Introduction

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This collection is the result of a conference on Islam in post-Soviet societies held in the summer of 2005 at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany. The conference discussed how Islam has developed and is being practised in these societies after the end of 70 years of official Communist atheism. A second aim was to explore how an understanding of Islam in this region could benefit from comparison with the anthropology of Islam in other Muslim societies. The Muslim populations of the former Soviet Union share a common historical experience. Soviet state policies towards Islam were relatively uniform throughout the territory of the Union. Until the *perestroika* reforms in the latter half of the 1980s, the majority of Muslim citizens were isolated from contacts with the wider Muslim world. Access to formal religious education was restricted to a small circle of official imams who studied in the two religious training institutions serving the entire country. For others, opportunities for Islamic learning were limited to lessons from neighbourhood mullahs or female religious specialists, most of whom had little religious training themselves. The number of mosques permitted to operate was relatively small and people were discouraged from attending them. As a result, the practice of Islam for most Muslims was largely confined to the performance of life cycle rituals such as weddings, circumcisions and funerals.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union there was an upsurge in interest in Islam on the part of the Muslim populations of all the successor states. In many of the Muslim majority republics, such as those of Central Asia, central governments have adopted the Islamic heritage of their region as a key element of nation-building projects. What unites the experience of Muslims in these societies is the sudden re-emergence of Islam into the public sphere, the opening up of contacts with the broader Muslim world, and

greater opportunities for studying Islam both abroad and at home in newly opened madrasas and religious higher education institutions. As students have returned home and as missionaries from Muslim countries have entered the region, people have become acquainted with ideas and movements within Islam which have long been circulating in the wider Muslim world.

The institutional structure of religious administration, a legacy of the Soviet period, is another factor common across the Muslim republics. The Soviet Union's four regional Spiritual Boards were responsible for registering mosques, appointing imams, and monitoring religious practice. These have been 'nationalised', with each republic forming its own independent board and religious training institutions. While all are formally non-governmental institutions, as they were in the Soviet Union, the extent to which they remain under the control of state authorities depends on how tightly religious practice is regulated in a particular republic. Thus, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan is much more closely tied to central government than its counterparts in, for example, Dagestan or Tatarstan.

Up to now, analysis of Islam in the former Soviet Union has been principally dominated by a concern about religious extremism. A large body of literature has been produced by journalists, policy think tanks, and international conflict resolution organisations speculating upon the challenge Islam poses to secular governments and regional stability. Much of this analysis places Islamic extremism within a volatile mix of poverty, water scarcity, inter-ethnic tensions, and repressive local regimes which threatens to explode at any moment[1]. Unfortunately academic studies have not been immune to this view. Even if analysis by social scientists tends to be more measured, the question of Islam is too often framed in terms of an Islamic 'resurgence', evidenced by such phenomena as the dramatic increase in the number of mosques, the formation of Islamic political parties, and the activities of missionaries from other Muslim countries[2]. Many have discussed whether 'extremist' or 'fundamentalist' movements have gained a foothold in post-Soviet states and whether local populations are likely to be attracted to these trends or to remain loyal to 'traditional', locally rooted forms of 'moderate' Islam[3]. These studies confine themselves to the macro-level of government policy and religious movements. When the practice of ordinary Muslims is touched upon, it is generally glossed over as 'traditional' or 'parallel' Islam and left largely unexamined.

The study of Islam in both the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet societies has suffered from being placed within an overly limiting analytical framework. Before the

demise of the Soviet Union this was Sovietology. Within this framework, Islam was interesting to Western analysts primarily in terms of the potential threat it posed to Communist rule in the Muslim republics[4]. Research on Islam in the post-Soviet era has largely pursued similarly instrumentalist objectives, adapted to fit a changed political environment. This analysis is framed within what are ultimately the geopolitical and security concerns of the US and Western European governments and therefore fails to address the significance for local Muslims of debates and struggles surrounding the practice of Islam. It does not shed light on the varied ways in which Muslims in post-Soviet societies are exploring and questioning what it means to be a good Muslim.

What has been largely missing up to now is a nuanced account of how Islam is lived 'on the ground'. We need to look beyond categories such as 'fundamentalism' and 'tradition' to reveal the dynamic interactions between the actors in central governments, officials within the quasi-state religious administrations, religious groups not sponsored by local governments, and the diversity of Muslim believers, all of whom are motivated by their individual agendas, interests and beliefs. Most importantly, we need to adopt an analytical frame which can accommodate the study Islam in the region on its own terms and at the same time place Islam in post-Soviet space within a comparative perspective of Islam as practiced in the wider Muslim world.

