended from ancient Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia, with various Turkic and Mongol ethnic contributions, as well. It is important to mention that the distinction between the Tajik and Uzbek people is an artificial one:

“Until the 20th century, people in the region used two types of distinction to identify themselves: way of life—either nomadic or sedentary—and place of residence. By the late nineteenth century, the Tajik and Uzbek peoples, who had lived in proximity for centuries and often used each other’s languages, did not perceive themselves as two distinct nationalities. Consequently, such labels were imposed artificially when Central Asia was divided into five Soviet republics in the 1920s.”

The land area that is now Tajikistan was originally part of the Achaemenid Empire, and then was part of Soghdiana, a collection of states that made up a distinct intermediary region on the Silk Road in between China and the southern and western markets. The Islamic Arabs began their conquest in the early 8th century, but it was the Persian-speaking Samanid principality that came to rule most of what is now Tajikistan from 875-999 AD. Bukhoro, or Bukhara, developed as a center of learning and culture in the early Samanid period. In the 9th century the Turkish penetration of the cultural sphere in Central Asia began, and the land that eventually became modern Tajikistan existed as part of Turkic or Mongol states. “By the early 19th century, the lands of the future Tajikistan were divided among three states: the Uzbek-ruled Bukhoro Khanate, the Quqon (Kokand) Khanate, centered on the Ferghana Valley, and the kingdom of

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72 Atkin, 205.
73 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 706-7.
Afghanistan. These three principalities subsequently fought each other for control of key areas of the new territory. Although some regions were under the nominal control of Bukhoro, or Quqon, local rulers were virtually independent.\textsuperscript{74}

The Russian conquest of present-day Tajikistan took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Imperial Russian policy makers believed that the peoples of Central Asia needed to be subdued in the 1860s due to the armed resistance occurring on the Kazakh steppe against Russian expansion. Furthermore, there was desire to make up lost territory in Central Asia, as well as to apply pressure to Britain, Russia’s sparring partner in the Great Game of colonization. The Central Asian region also took on great economic importance in the latter half of the nineteenth century as Russia’s major supplier of cotton, the United States, was embroiled in civil war, and Central Asia had great potential as a local cotton supplier. Nonetheless, the majority of Central Asian people had only limited contact with Russian officials or settlers before 1917.

\textit{Turkmenistan}

For most of history, the territory of Turkmenistan has been only the geographically defined region of independent tribal groups and other political entities. The ethnic basis of the population of Turkmenistan comes from sedentary Oghuz tribes in Mongolia who migrated to Turkmenistan in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. The term ‘Turkmen’ appears in the 10\textsuperscript{th} century as a means of distinguishing Oghuz groups who migrated south into the domains of the Persinate Seljuk Empire and had accepted Islam. Eventually the term became used exclusively to refer to Muslim Oghuz. Ironically

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 205.
enough, it was the Turkmen who contributed to destroying the Seljuk Empire, and the Turkmen settled on the land that is now Turkmenistan in around 1157 AD.

In the 16th to 19th centuries, most Turkmen tribes divided into the Khanate of Kiva or the Khanate of Bukhoro, becoming very important components of the military for these regions. Russian encroachment upon Turkmen territory began in the latter half of the 19th century, and was fiercely resisted. However, the Turkmen were defeated and conquered in 1881.75

Uzbekistan

The first occupants of Uzbekistan were Iranian nomads. The cities Bukhoro (Bukhara) and Samarqand (Samarkand) appeared as centers of government and culture as a result of their location on the Silk Road. They acquired great wealth and their province, Mawarannahr, was one of the most powerful Persian provinces of the ancient world. However, the Central Asian Iranians could not defend their land against the conquest of the Islamic Arabs in the 8th century, and with the Arab defeat of the Chinese in 750, the influence of Islam was cemented in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan continued to flourish as a center of culture and trade. At the height of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 8th and 9th centuries, Uzbekistan, specifically the Mawarannah province, had its golden age. “Bukhoro became one of the leading centers of learning, culture, and art in the Muslim world, its magnificence rivaling contemporaneous cultural centers such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Cordoba. Some of the greatest historians, scientists, and geographers in the history of Islamic culture were natives of the region.”76

75 Clark, Thurman, Tyson, 305.
76 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 387.
The 9th century marked the beginning of the gradual incorporation of Turkic culture into the region, followed by the conquest of the area by the Seljuk Empire. The Seljuks split the land into states ruled by local Turkic and Iranian rulers, which did not greatly affect the culture, wealth, or intellectual life of the region. However, the Mongol invasion of the 13th did affect all of these things, quickening the rate at which Turkic culture became the dominant cultural norm, making Iranians a minority, and severely damaging cities including Bukhoro. In the 14th century, the Timur took over Mawarannahr and witnessed its final swell of influence and wealth; following the death of Timur, the Timurid state broke up and nomadic Uzbek tribes invaded Mawarannahr. Their conquest was complete by 1510. The Uzbeks established the Khanate of Bukhoro, the Khanate of Tashkent, and the Khanate of Samarqand, but at this juncture in time, land trade was declining due to the rise of new sailing technology allowing for greater sea trade. The Khanates, specifically Bukhoro, were also weakened by war with Iran, which further led to the cultural isolation of Central Asia from the rest of the Islamic world.77

The Russians took interest in trade in Central Asia just in time to fight back the invading Iranians, but upon arriving, the Russians began to realize the potential of the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan was wedged in the middle of the Great Game, with Britain in Afghanistan and Russia beginning to rise to power in the Kazakh steppes at this time. Russia needed a cotton supplier and also had a degree of concern over British designs on Central Asia, given their location in Afghanistan. The Khanates continued to wage small wars in Central Asia, resulting in a loss of energy and resources. This made it simple for the Russians to move to conquer their territory immediately after their

77 Ibid, 391.
conquest of the Caucasus in the late 1850s. By 1876, the entire territory of present day Uzbekistan was under Russian control, mostly in the form of Protectorates.\textsuperscript{78}

Having covered the basic history of each Central Asian country and Russia’s incorporation and subsequent colonialization of each one, I can now discuss the history of Central Asia during the era of the Soviet Union. Specifically, I will focus on resistance movements conducted by various Muslim-identifying peoples against the Soviet regime, and Soviet policies on Islam. Vitaly V. Naumkin aptly notes that the experience of Soviet and pre-Soviet era Islamic political activity, often in the form of resistance movements, “...became part of the region’s ideological and political heritage,”\textsuperscript{79} and therefore this activity must be noted in order to help explain the later resurgence of political variations of Islam in Central Asia. Soviet policies and frequent oppression of Islam also set the stage for the later resurgence of a repressed identity.

Prior to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, Central Asia was under the control of the Russian Empire, as discussed. The most major ideological development in that area between the 1860s and 1917 was jadidism. Jadidism refers to the education reformation movement incited by Ismail Gasprinskii. Gasprinskii suggested a new method of teaching Islam to Muslim Central Asians and Tatars, called al-usul al-jadid, due to his dissatisfaction with the existing system. Gasprinskii’s method was strongly opposed by the qadimists, or followers of the old system, and also by the Russian government.

According to Yemelianova,


\textsuperscript{79} Vitalii Viacheslavovich Naumkin, Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 18.
"The qadimists feared to lose in competition with their reformist rivals who provided better education and practical training more suited to modern conditions. The Tsarist Government regarded the jaded medresses as bulwarks of future dissent and of nationalist and Islamic extremism. The Russian Orthodox Church viewed them as a dangerous antidote to the total Christianization of Russia’s Muslims."

Gasprinskii’s al-usul al-jadid became the basis of a wider socio-political and cultural phenomenon jadidism, "...designed to further the deeper intellectual, economic and political integration of Russia’s Muslims within the nation-wide process of modernization. Most Jadids became either directly involved in the Russian nation-wide intellectual and political debate on the future reform of the Russian state and society, or were strongly influenced by it." Jadidism was a statement of rejection of anti-Islamic Russification policies, and also a statement in favor of equal treatment of all subjects of the Russian Empire, including Muslims. This phenomenon was particularly well received among Tatar intellectuals, who understood

"...the historical interaction with Russians as a defining component of Tatar national identity, alongside Islam and the Tatar language. They derived the importance of the Russian factor from the fact that the Tatars and the Russians had a common homeland and knowledge of each other’s interests, habits, customs and beliefs. They traced mutual cultural influences...At the same time, they made a clear distinction between the anti-Islamic Russification policies of the Russian state, which they categorically rejected, and the objective benefits for Russia’s Muslims of a strong Russian state under an enlightened Tsar who would treat all his subjects equally, irrespective of their religious and ethnic origins...In modern terms they were the proponents of the principles of multiculturalism and the civic nation.”

The main limitation of jadidism was perhaps its Tataro-centrism. In areas further removed from Russia influence, or closer to another culture’s influence, jadidism was less likely to be influential. In fact, in the Caucasus, Crimea, and Central Asia, pro-Ottoman

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80 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 76.
82 Yemelianova, Russia and Islam, 77.
sympathies were far stronger than pro-Russian ones, even with the demands put upon
the Russian government by *jadidism*. Nonetheless, *jadidism* was still a movement of
resistance against particular policies of the Russian state. It demonstrated the intellectual
capacity colonial resistance was capable of, as well as the strength of non-violent
resistance. *Jadidism* was very popular in some areas, and its ideas were discussed and
made part of Tatar cultural consciousness. It is valuable to see how an idea can be used
as a resistance strategy in this context because a similar ideological framework of
resistance influenced later Islamic resurgence in Central Asia.

There was, however, violent resistance to Russian rule and policies in 1916. The
Tsar’s 25 June decree assigned a high number of Muslim men to military auxiliary works,
even though Russia’s Muslim subjects had previously been promised exclusion from
military work. A large majority of the local Muslim elite saw this decree as excessive
interference. Furthermore, many Kazakhs specifically felt great resentment towards
Russian settlers who robbed them of their land. In an indigenous resistance movement
that eventually proved to be the last barrier to assimilation of Central Asia into the
Soviet Union, the Basmach Revolt began under the banner of Islam. According to
Yemelianova:

“It began in July 1916 in Khodjent. By Nov 1916 over 50,000 basmachi took part
in the uprising which embraced a large territory from the river Amu Darya to the
Urals...This revolt acquired a distinct anti-colonial character. It reflected the long
suppressed resentment of local nomads and sedentary peoples against the
agrarian colonization of the most fertile land by Russian and other Slavic settlers,
as well as against the advancing destructing of the traditional way of life as a
result of the Russian economic and military penetration.”

83 Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union (with an Appendix on the Non-Muslim Turkic Peoples of the
84 Ibid, 93-4.
However, the movement gradually became more and more divided as it grew in numbers. Throughout the course of the political transition to Soviet control, the revolution continued but slowed, eventually fizzling out in 1925.

Much changed between the start and end of the Basmach Revolt, however. After the fall of the tsarist government in February 1917, there was an attempt at greater Muslim involvement in the political sphere. The Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 made further growth impossible, however. This was ironic: in the initial pre-revolution period, the Bolshevik government needed and sought support from the Muslim population. Hence, Naumkin writes,

"...the government took serious steps to meet Muslim wishes, proclaiming freedom and inviolability of their rights, customs, and traditions. A significant section of educated Muslims, especially jadids and some mullas, and peasants and nomads responded to the slogans of the new regime and backed the revolution. Many Islamic reformers naively believed that socialism would bring national liberation to their people. While the Bolsheviks regarded the empire's Orthodox clergy as one of their main enemies, as it had been one of the pillars of the former regime, in the Muslim religious class they saw an ally, albeit temporary."\(^{85}\)

After the Soviet government had secured its place, the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Republic, which was a constituent unit of the Russian Federation, was established. By 1924, the People's Soviet Republics of Bukhara and Khorezm were incorporated into the Federation. Then began the process of 'national-territorial delimitation', during which the Central Asian region was "...divided into a number of union republics on an ethnic basis, and new boundaries were demarcated."\(^{86}\)

Yuri Slezkine's article 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment' explains that the Soviet Union used language to describe peoples—for example, "...the central Asian Sart (usually defined as settled Muslims) were decreed out of existence, the various Pamir communities became 'Tajiks' and the

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\(^{85}\)Naumkin, 20.
\(^{86}\)Ibid, 19.
Uzbeks were radically redefined to include most of the Turkic speakers of Samarkand, Tashkent and Bukhara. As such, the Soviet Union categorized its non-Russian subjects by linguistic group and failed to account for the existence of nationalities outside of those boundaries. The Bolsheviks also promoted titular ethnic identities in order to boost the formation of these republics, once again ignoring the fact that these ethnic divides had not previous existed before they were drawn in on Soviet maps. In fact,

"The Leninist-Stalinist division of the Central Asia republics is known to have been carried out with complete disregard for the important social and political factors linked with the notion of 'common cultural territory.' When the frontiers among the Central Asian republics were defined, everything had been done to create the conditions for the destruction of the ethnocultural units of the region. The most characteristic example of this phenomenon is the most densely populated part of the Central Asian region—the Ferghana Valley."

The Soviets initially supported Islam and national culture in Central Asia because, "The more rights and opportunities a national minority would enjoy, the more 'trust' it would have in the proletarians of the former oppressor nation." Therefore, Islam and Islamic practices were not interfered with and were considered legal for a period of time to engender good faith and encourage a minority's trust in Russian proletarians.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that,

"...In the first years after the revolution the Bolsheviks directed their atheistic assault primarily against the Orthodox Church and pursued a relatively liberal policy towards Islam and Muslims. The Bolsheviks relied heavily on co-opted representatives of the Muslim liberal intelligentsia, mainly from the jadid camp. The latter promoted ideas of the compatibility of Islam and Bolshevism - the essence of Islamic communism. Mulannur Vahitov, Sultan Galiev and other Muslim communists were directly involved in the creation of the Bolsheviks' first documents relating to various Muslim peoples of the former Russian empire.

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89 Slezkine, 419.
which played an important role in ensuring the relative loyalty of the Muslim population to the communist regime."^{90}

The Soviet authorities, in fact, initially relied upon the *jadids* to reform the traditional system of religious education. However, this reform was served with a side of oppression:

"All educational institutions, which tried to oppose reforms, were deprived of waqf properties, or simply closed. The consequences of reforms were soon reflected on the traditional system of education. First of all, the teaching of religious sciences began to be conducted in national languages (Uzbek and Tajik) with the use of a new Arabic script, instead of the traditional Persian or Chagatai written language."^{91}

This was a dark premonition of what was to come. Once the Soviet government was secure in its position, the more respectful policies towards Islam were replaced by harsh repression. In the first decade after the October revolution,

"...The dominant approach towards Islam, Orthodoxy and any other religion was one of ruthless suppression. A central role in the anti-Islamic and wider anti-religious assault belonged to the notorious organization ‘The Union of Militant Atheists’, whose motto was ‘a war against religion is a war for socialism’. In the course of the anti-Islamic campaign, which continued through the 1930s, about 30,000 Muslim clerics perished, *shari’a* courts were abolished, waqf property was sequested, almost all mosques, madrasahs, maktabs and other Islamic-related institutions were either destroyed, or closed, or converted in various secular public institutions such as secular schools, publishing houses, social clubs, kindergartens, factories, storage places, or even wine-refinery and drying-out clinics. The last two cases were especially insulting to Muslim religious feelings. Fasting during the month of Ramadan and the Islamic practice of circumcision were both declared unhealthy."^{92}

Meanwhile, the *basmachi*, acknowledging defeat was close at hand, encouraged Soviet Muslims, particularly members of the revolt, to perform *hijra* and return to the Middle East. Thus, "...in certain Muslim countries (Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia), a substantial Central Asian diaspora was formed whose representatives in the future, at the end of the

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^{91} Naumkin, 20.
20th century, would play an important role in diffusing political Islam throughout the newly independent states of Central Asia.”

The first through second decades of the Soviet Union were also marked by harassment, persecution, and decimation of symbols of Islam including mosques and clergy—so much so that by World War II, Islam in the Soviet Union was formally almost non-existent and symbols of religious life, including rites and rituals, were not openly acknowledged, discussed, or practiced. In 1930, the Soviet state, "...meted out the harshest repressive measures against local Islam and particularly the religious class. Many mosques were destroyed, many madrasas were closed, and many members of the religious class were subjected to reprisals. Many of those 'Jadids who supported the regime, served it, or even entered the Communist Party perished during purges. Official Islam was placed under tight state control, an active atheism was pursued, and Sufi brotherhoods were persecuted. However, popular Islam endured and went into hiding, into private life." 

Islamic intellectuals and thinkers were arbitrarily charged with anti-Soviet activities and sent to gulags or executed, and national-territorial delimitation continued until 1936. For example, "Under the new national-administrative hierarchy the Tatars and Bashkirs, who were among the largest and most politically and economically advanced Muslim communities of the USSR, were assigned 'second class nationality which could only be granted autonomous status within the Russian Federation, while nomadic Turkmens, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were promoted to 'first class nationalities' who were entitled to form their union republics. Central Asia was divided into the five union republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." 

During World War II, Soviet policies towards Muslims and Islam became more ambivalent. The atheistic stance of the Union in general relaxed in order to “consolidate
multi-ethnic and poly-confessional nation-wide resistance to Nazi invasion"97 and the Union of Militant Atheists was dissolved. Purges on the intelligentsia and other Muslim intellectuals were halted, and bans on certain religious activities and practices were even lifted.98 Yaacov Ro’i notes that, “Islam, which had a long history of survivalism in disadvantageous circumstances, persisted in men’s consciousness and in their social mores, notably in the more distant and inaccessible areas, where many of its mosques had somehow escaped recurrent bouts of closures and continued to operate.”99 Furthermore, while the Soviet government understood one facet of Muslim religiosity, namely highly performative aspects of Islamic ritual and community, it neglected to consider other components or facets that existed in Muslim communities. While some mosques had escaped “bouts of closures”, some Muslim communities may never have had much use for mosques in their local understanding of Islam. As Ro’i notes, Islamic consciousness and social practices persisted, and I believe this is hugely in part because they were never under the eye of the government, which reduced Islam to mosques and life-cycle rituals. As such, when the aforementioned bans were lifted, those communities that wanted to engage with performative and visual aspects of Islam were able to do so once again, and so did.

Stalin also founded the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) in May 1944, whose purpose was to be the liaison between the Soviet government and the Muslim community. Nonetheless, 1944 also saw the overnight deportation of all ethnic Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachais, Khamshils, Kurds, Meskhetian Turks, non-

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97 Ibid, 24.
98 Ibid, 23.
99 Ro’i, 714-5.
Muslim Greeks, Bulgarians, and Germans to Siberia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia due to a collective accusation of collaboration with the Nazis.100

However, after Stalin’s death in 1953, policies towards religions became more conservative once again. Yemelianova categorizes the policies, including many with a continued focus on re-settlement and ethnic enlargement, as oppressive, arbitrary, and aggravating. She writes,

"The communist party sought a complete eradication of religiosity among the Soviet people and further restricted the social, educational and cultural activities of religious institutions and societies. At the same time, it encouraged the incorporation of pre-Islamic customs into ‘socialist national cultures’ and their cleansing of their Islamic components. The Soviet authorities fostered official ‘Soviet Islam’, represented by the muftiates...It is worth noting that the muftiates were infiltrated by KGB agents and were controlled by the government’s CARC, and that their Muslim clergy often regarded their religious careers as a means of acquiring the material and social benefits of the Soviet system.”101

Yet by the mid-1960s, Soviet leaders understood the Soviet Union as having become a mature socialist state, and thus deemed it immune to identities based in religion or nationalism. Furthermore, it seemed to the state that Islam and the religious figures that the government allowed to continue in their functions were thoroughly integrated into the Soviet system at this point, and therefore not considered dangerous. This led to yet another relaxation of religious policies.