The study of Islam in the Soviet Union

Some of the richest ethnographic accounts of the practice of Islam in the Soviet period and earlier are provided by Soviet ethnographers. However, the analytical slant of this literature was shaped by the necessity of writing in accordance with Soviet state policy and Marxist-Leninist ideology. Islam, and religion in general, was assumed to be regressive in two ways. It acted to further the interests of exploitative classes by concealing the real relations of production[5]. It was also identified with pre-modern societies which Soviet ideologues assumed would whither away naturally with the advance of the socialist modernity. Given this ideological straitjacket, it was inevitable that the everyday practice of Islam in the period of mature socialism would be viewed in terms of 'traditionalism'. In addition, because of the existence of a quasi-state regulatory structure, many Soviet analysts have tended to identify an 'official', textually 'pure' Islam which existed within this structure where imams and religious officials were formally educated in the central scriptures of Islam. They opposed to this a 'popular', 'traditional' practice which existed outside official regulation.

Sergei Poliakov's analysis of Islam in Central Asia is fairly typical in this regard. Although he went against the grain of Soviet scholarship in asserting that Islam was not being displaced by a secular, socialist consciousness, he characterises rural Central Asia in the late Soviet period as a 'traditional society'. By this he means 'the complete rejection of anything new introduced from outside into the familiar, 'traditional' way of life'[6]. He distinguishes between the 'government Islam' of the few registered mosques, and the vastly more widespread 'everyday' Islam. The latter is comprised of worship at the large number of buildings which serve as unregistered mosques, the veneration of holy sites (*mazars*), and the various life cycle rituals held by families with community involvement. The 'underground' imams who officiated at the unregistered mosques, the female religious specialists, and the guardians of *mazars* lacked formal religious learning. However, being closer to ordinary people than officially appointed imams they exerted a strong influence. Poliakov argues that this 'everyday' Islam regulated daily life in families and neighbourhoods, and generated a particular 'traditional' way of life.

Arising from the association of 'real' Islam with the formal learning of official imams is a tendency in Soviet scholarship to identify non-scriptural practices as 'pre-Islamic' survivals. Practices described in this way include healing and divination undertaken through the medium of spirit beings (usually referred to as shamanism), belief in the destructive influence of the evil eye and witchcraft, the production and use of protective amulets, and many of the customs and ceremonies connected with life cycle rituals[7]. Thus, what emerge from Soviet ethnographic accounts of Islam are clear sets of oppositions; that between the 'official' and the 'traditional', and between 'pure' Islam and 'pre-Islamic tradition'.

Studies by scholars outside the Soviet Union often adopted similar dualistic oppositions. The concept of 'parallel' Islam was most notably developed by the Sovietologist Alexandre Bennigsen to mean Muslim practices which took place outside the sphere of the Muslim Boards and official mosques[8]. However, rather than identifying these practices with traditionalism, the emphasis is placed on the fact that they escaped state regulation and control. As such they potentially posed a threat to the authority of the Soviet state. This approach has been followed by others who have described how officially established imams attempted to reconcile the tenets of Islam with communist ideology and at times acted as spokesmen for the Soviet regime in foreign policy matters. 'Parallel Islam', on the other hand, was seen as potentially

subversive by Soviet authorities[9]. Yaacov Ro'i's recently published study of Islam in the Soviet Union, one of the most comprehensive such studies to date, similarly adopts the categories of establishment and parallel Islam[10].

There have been a number of criticisms of such a sharply dichotomous view of the practice of Islam in the Soviet Union. It has been argued that far from being clandestine and outside of state control, unregistered mullahs were in fact supervised by officially appointed imams[11]. Ro'i himself has described the links between the official spiritual directorates and unregistered religious practitioners[12]. Shirin Akiner has suggested that Muslim practice be placed on a continuum of shades of belief from the affective (for example the wearing of protective amulets) and integrative (celebrations which foster communal solidarity) to a spiritual and intellectual relationship with God framed by a formal system of belief. She argues that the spiritual, intellectual end of the continuum was blocked off for most of the population during Soviet rule reducing Islam to a state of primitive superstition[13].