The liberalization of policies towards Islam contributed to a rise of interest in Islam amongst a younger generation in the Ferghana Valley, as well as a rise of Islamic networks in the region, often with an educational focus. Furthermore, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 prompted an increase of Islamic awareness among Soviet Muslims. Zumrat Salmorbekova writes,

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100 Yemelianova, ‘Islamic Radicalisation,’ 24.
101 Ibid.
"The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan following the Marxist coup of 1978 had an 'awakening' effect on Central Asian Muslims, who from the very beginning of the conflict had ambivalent feelings about it. During the invasion (1978-1989) Soviet soldiers of Central Asian origin were forced to fight against their ethnic and religious brethren. The situation was aggravated by the fact that some of their opponents were mujahidin (Islamic fighters) who were descendants of Central Asian basmachi. As a result, Central Asian soldiers en masse were ineffective and some of them were prone to changing sides. Of special significance was their exposure in Afghanistan to different and more puritanical forms of Islam. So, upon their return home many Central Asian soldiers began to question the validity of their Islamic practices and beliefs. It is worth noting that those ex-soldiers became particularly receptive to the principles of Salafi Islam which began to proliferate the region during the 1980s."

When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, a group of graduates from Central Asian madrasas known as the young imams become predominant. According to Yemelianova, "Young imams challenged official old imams over their alleged passivity, theological ambivalence, low moral standards and conformity with the Soviet establishment. They began a campaign for the restoration of the Islamic infrastructure on a pre-revolutionary scale, and for the wider involvement of Soviet Muslims in the social and political life of the country."103

In October 1990, freedom of conscience was guaranteed and various forms of religious activity were officially and legally allowed. Persecution on religious grounds was also banned, and, "Under this law the number of people who confessed their Islamic faith rose overnight from 10-12 percent to over 50 percent."104 Border controls were also relaxed and as such, there was a great increase in the amount of contact between Soviet Muslims and other Muslims abroad. Ro'i notes that,

"The similarity of the socio-political experience meant that Islam in the Soviet Union and in much of the third world was undergoing identical challenges and

103 Yemelianova, 'Islamic Radicalisation', 25.
104 Ibid, 25.
inevitably reacted in ways that were not basically different. This tie, however ephemeral, to trends affecting foreign Islam was enhanced with the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan. These brought the potential of a politicized Islam to the consciousness of the more radically Islamic activists inside the USSR.”

The question must be asked: how did Islam survive under the repressive policies of the Soviet Union, particularly in the 1920s, 30s, and 50s? Ro’i’s magnum opus, Islam in the Soviet Union, addresses these questions in great detail. In summation, however, Ro’i identifies five key reasons for Islam’s survival. First, the Soviet regime itself played a part: the Soviet government legitimized the existence of Islam by helping to create spiritual directorates and entities such as CARC. This signified the possibility of a working relationship between secular Soviets and Islam, even if that signification was not intended by the state. The state also lacked a specific and stern policy on Islam—Ro’i writes, “At the level of the regime, then, Islam received indirect reinforcement from: the irresoluteness and lack of direction which characterized government policy towards Islam; the total ignorance among decision-makers of what in fact was taking place in the Muslim community; what forces were at play and what trends at work in the Islamic ‘movement’; and the lack of professionalism in analyzing the Muslim periphery.”

Second, local variations of Islam and specific regional practices aided Islam’s survival. Mullahs continued to work and perform rituals even when their mosques were closed down, and shaykhs continued to operate holy shrines and pilgrimage sites. Third, more radical religious figures printed illicit religious literature and provided underground education. Fourth, the Soviet state understood Islam through its most visible aspects, and understood Islam as a single, static entity. The state therefore

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105 Ro’i, 716.
106 Ibid, 721.
recognized certain practices and ideas as ‘Islamic’, and legally allowed those that it approved. Islam, however, existed (and still exists) outside of the box that the Soviet state would have liked to put it into. Ro’i writes of ‘official Islam’ and ‘underground Islam’, but I would not divide Islam into two separate categories, as Islam is both of those categories simultaneously (and greater than the sum of those parts, as well)—it cannot be consolidated into a stable material entity. The point Ro’i is trying to make, divorced from its reductionist language, is that while the Soviet state was focused on repressing or legalizing the aspects of Islam that it could see and understand, Islam continued to be practiced in other manifestations and variations and forms regardless of what the state thought. This, Ro’i says, “was a significant factor in enabling Islam to withstand regime pressure, and indeed highlighted its resilience in the face of this hostility.” And finally, Islam was a key component of social infrastructure—Ro’i identifies Islam as “the essence of their [Soviet Muslims] native culture and tradition.”

This collection of factors enabled Islam to withstand repressive policies and resurge when conditions were ideal.

The repression of Islam and the history of resistance to Russian and Soviet policies laid the groundwork for the Islamic resurgence we witness in Central Asia after the 1990s; however, there is still much to be explained. While we have now covered the intellectual and historical bases of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia, the concrete social, political, and economic factors which catalyzed its appearance must now be examined. At this juncture, I will narrow my lens to the Ferghana Valley specifically, as it is the
area with the most documented resurgence of political Islam in Central Asia as well as the area with the most research conducted upon it.

The Ferghana Valley is a 120,000 square kilometer area of land straddling Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. As of 2010, over 11 million people live there, or 356 people per square kilometer. Almost half of the valley's population is under the age of 20, and the area has the highest birth rate in the former Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet state was devastating for the valley. Soviet Muslims found themselves reorganized into different political entities in newly independent states, much as they had been under preexisting Soviet national-territorial delimitation policies. It is important to recognize, however, that the full devastating effect can only be understood through an acknowledgement of the benefits of the Soviet state. While deeply oppressive to Islam and nationalism, according to Salmorbekova and Yemelianova,

"...the Soviet rule enhanced the significant economic and societal modernization of Central Asian Muslims. The region was integrated into the nationwide modern transport and energy systems. Among the obvious gains were the eradication of widespread illiteracy, the elimination of numerous deadly diseases and the emancipation of Muslim women, who at least legally acquired economic and social equality with men. The corollary was a manifold increase in the living standards of local people and a demographic growth. It is worth noting that due to comprehensive free secondary education and the accessibility of free higher education Central Asian Muslims greatly excelled their co-religionists abroad in terms of their level of education and professional training."109

As such,

"The break-up of the USSR and the subsequent cessation of subsidies and material supplies from Moscow had a devastating impact for the economy of the valley which turned into the poorest region of the former Soviet Union. It suffers from a scarcity of arable lands, poor irrigation facilities and the lack of state loans for agricultural production. Since the early 1990s over 30 per cent of the valley's

109 Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, 212.
inhabitants have been unemployed. The highest unemployment has been among young people under 25 years old, and women."  

Living conditions sharply declined, and access to resources including education and healthcare for the local population was drastically reduced. Central Asian governmental authorities also provided no support in aiding or abetting these socio-economic problems. In the midst of this economic crisis, the people of the Ferghana Valley were also suffering from the ideological disorientation accompanying the collapse of the Soviet Union’s communist ideology. This “ideological uncertainty” led some people to turn to “nationalist, Islamo-nationalist, or Islamist-driven movements.” This Islamic revivalism was also aided by financial aid and ideological assistance from various governmental and non-governmental Islamic funds and organizations in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other Muslim countries. According to Yemelionva,  

“They dispatched hundreds of Islamic preachers and missionaries to the former Soviet Muslim regions. Many young Muslims from these regions went to study in various foreign Islamic institutes and universities. Foreign Islamic teachers were employed by madrasahs, Islamic institutes and universities which were opened in the region. Among the implications of this intensive cultural and educational reawakening, was the emergence of a large number of young Muslim clerics who received structured Islamic education within a non-traditional, i.e. Hanafi, madhhab in the case of most Turkic and Tajiki Muslim...”  

‘Imported influence’ is a term that I have found many scholars of Central Asian history and politics love to throw around when discussing Islamic revivalism. It is easy to say that extremists from other countries came in and ‘corrupted’ (read: politicized) the manifestation of Islam that had developed in Central Asia. It is more difficult to ascribe legitimacy to indigenous Islamic expressions and local Muslims. But ask yourself: why
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Samantha Pellegrino

couldn't, or why wouldn't, an indigenous population suffering from political repression and economic depression mobilize itself politically around a shared cultural value? Why would this population need an outside source to inspire them to action? I acknowledge, of course, that many Muslims of Central Asia were likely influenced or inspired, at least in part, by foreign preachers. But to suggest that the indigenous Central Asian Muslim population never would have become politically active around the banner of Islam is naïve at best. Thus I contest when Ahmed Rashid writes that,

"...it remains true that that Islamic ideologies of the IMU and the HT are based not on the indigenous Islam of Central Asia, the birthplace of Sufism...and nineteenth century Jadidism...but on imported ideologies. Their message of extremism originated with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the militant madrassah culture of Pakistan (where many IMU and HT adherents studied), and the extreme Wahhabi doctrine of Saudi Arabia."\(^{115}\)

The Islamic ideologies of Central Asian political parties were born of the need of the Central Asian people. Influenced by outsiders, certainly, and perhaps even given more nuance and theoretical or educational backing, but gestated in a Central Asian environment, raised in Central Asian minds, and enacted by Central Asian people in Central Asian circumstances.

It is important, though, not to disregard the place of foreign preachers and activists in Central Asia—nothing here has only a single facet. These preachers and activists were politically minded and prepared to address social and economic issues in Central Asia, unlike the old imams. As such, "...they criticized regional and central governments and official Islamic authorities for their alleged corruption, incompetence..."\(^{115}\)

and, in the case of Islamic officialdom, doctrinal inadequacy...Islamists often acted as the only genuine supporters of poor and desperate Muslims.”

The early 1990s were marked not only by dire economic conditions, but also by a boom of Islamic activities. Mosques, madrassahs, publishing houses, universities, and institutes all grew dramatically in numbers. The active young imams dominated muftiiates. Many young men also received foreign scholarships and traveled abroad in order to pursue their studies of Islam. The post-Soviet governments of Central Asia “…displayed either total indifference to the unfolding Islamic revival, as in Russia, or a silent endorsement of it, as in most newly independent Central Asia states. There the new nationalizing states chose, albeit to various degrees, to use Islamic symbols to enhance their non-Slavic and non-Orthodox national identities and to strengthen their legitimacy.”

It was also around this point that Islamic political organizations and parties began to emerge in Central Asia, and this political mobilization was an important component of the revival of Islam after the oppression of the Soviet Union. The first party to be founded was the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which separated into individual branches in the newly independent Central Asian states.

“Called Nahzati Jawononi Islamii Tojikiston (Renewal of the Islamic Youth of Tajikistan), this organization represented hujra students who rejected the political caution of their teachers and advocated a social, if not political status for a purified Islam. But the immediate impetus for the organization of the IRP came from the outside. In July 1990, a number of Muslims, mainly lay intellectuals from the northern Caucasus, gathered in the Russian city of Astrakhan to form the Islamic Renaissance Party with the aim of struggling for freedom of conscience and freedom of practice for Muslims throughout the Soviet Union.

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Delegates from Tajikistan returned to Dushanbe to form a local branch of the party and succeeded...”¹¹⁸

In Tajikistan, the IRP became the IPVT—the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, and quickly became one of the leading opposition parties in the state, with over 10,000 active members and 20,000 passive members.¹¹⁹

The main goal of the IPVT was “to restore the basics of Islam to society and to begin the process of bringing Islamic knowledge and Islamic values back into public life.”¹²⁰ The IPVT advocated a return to the “pure, unadulterated Islam of Prophet Muhammad and the other righteous ancestors who lived in the seventh century AD. And they [IPVT leaders] opposed the Islamic officialdom who they accused of complacency, ritualism and doctrinal rigidity. By comparison, they promoted independent judgment in religious matters.”¹²¹ Importantly, the party also emphasized its non-violent nature. In fact, “Throughout the civil war and the political crisis that preceded it, IRP spokesmen insisted that ‘they had no intention of establishing a theocratic fundamentalist state in Tajikistan, and that they would never strive to impose Islamic ideology and their objectives on the citizens of the country...[the Party’s] objective was to play a role of its own in the spiritual revival and self-realization of the nation, and to defend the rights and demands of Muslims’. ”¹²²

As we have already seen, most sources on political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia will, at this point, suggest that the ideological basis of political parties such as the IPVT was not homegrown in Central Asia. They will tell you that one of the

¹¹⁹ Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, 213.
¹²⁰ Khalid, 147.
¹²¹ Yemelianova, ‘Islamic Radicalisation’, 27.
¹²² Khalid, 149.
founding members and leaders of the IRP, Sayed Abdullah Nuri, was a student of Mullah Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani, and that Hindustani studied in Deoband, India, practiced a form of Islam called Deobandism, and then opened a clandestine madrassah in Dushanbe in the 1970s. According to Rashid, “Hindustani brought the new ideas shaping the Muslim world and the ideology of Islamic fundamentalist movements in India, Pakistan, and the Arab states to Central Asia, spreading his message to both Tajiks and Uzbeks in the Ferghana Valley.” It could be said that Hindustani directly influenced the ideological basis of the IRP through Nuri, and thus the political character of the organization was drawn more from interpretations of Islam that were made outside of Central Asia than from local variations. These sentences have elements of factual truth to them; however, they neglect the fluidity of religious ideologies and beliefs. As I said before, regardless of where the interpretation of Islam that allowed for political mobilization came from, it was adopted and nurtured in Central Asia. It was processed by Central Asian people and practiced by Central Asian and, in being so, it became Central Asian in character.

Furthermore, in Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia, Adeeb Khalid explains that Hindustani himself was not spreading ‘imported’ ideas to his students or encouraging them; rather, his students rebelled against his teachings in a dispute about ritual: “…in contradiction to local customs and rituals, some students began to conduct daily prayer in the manner of the Hanbali school dominant in the Arab lands. In disavowing traditions long dominant in Central Asia, the students were motivated by a desire to copy the ritual forms practiced in the Arab lands, which they

123 Rashid, 97.
took to be a purer form of Islam, one uncontaminated by local traditions.\textsuperscript{124} Hindustani also adhered to the conventional argument principles of jihad are more about the self and internal struggle than external or violent struggle. In fact, “Hindustani argued that he had practiced this principle and that it had borne fruit: Stalinist repression had been a test of Muslims’ faith, he argued, and Muslims’ fortitude in sticking to their faith and their traditions had been rewarded by God in the form of the relative liberalization of the Brezhnev period.”\textsuperscript{125}

But I digress—whether or not Hindustani preached Pakistani ideas to his students is actually irrelevant to my point: the point is that whatever was being taught about Islam was processed, digested, and reformed and practiced by Central Asia students, thus making it Central Asian in character regardless of its technical origins. This is perhaps best emphasized by the fact that the members of the IPVT were from a multitude of walks of Central Asian life: the party membership included ‘unofficial’ underground ulema from the Soviet era, registered clergy in the ‘official Islam’ of the Soviet Union, Sufi pirs and their followers in the Pamir mountains, and a younger generation of Tajik people influenced greatly by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{126} All of these people brought a unique Central Asian perspective to the variation of Islam that they were practicing, and I would argue again that this therefore makes the variation Central Asian in character, regardless of how or where it “started”. There was also a strong national twist to Tajikistan’s Islamic revival:

\textsuperscript{124} Khalid, 144-5.  
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 146.  
\textsuperscript{126} Rashid, 95.
the revival was seen as a means to "...cement a Tajik identity and ensure Tajikistan’s development as a unified state."  

The political situation in Tajikistan began to change in 1991 when the hardline Communists in the Tajik parliament forced Rakhmon Nabiev into the presidency. Mass protests broke out at the election, and the IPVT was given the opportunity to make sustained contact with the masses. Rashid writes, "This was a heady time for the IRP, who fed and cared for the people living in the streets, receiving their first taste of mass mobilization and political agitation in the process. No other Islamic movement in Central Asia has ever been given such a chance at mass contact as Tajikistan’s IRP was in those years."  

The political struggle regarding the presidency had evolved into significant unrest in Tajikistan. Regions began to demand greater autonomy or threatened to split away from the state. Nabiev was at a loss to contribute positively here, and remained so when civil war erupted. He quickly resigned. Parliament put Emomali Rahmonov, a communist leader from Kulab, into power in December 1991, and government forces faced off against Islamo-democratic opposition parties, including the IPVT, the Party of Rastokhez, the Popular Front, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and the La’li Badakshon Party. It is significant to note that the Islamists from the IPVT "...perceived this war in terms of jihad against the kafir government of President Rahmonov."  

President Rahmonov banned the IPVT in 1993, and in 1995 the IPVT transformed its alliance with other Islamo-democratic groups and parties into an umbrella organization known as the Ob’edinennaiia Tajikskaia Oppozitsiia or the United Tajik

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127 Ibid, 96.  
128 Ibid, 100.  
129 Salmorbekova and Yemelinova, 221.
Opposition (UTO). The conflict only stopped in 1996 when, “the regional equation changed dramatically when the Taliban captured Kabul and ousted the Afghan Tajik government. Central Asian leaders were fearful that the Taliban, drawn from the Pashtun ethnic group, would try to spread their harsh interpretation of Islam into Central Asia. Both the governments and the UTO now realized that it was in their common interest to negotiate an end to the civil war.”\(^{130}\) The Tajik civil war lasted six years and claimed over 700,000 lives. It also displaced one million people and devastated the Tajik state. This devastation spilled over into neighboring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well. IPVT was legalized after the war ended, and ceased to be a major Islamist opposition.

During and after the civil war, most authorities in Muslim regions of Central Asia toughened their policies on Islam, and on ideologies suggesting a return to seventh-century Muhammadian society in particular. According to Yemelianova,

> “The opposition Islamic and Islamo-national parties and organizations have been either banned, or their activities considerably curtailed. Hundreds of Islamists and their sympathizers have been imprisoned. Islamist and wider Salafi literature and periodicals have been banned. The state has returned to the policies of Soviet-type control over official Islam, embodied in muftiats, and the de-legislation of mosques not affiliated to muftiats. The activities of foreign Islamic funds and organizations have been banned, or severely restricted. Government of most ex-Soviet Muslim countries have begun to cultivate and promote indigenous, peaceful ‘traditional Islam’ and demonize the allegedly destructive foreign Salafi Islam, or Wahhabism.”\(^ {131}\)

The epicenter of Islamism shifted from Tajikistan and Tajikistan’s portion of the Ferghana Valley to Uzbekistan’s portion of the valley, with the goal of politically motivated Islamists being the Islamic unification of Central Asia, or at least the Ferghana

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130 Rashid, 104.
131 Yemelianova, 'Islamic Radicalisation', 28.
Valley. Much of the shift in location had to do with Uzbekistan’s president, Islam Karimov. Rashid describes Karimov as such:

“Karimov was a first secretary of the ruling Communist Party who parlayed this position into the presidency both before and after independence...he has run an authoritarian state ever since, crushing dissent, banning all political parties (except for a brief period of freedom), exerting complete control over the media—even going so far as to have political opponents kidnapped by this fearsome security agencies from neighboring Central Asian states.” 132

Karimov had been staunchly against political manifestations of Islam since before the Tajik civil war, although the war certainly acted as validation for his continued repressive policies. In September 1991,

“...Islamists and nationalists were actively involved in anti-Karimov protests in Tashkent. President Karimov’s response was a heavy-handed nationwide crackdown on Islamist and any other opposition and foreign Muslim missionaries. In 1992, when the war began across the border in Tajikistan, the Karimov government banned Islamic and well as nationalist parties and organizations. Many Islamic activists and pro-Salafi ulema and mosque imams were imprisoned, or disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Hundreds of mosques, administered by ‘young imams’, who had been educated abroad, were either closed, or transferred to the supervision of traditionalist imams. All mosque imams were ordered to end every sermon with praise to President Karimov.” 133

He also issued a series of crackdowns in 1992, 1993, and after 1997. He arrested hundreds of non-radical Muslims, “...accusing them of being Wahhabis, closing down mosques and madrassahs, and forcing mullahs into jail or exile...In 1998 the government passed the infamous Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which established new modes of repression against Muslims.” 134 These crackdowns only served to encourage further radicalism and motivation to remove Karimov from the presidency. Political resurgence was also encouraged by foreign

132 Rashid, 80.
133 Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, 222.
134 Rashid, 84-5.
influence, as in the rest of Central Asia. The result has been that two radical political groups, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HT), have emerged as powerful political and social forces in the Ferghana Valley.