One of the most interesting criticisms has been made by Mark Saroyan. As well as demonstrating that popular practices penetrated into the official space of the mosque, and visa versa, he has argued that the Muslim leadership within the official religious hierarchy were not mere mouthpieces for the state authorities. He interprets their attempts to reconcile the principles of Islam with Communist Ideology not as accommodationism but as a counter discourse. By reworking state discourses of the 'new Soviet man' into the 'new Soviet Muslim citizen' they attempted to subvert the state's hegemonic argument that religion only served to hamper human progress[14]. Thus, 'official Islam' cannot be assumed to be merely state controlled Islam since the official institutions encompassed diverse agendas and interpretations of Islam which were not always entirely in keeping with the Soviet state ideology.

Although these critiques of a stark separation between 'official' and 'parallel' Islam demonstrate how interconnected the two were in reality, they do not entirely escape the limitations of the more crude dualistic models. In common with Soviet scholarship they fail to take seriously the practice of the majority of Muslims. Lying behind the analysis is an assumption of some version of the dichotomy between the Great and Little traditions popularised in relation to Islam by Gellner[15]. They continue to relegate non-scriptural practice to the realms of unreflexive tradition. However, if we dismiss the local practice of Muslims as mere superstition in opposition to the rational belief systems of textual religion, we ignore how they constitute equally coherent

reflections on the order of the world and the place of humans within it, on concepts of morally good action, and on the nature of a person's relationship with God[16]. Moreover, the category of 'pure' or 'orthodox' Islam of the Great tradition does not take account of the diversity of interpretation within scripturalist Islam itself.

From 'official' to 'traditional' Islam, from 'parallel' to 'fundamentalist' Islam

With the break-up of the Soviet Union there has been renewed popular interest in Islam. Since the Muslim republics gained independence, greater freedoms of religious expression have been instituted and contacts with the rest of the Muslim world expanded. From a situation where Islam was suppressed or at best reluctantly tolerated by state authorities, in many of the successor states it has been actively embraced by ruling elites as a source of legitimacy for their regimes and as an element in their state-building projects. However, this does not mean that all interpretations of Islam and all forms of Muslim practice have been able to compete on equal terms. Religious expression continues to be regulated more or less closely in the different republics through the quasi-state Muslim religious administrations.

For example, in Uzbekistan the Karimov regime promotes Islam as an element of Uzbek national culture. A national heritage version Islam, which celebrates the achievements of figures in Islamic history who can be shown to have some connection with the present territory of the country, is constructed within state discourses[17] and presented as in keeping with local 'tradition' (see the contributions of Kehl-Bodrogi and Louw). These include figures such as Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, the 9th century compiler of the most authoritative collections of hadith, and Baha' ad-Din Naqshband, founder of the Naqshabandi Sufi order. The only form of Islam permitted is that of the Hanafi school and a sanitised celebration of Uzbekistan's Sufi tradition. Any religious practice or the expression of ideas outside these narrow bounds is ruthlessly suppressed.

In the case of Tatarstan and Dagestan in the Russian Federation, the official Muslim boards have been appropriated by the leaders of Sufi *tariqats* (orders) which operated outside the official religious administrative structures during the Soviet period. The main challenge to their authority comes from reformist movements who promote a strictly scriptural interpretation of Islam. They oppose much of local practice as un-Islamic innovation, reject the existence of hidden or mystical knowledge and divine grace accessible only to Sufi *shaykhs*, and advocate a personal, direct relationship

between each Muslim and God through an informed interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna.

As the political and religious landscape has changed in the ex-Soviet republics, the terms of analysis used by those studying Islam in the region have correspondingly shifted. However, striking continuities with the studies of Islam in the Soviet period persist. While the term 'parallel' Islam is no longer widely used, many writers continue to construct a dichotomy between 'official' and 'unofficial' Islam. The former retains its reference to the state, but is now identified with local 'tradition', reflecting the fact that practice which in the Soviet period was a marker of 'parallel' Islam is now being promoted by many post-Soviet governments. 'Unofficial' Islam as the term suggests continues to refer to practice which takes place outside the sphere of the quasi-state religious hierarchies. However, these now tend to be identified as 'fundamentalist', 'Wahahhabi', 'Islamist' or 'revivalist'. They are described as foreign or alien ideologies which were introduced to the region in the last years of the Soviet Union and especially since its collapse[18].