The IMU and the HT are entirely distinct from one another, however—in fact, they are characteristically different, with separate ideologies, goals, and methods. Khalid lays out the structural and defining qualities of each party. Of the IMU, he writes,

"The IMU is a militant jihadist organization that seeks the overthrow, violent if necessary, of the Karimov regime and its replacement by an Islamic state...The group was first heard of in the spring of 1999, although it had probably formed the year before. It comprised Uzbek radicals who had fled their country in the face of persecution...The IMU received support from the Taliban, Pakistan’s Interservices Intelligence agency, and Osama bin Laden. The Taliban provided IMU with a training base in Kunduz, where many foreign fighters also trained...Uzbekistan’s homegrown dissent met the jihadist culture that had emerged in Afghanistan and became entangled in its global networks. The IMU thus acquired many of the characteristic features of jihadist Islam: a fascination with armed struggle in its pursuit of an Islamic state, to the exclusion of any other political program, and a vitriolic rhetoric that mixed anti-American, anti-Jewish, and anti-Israeli motifs. But to a striking degree, the IMU was motivated by simple hatred of Karimov and his regime."

Khalid is apt to point to statements issued from the IMU in order to support his theory about IMU motivation. "The movement views the people of Uzbekistan as a people who prefer the Islamic outlook, who have defended Islam in hard times and who have an ancient Islamic history," they write. "The history of the dark century of the Russian invaders—the Bolshevik rule—in the country has ended, but we have not achieved our freedom or been able to resume our Islamic life...Instead, a despotic and apostate group have become the rulers of the country." This, as Khalid emphasizes, speaks to the key place of local political repression and dissent in fostering and encouraging the

135 Khalid, 155-7.
137 Ibid.
emergence of radical and violent political parties operating under an Islamic rhetoric.

Propaganda from the IMU also demonstrates the importance of historical and local context in political manifestations of Islam in the area: in The Whirlwind of Jihad, Martha Brill Olcott describes the contents of a propaganda film titled “The Call” produced at the IMU studios in Afghanistan in 2000:

“The ‘call’ in the movie’s title refers to the call to jihad, and the film goes on to offer a history of Russian colonization and Soviet rule in Uzbekistan. According to the film, this history of colonization and oppression provided the constant incentive for jihad and local rebellion—from the Andijan uprising of 1898 to the resistance to the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, from the period of collectivization until the present, when the Uzbek people were urged to rise up and support the IMU under Tohir Yuldoshev’s leadership to oppose the godless regime of Islam Karimov. The movie even went so far as to make a direct link between the resistance in the early 1920s and that of Yuldoshev’s organization....”

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir, however, while still radical, is indeed radically different from the IMU. Khalid says,

“Founded in Jerusalem in 1953, it [the HT] is a transnational organization that seeks to Islamize society from the bottom up. Its avowed goals are straightforward but grandiose: to ‘resume the Islamic way of life and convey the Islamic da’wah [‘invitation,’ proselytism] to the world.’ Accomplishment of this goal will bring ‘Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life in Dar al-Islam and in an Islamic society such that all of life’s affairs in society are administered according to shariat rules.’ Such a society can only be built by ‘changing the society’s existing thoughts to Islamic thoughts so that such thoughts become the public opinion among the people, who are then driven to implement and act upon them. Secondly the Party works to change the emotions in the society until they become Islamic emotions that accept only that which pleases Allah and rebel against and detest anything which angers Allah. Finally, the Party works to change the relationships in the society until they become Islamic relationships which precede in accordance with the laws and solutions of Islam.’ The ultimate goal is the ‘restoration’ of the khilâfa, the caliphate, which the Party sees as a single Islamic state encompassing all the Muslims of the world.”

This, then, is something new. As Khalid notes, the IMU conceives of itself as a religious movement, but the HT understands itself as purely political. In fact, the HT, he writes,

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139 Khalid, 160.
"...casts itself proudly as 'a political group and not a priestly one.' Typically for an Islamist party, the HTI [Khalid’s acronym for the HT] has little interest in theological debate, seeing Islam primarily as a political system. As the party’s platform puts it, ‘Islam is [the party’s] ideology.’"140

What connects the HT and the IMU is, I think, less their “Islamic character”, and more the local issues that spawned them. "The HTI is primarily a vehicle for dissatisfaction with the current political and moral order in the region."141 The same could be said of the IMU, although the two groups clearly operate with different methodology, and this perhaps stems from their larger goals, as well: though both emerging in Central Asia as a response to problematic local conditions, the IMU does seek the overthrowing of a state, while the HT’s grand conception needs no such political surge, only a change in grassroots ideology.

In investigating the grassroots ideology of Central Asia, Salmorbekova and Yemelianova conducted fieldwork in the Ferghana Valley in order to interview the Muslim population about the resurgence of political variations of Islam in the area. According to the researchers,

"They [interviewees] attributed the Salafis’ relative recruiting success to their greater competence in Islamic doctrine and their readiness and willingness to address broader social and political issues...Most respondents agreed that the major causes behind the proliferation of Islamism in the Ferghana valley were the dire socio-economic and ecological conditions, the political suppression, the theological inadequacy and inertia of state-sponsored Islamic clergy, and the doctrinal, financial and propagandist advantages of Islamists."142

Fieldwork and journalistic investigation conducted by Rashid resulted in similar responses. He writes,

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140 Ibid, 160.
141 Ibid, 163.
142 Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, 231-2.
Politicians, aid workers, and intellectuals have repeatedly warned the government that the growing poverty, unemployment, and disease are responsible for the rise of Islamic radicalism. 'A social explosion is entirely feasible. People are disillusioned and they cannot do anything to improve their lot,' explained Jypar Jekshev, chairman of the Democratic Movement Party.”

Even with this information, political suppression in the area continued. Yemelianova notes that,

"In the early 2000s the parliaments of most ex-Soviet Muslim states and Russia’s autonomous republics passed new restrictive legislation on religious communities and adopted laws against extremism. These have provided a legal basis for further suppression of religious, or any other, opposition to the ruling regimes."144

The government has gathered lists of active and passive Islamists, and mass media campaigns have reinforced anti-Islamist sentiments. However, all government activities have proved counterproductive: radicalization has just been increased and enhanced, especially among angry young people who have experienced oppression first hand or through their family members and associates. In the Ferghana Valley,

"In the conditions of continuing economic hardship, especially high youth unemployment, the pervasive corruption of political and administrative bodies and the paralysis of democratic process, the ‘Islamic solution’ has presented an attractive, albeit imaginary, alternative to the existing political, economic and spiritual impasse.”145

This chapter has given a detailed overview of the historical, social, economic, and political conditions that have given rise to continued resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia, particularly the Ferghana Valley. The next chapter will address some of the larger questions that I have formulated or stumbled upon in the course of the writing of this thesis, specifically the rejection of Communism.

143 Rashid, 72.
144 Yemelianova, 'Islamic Radicalisation', 29.
145 Ibid.
and Marxism by ‘Islamically motivated’ or ‘Islamically inspired’ political parties in Central Asia and the relationship between Islam and liberation theologies from a Western perspective.
ISLAMIC RESURGENCE: POLITICS, IDENTITY, AND LIBERATION
Samantha Pellegrino

Works Cited


Up until now, this thesis has attempted to explore and explain the nature and causes of the resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia. It has done so through a thorough examination of both the intellectual underpinnings of politicized variations of Islam and the social, historical, economic, and political factors affecting Central Asia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is time now, however, to address the questions that this exploration has left in its wake, as well as to personalize this work through investigating the paths of thought that originally led me to this project and its focus on the resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia. Without the necessary background information of the previous two chapters, following up on those questions would have been impossible for me to attempt, and impossible for you to follow. But after the past two chapters, I believe we are both at the proper juncture to pursue this next set of more serious questions.

Peculiarly enough, it was the study of liberation theologies that led me to Central Asia. Learning last spring about the influence of Marxism in Latin American liberation theologies, as a student of Islamic Studies, I could not help but ask, where in time and space have Islam and politicized ideas of social justice (such as Marxism, communism, and socialism) interacted, and under what conditions and with what results? The most interesting thread of my inquiries led me to the Soviet Union, where a large Muslim population found itself oppressed by a socialist ideology. Furthermore, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, politicized manifestations of Islam began to use rhetoric and define social objectives quite similar to those of traditional liberation theologies in order to garner popular support, yet these did so without the inclusion of Marxist or socialist ideologies.
This was, frankly, not what I had expected. My younger self did not understand socialism as a fundamentally oppressive entity, and also presumed Islam and socialism would be compatible entities. Hadn't the Prophet Muhammad sought the creation of a community where resources and wealth were equally distributed? Wasn't there Qur'anic justification to be had for ideas of socialism? The whispered question behind my entire thesis thus emerges: why did the political resurgence of manifestations of Islam in Central Asia exclude the influences of Marxism and socialism?

**A Framework of Iranian Revolution**

Pursuing an answer to this question led me to Iran. The Iranian Revolution and the political triumph of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic, while less compelling to me personally than a more obscure study of Central Asia, nonetheless contains a crucial example of a political movement steeped in interpretations of Islam that rejected Marxist and socialist ideologies during its ascendency to power. It perhaps seems odd to turn to Iran for an understanding of the Ferghana Valley, especially given the emphasis I have placed on context throughout the course of this thesis. Naturally, the Iranian Revolution has a specific context, without which it could not have occurred. It would be foolish, for example, to suggest that previous involvement of the Tudeh Party in Iranian politics did not leave a distaste for socialism in the mouths of many. The same is true for political resurgence in Central Asia, as I believe I have made clear. And, as Zabih I. Munavvarov notes in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, "Regarding the possible repetition of the Iranian experience in its Central Asian version, it should be said that linking the process of religious revival in the Central Asian republics with the problem
of power and obligatory transformation to an Islamic fundamentalist government is a result of insufficient and superficial knowledge of the historical past and the reality of the region and its Muslim peoples." It is certainly not my intention to fulfill Munavvarov's prophecy: I do not want to simply and haphazardly link together these two instances of Islamic resurgence in the political sphere.

Yet, nothing happens in a vacuum. To suggest that there is nothing to be gained in comparing the Iranian Revolution and Islamic resurgence in Central Asia is close-minded at best. To understand the intellectual foundations and justifications of politically active and motivated interpretations of Islam, we had to foray into the minds of the Muslim Brotherhood's premier intellectuals and ideologues. To understand the denial of Marxism and socialism by Islamically-motivated political parties in Central Asia, we must look into the ideological underpinnings of the Iranian Revolution, as well as to the specific context of Muslims in Central Asia and their experiences with Marxism and socialism. In doing so, we can construct a comparative framework that we will utilize to understand Islamic resurgence in Central Asia through the lens of the Iranian Revolution.

In formulating this comparative framework, I drew from Hamid Dabashi's *Theology of Discontent*, with a specific focus on his chapter about Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shari'ati's *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*. I will highlight and explain key findings and concepts in these works, and then overlay the developed comparative framework atop my research on political manifestations of Islam in the Fergana Valley.

This will serve to explain the relationship between the two, and to answer our lingering questions.

Westoxication

While he did not live to see the events of 1979, Jalal Al-e Ahmad contributed hugely to “the Islamic Ideology” that drove the Revolution through his works of fiction and essays. Most especially, Al-e Ahmad gave name to the notion of “Westoxication” and wrote extensively on the idea and influence of “The West” on Iranian society and politics. His ideas serve as part of the intellectual backbone of the political push to disassociate completely from the West in social and governmental structure. According to Dabashi,

“Al-e Ahmad attends to the particular problems of his rapidly changing environment...In addressing questions of crucial importance for his contemporary concerns, ‘The West’ is always the dominant force...That Iranians had lost their sense of historical identity was, for Al-e Ahmad, a premeditated scheme of European colonialism and its commercial interests...”

It was, in particular, through the publication of Westoxication, or Gharbzadegi, that Al-e Ahmad made his ideological imprint on the Revolution. Gharbzadegi, published in 1962, became not only a key work of prose for ideological reference, but also such a significant part of the Iranian political vocabulary that even Ayatollah Khomeini referred to it. “No other term has captured the quintessential Zeitgeist of a generation like Gharbzadegi. Its ideological construction was a matter of political inevitability.”

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148 Ibid, 74.
By ‘Westoxication’, Al-e Ahmad meant “...the excessive and rather awkward preoccupation of certain influential segments of Iranian society with manners and matters ‘Western’ in origin.”

Gharbzadegi locates and criticizes ‘Westoxication’ in society, or as a social force, and suggests that this force particularly contributed to the weakening of the Iranian’s sense of national culture and character, with a focus on the Shi'i ethos. ‘Westoxication’, Al-e Ahmad felt, “…was gradually eroding the essence of the Iranian national spirit more than anything else.”

Al-e Ahmad felt that the larger consciousness of his nation, bound by history and religion in particular, was under attack from ‘Western’ cultural hegemony. He was able to work towards reconstrcuting “a religiously charged political identity” for Iranians in the 1960s, one based in an “Islamic identity, reinterpreted with contemporary historical exigencies,” through his expressions of discontent regarding the overriding of Islamic Iranian culture with that of ‘The West’. In his own words,

“We have not been able to preserve our ‘cultural-historical’ identity in the face of the machine and its inevitable onslaught. Instead, we have been dissolved. The point is that we have not been able to assume a calculated and evaluated position vis-à-vis this monster of our time.”

Dabashi compares Al-e Ahmad’s writing to the body’s alarmed response at the presence of an outside, or foreign, element. In this metaphor, the foreign element is “the collectively presumed forceful imposition of ‘Western’ cultural hegemony,” which, Dabashi keenly notes, Al-e Ahmad sees as an extension of a larger battle between ‘The West’ and (Islamic) Iran. In Dabashi’s words, “Al-e Ahmad’s ultimate concern...was for
Iran to have an independent cultural identity on par with 'The Western' nation-states...

Al-e Ahmad persistently tried to instill a sense of self-respect and dignity in being an 'Easterner'.

Besides noting aggressive 'Western' influence in his culture, Al-e Ahmad also takes stock of Marxism. His largest critique of that ideology is one we will see again in Shari'ati's work: namely, that Marxism is a product of 'The West' and a sign of 'Westoxication', regardless of its secular appeal. Beyond this, however, Al-e Ahmad critiques Marxism for its denial of religion, largely in part because of the revolutionary potential he sees in religions. Al-e Ahmad writes,

"If we look at it from a Marxist point of view, it is a time that 'religion = opium of the masses' is still a universal truism for Communist parties who wish to substitute [for religion] another sacred tradition. But take a look at Ghandi's strategies. In India he waged a war against colonialism with the aid of religion. Or [consider] what the Vietnamese Buddhists did in helping the Viet Cong; or what is happening in the European confusion with the participation of the left wing of the [Christian] church [in politics] or what went on in Algeria to get rid of the French; or what happened in our own country during the Tobacco Revolt, the Constitutional period, in nationalization [of oil], and in June 1963."

Al-e Ahmad grasped something key about the nature of revolutions in relation to religion. His own words express it best, but as I understand it, Al-e Ahmad knew that removing religion from politics and social affairs, as in Marxism, was fruitless when the people participating in politics understood themselves as religiously constructed. There is a necessity of tapping into a people's specific history, their specific religious experiences— their specific context, really—in order to mobilize them. Marxism denies

155 Ibid, 63.
156 Ibid, 53.
157 Ibid, 91.
the people their foundational culture, expects them to swallow 'class struggle' as the be-
all-end-all of a movement. In Al-e Ahmad’s words now,

"...You can only be effective in politics, or in the affairs of society, when you
have weighed the degree of receptivity or tolerance of that society vis-à-vis your
ideas. And in order to achieve this measure, you will have to have known that
society, its traditions, history, the factors instrumental in making its collective
belief, forces that mobilize its masses in the streets, and then its silence, its sitting
silently at home."\(^{158}\)

Islam and Marxism In Opposition

Jalal Al-e Ahmad defined Gharbzadegi for a generation and, in doing so, gave
name to the notion of a culture being aggressively saturated in Western influence. He
critiques Marxism for neglecting the context of a people in revolution and for being a
product of “The West” and thus just another symptom of Gharbzadegi when made
manifest in Iranian culture and politics. Ali Shari’ati extends Al-e Ahmad’s criticism in
Marxism and Other Western Fallacies, which, as the title may indicate, irrevocably
associates Marxism and “the West” with one another, and condemns Marxism as a
fallacy. Shari’ati defines Marxism as a fallacy in opposition to or against Islam, and his
ideas thus serve to both sever the link between Marxism and political manifestations of
Islam, as well as to champion Islam as the ultimate form of social and political
governance.

Shari’ati begins by elucidating the philosophical train that ties Marxism to
ancient Greek thought, necessarily, then, linking Marxism to “the West”, as well. In
short, Shari’ati sees the anthropocentric universe of the Greeks stemming from a
severance between man and gods. Thus, “Inasmuch as this anthropocentricity took the

\(^{158}\) Ibid, 92.
form of opposition to the heavenly, it became earthly and tended toward materialism. Thus humanism in the Western perspective—from ancient Greece to present-day Europe—has been drawn into materialism, and it has undergone a similar fate in the liberalism of the encyclopedists, in Western bourgeois culture, and in Marxism.”

Shari’atī then addresses the reader who, perhaps much like my previous self, assumes a congruence between Islam and Marxism. He notes that Islam and Marxism need to be compared against one another as, in his understanding, both are unique in addressing the totality of human existence completely, unlike other ideologies (including materialism, naturalism, nationalism, or other religions). In his words,

“Islam and Marxism, however, are two ideologies that embrace every dimension of human life and thought, which is to say that each possess a particular cosmology, a particular code of morals, a particular form of social organization, a particular philosophy of history and future outlook, and a particular vision of what man is and particular means of disseminating that vision. Each is keenly interested in the private and social lives of people in this world.”

However, “Islam and Marxism completely contradict each other in their ontologies and cosmologies.” Well, then. Shari’atī sees Marxism and Islam as two diametrically opposed schools of thought, diverging in both intellectual bases and world-views. Furthermore, each is fully developed and unable to be divided. They necessarily polarize. He elaborates further,

“Marxism, among all the new ideologies, is unique in that it struggles to base every aspect of human life—material and spiritual, philosophical and practical, individual and social—upon its peculiar materialistic world-view. It is for this reason that the system afflicts every dimension of human life with the calamity of materialism. Islam, alone among all the historical religions, has this same comprehensiveness. It does not confine itself to ordering the relations between man and God, or to the purification of the soul (as do Christianity and

159 Ali Shari’atī, Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique (Berkeley: Mizan, 1980) 19.
160 Ibid, 65.
161 Ibid.
Buddhism; it presents itself as a school comprehending the various aspects of human life, ranging from philosophical outlook to individual daily life."\textsuperscript{162}

Shari’ati presents more than just broad-sweeping rhetoric regarding the discrepancy between Islam and Marxism, however. He details eight places where Marxism fails and which of its aspects cause it to do so in these particular places, and then demonstrates how Islam succeeds where Marxism cannot.

First, Shari’ati claims that Marxism, being founded entirely on a materialistic perspective of the world, cannot understand or elevate humanity beyond the idea of materiality. Thus, humanity is lobbed in with all other beings "...in the confines of an unconscious and purposeless nature."\textsuperscript{163} Islam, in contrast, gives meaning to human existence through the world-view of \textit{tauhid}. Second, Marxism reduces humans to the product of tools by virtue of its materialism. Islam, however, sees both matter and man’s nature as signs of God, and thus is able “to uphold the human station without reference to natural and social determinations. It guards humanity from slipping into the pit of materialist, historicist, or sociologist fanaticism, so that the primacy of man will not be transformed into a primacy of matter or of tools.”\textsuperscript{164}

Third, Marxism cannot speak of values or make value judgments because of its devotion to material realism. Islam, however, can justify the existence of values logically through a belief in an absolute source. Fourth, Marxism "...is unable to base itself on a constant principle such as the human essence or human reality. Having denied both God and the primordial nature of man, it has relinquished the authentic basis for the human values that make up the body of morals."\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, 84.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 87.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 88.
principles that exist in human nature and serve as the basis of morals. While Marxism associates values with social customs and tries to “...bury them in the depths of an economic and social materialism,” Islam roots values in man’s nature and shows them “...to be reflections of the Absolute shining upon the human conscience.”

Fifth, Shari’ati writes, “Marxism, by annexing ‘dialectical’ to ‘materialism’ in order to arrive at an explanation for historical and social change, has arrived at a materialistic determinism in which man has given up his primacy...it denies whatever it is has claimed by way of humanism and completely deprives humanity of all freedom and responsibility.” Islam, meanwhile, sees man as having an essence composed of equal parts ‘clay’ and divinity, and as having a will that can choose to engage with either half.

Sixth, Marxism denies the constant principles of fire and logos that Heraclitus maintains in dialectics, and in doing so, denies any form of order or constant aspect of being to the universe and humanity. Islam does not have this problem. Seventh, “Marxism is the philosophy of the producers” while “Islam is the philosophy of guidance.” And finally, eighth, Marxism leaves humanity to suffer a historical determinism since it is man who has created God, whereas Islam preserves man’s independence of natural and material determinations since it is God who has created man.

Shari’ati leaves little room in his work for any contradiction of his most basic thesis—that is, the oppositional nature of Islam and Marxism, not necessarily the primacy of Islam. His vitriolic insistence that Marxism is incompatible with Islam

166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid, 89.
certainly influenced a great many Iranians in their denial of space for Marxism in politics.

Applying the Framework

To summarize the above research briefly, Shari'ati identifies Marxism and Islam as fundamentally oppositional, while Al-e Ahmed simultaneously identifies Marxism as Western in nature and suggests that Iran is diseased with ‘Westoxication’, or the nasty combination of Western cultural hegemony combined with a character-degrading obsession with all things Western. Al-e Ahmed also makes mention of the necessity of catering to the background and context of one’s people in inciting a revolution or political movement.

Shari'ati and Al-e Ahmed both write from a specific context, a specific time and place, yes; but they can also help us understand the lack of Marxism present in political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia. There is a strange simplicity to it, in fact. With regards to the Iranian Revolution, one could say that Marxism was denied a place in politics because the revolution was inherently based in the desire to locate and define the “Oriental Other”, the Iranian people, as both separate from and opposite to Western dominance — to de-Westoxify, to purge the influence — and Marxism, as demonstrated by Shari’ati’s work, is both Eurocentric and fundamentally opposed to what is here understood by Al-e Ahmed as the crux of Iranian identity: Islam. There is no place for a political product from the West, whose use in politics is considered a symptom of Westoxication by Al-e Ahmed, in a world reconstructed by “the East” that prioritizes its Islamic character.
This framework is easily transferable to the Central Asian situation. At its simplest, Marxism is cast out of political manifestations of Islam because of a desire to distance a potential Islamic government or state from the Soviet Union: a political entity that is defined in opposition to "the West" and therefore by "the West" (defined by a dialectic relationship with "the West" is perhaps the most accurate), and a Marxist entity, as well, that also harshly repressed Islam during its tenure. There is also the desire to self-style one's state representation: as Aziz Niyazi notes in Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union, Khanifi leaders during the period of time that Niyazi loosely labels as 'the Islamic Movement' in Tajikistan "...pointed out that Western liberal-democratic or socialist systems are unacceptable for their own model of social development."\(^{170}\) It is a further break from Western or colonial hegemony to self-style one's system of government, to define it according to one's constituency and local history, beliefs, and opinions.

A perhaps more complex reading would suggest that the new governments of the "-stan Republics" wanted to amalgamate a national ethos outside of religious identity, one that was post-Marxist as well as nationalist, in contrast to any identity based on a confessional group. In doing so, the new governments did not actually deviate much from Soviet ideologies: as Adeeb Khalid notes in Islam After Communism, "At bottom, of course, this national reassertion was very Soviet: it took for granted the basic assumptions underlying Soviet nationalities policies and challenged only the limits to Soviet discourse."\(^{171}\) Furthermore,


"This interest in the nation was harnessed by local Communist elites and put to good political use. It was common in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse to think that it had been caused by nationalism—that the nations that the Soviets had kept in their prison house had risen up and thrown off their chains. The reality was far more mundane, especially in Central Asia, where local Party elites displayed considerable agility during the final crisis of the Soviet Union and emerged firmly in control. Far from being a subversive phenomenon, nationalism had provided Party elites a way of maintaining themselves in power."  

This is all to say that the development of the unified cultural and national identities in Central Asia could be seen as essentially government-sponsored, national ways to appropriate religion or a religious identity for culture, in order to maintain the status-que power structure of the government. Khalid provides further evidence for this, in fact:  

"Central Asian Party leaders also supported the attempted putsch against Gorbachev in August 1991. Only when the plan failed did they hastily turn to independence, cashing in on their status as national leaders to declare their republics independent of Moscow. They retained their grip on power, which was threatened by a democratized reconstitution of the Soviet Union, by claiming it in the name of the nation. Western observers had expected nationalism to liberation the various nations of the Soviet Union from the Communist regime. Instead, nationalism became the vehicle for the Communist Party elites to retain their power."  

In pushing back against this appropriation, political manifestations of Islam must be in opposition to purely national identities (thus the predominance of pan-Islamic identity ideas) and also must position themselves as distinctly religious and therefore distinctly opposed to their religious opposites—i.e., Marxism.  

Of course, both of the above readings contain elements or entities of truth—there is no singular way to explain the absence of Marxism or socialism in political manifestations of Islam: only many ways. Perhaps it is important to point out the

172 Ibid, 127.
173 Ibid, 129.
simplest reading of all: a secular ideology was a competing ideology. Taking discourses of “East” and “West” out of it, the fact still remains that, in both Iran and Central Asia, nationalism, socialism, and political manifestations of Islam all fought for political control, and who is going to grant the enemy any ideological foothold? Yet I think Dabashi is correct in pointing out, “Whatever the process of its formation, the primary target of ‘the Islamic Ideology’ was not its rival secular ideologies. The state and its ‘Westernized’ despotism are what most animated ‘the Islamic Ideology’.”

I concur—taking the “East and West” out of the equation does not do any actor in these stories justice. Resurgence is a response, and in the case of both Iran and Central Asia, it is a response to a state failing its peoples' expectations and to the influence of the West.

Of course, Dabashi points out the great irony of the story of the Iranian Revolution and the story of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia. He writes,

"Thus juxtaposed, ‘Islam and the West,’ the very duality of it, is more a figment of the imagination, compelling though in its apparition, than having any claim on historical veracity. As cultural constructs, both ‘Islam and the West’ feed on the universal need to create a ‘Self,’ as an ‘Other’ is being simultaneously given birth to. As ‘The West’ created ‘the Orient’ to complete its ‘Self’-imagination, Muslims, in collaboration with their European and American counterparts, invented ‘The West’ for precisely the same purpose. While in ‘The West’, ‘The West’ was the self-congratulatory pronouncement of all things good and admirable, for Muslims it became the symbolic construction of corrupted excellence, an object of discrete adoration and manifest hatred.”

He goes on to question exactly how a new historicity and subsequent Islamic identity can be developed, particularly for the Muslims of Iran, without the damaging influence of this self-perpetuating dialectic. In the continued application of our comparative framework, while much time has passed since the initial resurgence of political variations of Islam in Central Asia in the 1990s, I believe that the people of Central Asia

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174 Dabashi, 502.
175 Ibid, 500.
are still uniquely located with reference to their ability to assess and reshape their self- and collective identities. The history of Islam in Central Asia is long and powerful, and the Central Asia republics are often passed over by Western eyes. Russia and the ever-prescribing force of Western globalization still influence and affect the Central Asian republics and the subsequent way their people identify relationally, of course, but I still find myself asking if there is the chance for the construction of an Islamic identity in Central Asia that begins to chip away at binary definition of “Islam and the West”.

Unfortunately, recent events and the involvement of Central Asian Muslims in them, such as the rise of IS and Central Asian members of its leadership, suggest that my hopes and beliefs are rather naïve. I think it is worth noting, however, that stemming from these observations, studies of Islam in the Central Asia have a high relevancy to the ongoing dialogue regarding Islamic identities, Orientalism, and the binary between “Islam and the West”.

Liberation Theologies, Islam, and Politics

Having explored the ideological underpinnings of political manifestations of Islam, the context that shaped Central Asia in such a way as to encourage political resurgence in the area, and the intellectual and theoretical reasons for the lack of Marxist or socialist ideology in political manifestations of Islam, there is one last question I want to explore, which is also the question that originally brought me to this topic. Can we understand political manifestations of Islam, specifically in Central Asia, as liberation theologies?
The Encyclopedia of Religion defines a liberation theology as "...critical reflection on the historical praxis of liberation in a concrete situation of oppression and discrimination. It is not a reflection on the theme of liberation but 'a new manner' of doing theology."\(^{176}\) The New Catholic Encyclopedia defines the term 'liberation theology' as "Historically and specifically, [referring] to a recent theological line of ...that focuses on the political, economic, and ideological causes of social inequality and makes liberation rather than development its central theological, economic, and political category."\(^{177}\)

Strictly speaking, the ideologies of Central Asian political parties representing various political interpretations of Islam can be seen as aligning with the major concerns of liberation theologies. Both are focused on the alleviation of oppressive social and political conditions through living and acting in a manner interpreted or understood as theological—certainly, political activism can be understood as "a new manner of doing theology", and I would even argue that it is not 'new' as political engagement and theology are strongly associated and encouraged across multiple religious traditions. Let us harken back to Sayyid Qutb, as well, who believed that Islam "...is not a philosophical elucidation of a scholastic doctrine, or an explanation of a metaphysical proposition, but a call for an internal social revolution"\(^{178}\) and jihad as a principle is "...conditioned on the emancipation of man from the slavery of other men."\(^{179}\) I feel a visceral tug in the back of my mind at the words 'internal social revolution' and

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\(^{179}\)Ibid, 194.
'emancipation' in this context stemming straight from my studies of liberation theologies.

But what, then, are the implications of attaching the term 'liberation theology' to political organizations that often perform and encourage violence as a means to acquire greater state power? Or, rephrased as a series of questions: what is the relationship between political manifestations of Islam and theologies, how do we reconcile theologies and politics, and is the distinction we make between theologies and politics a fundamentally "Western" idea or farce? The question of intention is also important here. On a strictly definitional basis, I find no reason to say that political manifestations of Islam cannot be interpreted as active or action-based theologies. The desire to incorporate Islam into the social and political sphere is certainly present in religious discourses and texts. Yet to label the actions of these political parties as theologies assumes, perhaps, a genuineness that political entities may not actually have. Power, and the desire for it, complicates this entire discourse: does a desire for power delegitimize the ability of something to validate itself theologically? Furthermore, the status of a political party as either the oppressor or representative of the oppressed also matters greatly: a liberation theology, by my definition, cannot oppress its own people; rather, it must work for their liberation. This immediately excludes certain political manifestations of Islam from the liberation theology category.

These collected questions could comprise an entire separate thesis — I will not, and really cannot, attempt to answer them in full. But, I will briefly offer my own two cents on the topic. I think it is quite possible that the major distinction between active or acting theologies and politics is linguistic. The obsession with separating politics and religion may well be a Western construct born out of the discourses and philosophies of
the Enlightenment. Our Western framework and understanding of ‘liberation’ might
hinder us in fairly assessing the qualities of liberation that may or may not be present in
certain political manifestations of Islam. This is not to say, of course, that all political
entities that claim access to Islamic truth are working for liberation, or should be granted
legitimacy—but let’s not forget that the definition of liberation is entirely contingent
upon our own cultural background. The fear of inadvertently legitimizing terrorism,
really, I think, stops many “Westerners” from associating liberation, a category charged
with linguistic and social assumptions stemming from our context, including an
overwhelmingly positive sensibility, with radical and political manifestations of Islam,
which are often inherently constructed as “wrong” or “oppressive” and categorized
with negative associations.

We can begin and end this chapter on the note of Marxism. Marx suggested that
religion and politics (socialism) were inherently incompatible. Yet in a direct refutation
of Marxism presented alongside political engagement coupled with religious values and
rhetoric, political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia demand that we reconsider
exactly what the relationship between politics and theologies really is, and where our
biases lie in answering that question.
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Works Cited


Conclusion

This thesis has been an exploration of (a) the nature and causes of the resurgence of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia, (b) related questions that emerged over the course of my initial exploration, and (c) larger themes regarding religion, politics, and identity, especially with regards to “Islam and the West”, that stem from reckoning with this material. To summarize, chapter one addressed the philosophical and intellectual underpinnings of Islamic resurgence in the world at large, with a specific focus on the term jihad. It questioned and examined the language we use in talking about politicized forms of Islam, and concluded with a discussion of specific terms and history necessary for understanding the contextual causes of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia. Chapter two discussed the social, political, economic, and historical conditions of Islam and Muslims before, during, and after the Soviet Union, in order to understand the circumstances beyond ideology that led to political manifestations of Islamic resurgence. The third chapter addressed the lingering question of why no Marxist or socialist influences were found in these political manifestations of Islam, and addressed larger themes and issues of the relationship between politics and theology, Islamic resurgence and liberation, and “Eastern” self- and collective identities and “Western” biases in perspective.

The real importance of this work, and any carefully thought-out work about Islam in Central Asia, is found in the attention it gives to the localities and nuances of an area whose narrative is usually neglected or colonized, and in the questions it asks about the relationship between politics, religion, and the identities of everyone involved. First, acknowledging the experiences of Muslims in Central Asia creates a narrative of decolonialization in two ways. It grants both agency and a driving or dominant
narrative to the experiences of people traditionally colored by colonialism and oppression. It also encourages Western academia at large to diversify its interests, to care about people and places that might not be on the news or in the center of current political issues, and furthers the larger push towards decolonization at large within academia. Second, in presenting larger questions about religion and politics, a study of this variety encourages self-reflection in academic work and a consideration of perspective that is both academically and emotionally valid. Over the short period of time in which I have been studying Islam, I have noticed how genuinely easy it is to analyze, for example, whether a political organization is ‘Islamic’ in character, without considering conceptions of identity, mine and others; and without stopping to truly analyze how my reading of the emotionality present in politics differs from that of those enacting the political activity themselves because of our respective identities. These questions and considerations are necessary components to a truly nuanced framework of studying Islam, as well as a truly nuanced study of religion and politics at large.

I want to talk a bit more about the place of less tangible categories of understanding, including emotion and identity, in academic works, especially those regarding politics, and including this one. A major goal of mine during the creation of this work was to find a way to include a sense of these visceral and difficult elements within the highly political topic that I had selected and in which, in the words of my advisor, I had “not left myself a lot of room.” In particular, the final chapter attempted to create a bridge between a rather removed and academic analysis of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia and an interest in the place where politics, identity, and emotions intersect.
What was the impetus behind incorporating these strange elements into my academic work? I have lately been reading a lot of material by the philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Gillian Rose, and I admittedly find myself highly influenced by these women’s ideas of an 'ethics of emotion'. There needs to be a place in academic discourse to explore the messy and visceral elements of human existence that are not so easily boxed or interpreted. Politics, and revolution specifically, should not be reduced to social factors and historical causes. There is a fundamental sense of emotion in taking political and/or revolutionary action. And understandings of identity are tied deeply to the emotion present in political stands. Separating these from each other, attempting to neglect the human element or to stuff it into a neat academic box, does no justice to anyone involved. The most compelling academic work that I have encountered is willing to acknowledge the messiness and contradictions of human feeling and lie down on the ground next to it. I sought to replicate the same willingness and engagement in my own work here.

Let me draw your eyes one last time to Dabashi’s work. Dabashi notes, regarding the case of the Iranian Revolution that,

"The revolutionary function of the ‘the Islamic Ideology’ received its impetus as well as its driving force from dormant common mythologies deeply rooted in the Iranian collective memory. This ideology was constructed, by a range of committed architects, out of materials sacred to the Iranian Shi‘i self-consciousness. The nature of this ideological construction was such that it connected the most immediate political concerns of the day to the subjective constitution of the Iranian mind.”¹⁸⁰

‘Common mythologies’, ‘collective memory’, ‘subjective constitution’...My point in drawing Dabashi back in here is to emphasize what I have just previously said, in

somewhat different words, regarding the place of the personal in academia. Dabashi identifies the key to the Iranian revolt as hinging upon subjective and emotional pieces of the identity of Iranians. The crux of political manifestations of Islam in Central Asia perhaps stems from the same place—from the lived experiences of humans on the ground as they intersect with social, historical, economic, ideological, and political situations and contexts.

I will also add that I worked very hard to step beyond my own intuitive and cultural biases during the creation of this work. Clearly, a large theme of this thesis is the mitigation of Western sensibilities and assumptions when analyzing Islam. But beyond academic analysis and the re-definition of terms and categories, I wanted to include a sense of my own intellectual labor. Self-reflexivity complements a trend of emotionality nicely, I find. My hope is that the greater incorporation of my own voice at the end of this project accomplishes this, as well.

Moving forward, there are, of course, further questions and avenues through which to continue an exploration of this topic. I would first and foremost encourage a student with more specialized language skills than my own to begin to examine the literature emerging from Central Asia. Just enough time has passed, I think, for us to begin to see highly crafted reflections on the political tumult of the 1990s emerge in the literary world. I would also encourage someone, perhaps my later self, to write that separate and very theoretically rich thesis about the interrelationship between politics, theologies, “Eastern and Western” biases, and our categorization of these ideas.

I do want to encourage the reader in moving forward not to ask one specific question, particularly in the context of current events. The question is, “Are violent political manifestations of Islam Islamic or unIslamic?” Anver Emon published an article
in late March titled ‘Is ISIS Islamic? Why it matters for the study of Islam’. He makes two
points that I would particularly like to highlight. First, Emon notes that,

"Recent arguments on whether ISIS is Islamic reveal two approaches to defining and studying Islam and “the Muslim”: (a) an originalism that runs the risk of pushing Islam out of history, and (b) a representative liberal-cum-protestantism that, by reading the Muslim subject both atomistically and representatively, either upholds or subverts an aggrandizing state."\textsuperscript{181}

Neither of these approaches is the scholarly ideal. Efforts should be made to encourage studies of Islam that are not inherently problematic, colonial, or even, frankly, politicized. Furthermore, that scholars study Islam and “the Muslim” in these ways betrays, Emon suggests, “a missed opportunity to reflect on the value of studying Islam as a mode of critique in the North American academy."\textsuperscript{182} This is a poignant reflection that scholars ought to keep at the forefront of their minds, and that I have attempted to represent at least subtly throughout the course of this thesis.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, Emon argues that discussing an Islamic/unIslamic binary with regards to political manifestations of Islam is simply unhelpful. He writes,

"The label of Islam(ic) in the case of ISIS might be better appreciated as what James Scott in \textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance} would call a ‘hidden transcript’ that is now made public. Scott writes about how the oppressed hew to ‘public transcripts’ that might appear as their contented resignation to the status quo. But when they are able to avoid detection, the dominated employ ‘hidden transcripts’ (like dragging one’s feet) to quietly subvert that same status quo."\textsuperscript{183}

In making their hidden transcript a highly public one, Emon realizes, ISIS has become the oppressor.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
"Drawing again upon Scott’s ‘transcripts,’ dominant powers both employ and often define the terms of the public transcript to which the oppressed must yield if they are to survive. ISIS’s public transcript of an Islam that sanctions violent spectacle has certainly created sufficient compliance for purposes of (per)forming its state." 184

In focusing, therefore, purely on the legitimacy of ISIS’s Islamic rhetoric, or the Islamic or unIslamic nature of the group, scholars assume that the public transcript ISIS presents is the only transcript that the group has. “To dispute whether ISIS is or is not Islamic assumes the exclusiveness of ISIS’s public transcript as the only transcript. ISIS’s hidden transcript, though, will remain hidden for as long as we remain focused on whether ISIS is Islamic or not," 185 Emom writes. In questioning the Islamic or unIslamic nature of violent political manifestations of Islam such as ISIS, then, we give credence to the oppressor: we leave an avenue for continued oppression open because of our own blind spots and biases in understanding. As such, I ask that you not walk away from this thesis wondering about a binary distinction between Islamic and unIslamic. Instead, as you move forward, consider how you observe and study and understand Islam, and consider what role your own selfhood, identity, and emotions play in your intuitive thinking and understanding as you do so.

If you have made it this far through this work, thank you. I hope the insights provided were valuable and stimulating, and that you turn this last page with some of your preexisting categories of understanding deconstructed, a greater knowledge of the intellectual underpinnings of Islamic resurgence and revolution, and a curiosity about the place where politics, religion, and emotion intersect.

184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
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Complete Works Cited


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