This sort of characterisation suffers from the same deficiency as the similarly dualistic analysis of Islam in the Soviet Union. In fact, many of those who describe Islamic practice in terms of official and unofficial Islam themselves admit that it is often difficult to draw a clear distinction between them. Individuals might describe themselves as both followers of 'traditional' forms of Islam and as reformists who disapprove of many local non-scripturalist elements of local Muslim practice. Perhaps more importantly, however, the use of terms such as 'traditional' 'fundamentalist' and 'alien' Islam hinders clear understanding because it adopts terms internal to local discourses as objective analytical and descriptive categories.

The term 'traditional' is not value-neutral. It is used as a weapon in the ideological and theological debates of different groups in their struggles to define and promote their own versions of Islamic orthodoxy. The Karimov regime in Uzbekistan promotes its own interpretation of Islam based upon what it constructs as the region's Islamic past. It refers to the 'Golden Heritage' (*altin meros*) of the nation, its Sufi tradition and the Hanafi legal school. All other interpretations of Islam are defined as 'bad' Islam, foreign inspired, fundamentalist and extremist, alien to Uzbek tradition and spiritual values, and linked to national and international terrorist networks. On the other hand, for many groups who promote a scripturalist interpretation of Islam 'tradition' has negative connotations. It refers to un-Islamic innovation which needs to be expunged

from local practice. People who hold such views might be members of Islamic movements acting outside the sphere of the official religious regulative structures. At the same time they could just as easily be officially appointed imams who frown upon the visiting of shrines and the activities of those who heal illness or claim to foretell the future with the aid of spirit helpers. In this collection, Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi provides an insightful analysis of the dilemmas faced by officially appointed imams in a major shrine in Uzbekistan. These imams find themselves caught between their convictions that the worship of saints is a form of idolatry, and the necessity of conforming to state policies which condones, and even encourages, the visitation of shrines as part of Uzbek national tradition.

By describing a certain category of religious practice as 'traditional', those who aim to understand the dynamics of Islamic practice are in fact entering into local debates about what constitutes 'correct' Islam. They are implying the existence of a frozen, reified version of Islam which is re-emerging after 70 years of Soviet suppression and failing to recognise the fact that the practice of Islam is, and always has been, produced within a dynamic process of contestation, change and development. By characterising certain ideas and groups as 'alien' and 'non-traditional' they implicitly support parties within this contest which use similar labels to delegitimise competing visions of Islam.

An anthropological approach to Islam in post-Soviet societies

The emergence of Islam as an object of comparative study within anthropology was marked by the publication of *Islam Observed* in 1968, Clifford Geertz's study of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia[19]. As Robert Launay has observed, prior to this anthropologists tended to treat Islam as a textually defined set of beliefs external to the societies they studied. Islam was something that was transformed within local practice into the syncretic religious forms anthropologists were actually interested in, and the study of Islam itself was left to theologians and Islamicists[20]. This is reminiscent of the approach adopted by the Soviet ethnographers I discussed above. Geertz, however, like many of those who followed him within the growing field of the anthropology of Islam, was concerned with developing an analytical framework which could recognise both the scriptural, theological and historical unity of Islam, as recognised by Muslims themselves, as well as the diverse manner in which Islam was realised in local practice.

The most notable example of this approach within the Soviet and post-Soviet context is Bruce Privratsky's account of Muslim practice in Kazakhstan[21]. Privratsky agues that we should not create a dichotomy between textually pure Islam and practices which are labelled pre-Islamic or shamanistic, such as the cult of the ancestors and healing with the aid of spirits. Kazakhs themselves make distinctions between different forms of religious observance, referring to theological, Qur'anic Islam as a pure ideal which is aspired to (*taza jol*), while the practice of Islam in everyday life is referred to as 'Muslimness' (*musilmanshiliq*). These, however, should not be seen as contrasted domains but refer to different aspects of religious life. The Islamic ideal is most closely approximated by a group within society known as *qojas*, who claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad or specific saints, and by older people. Privratsky uses the concept of collective memory as the link between a global Islamic tradition and the heterodox complex of Kazakh religious attitudes, which includes the cult of saints and ancestors as well as healing cults. Kazakhs feel their religion is legitimately Islamic because it was handed down to present generations by their ancestors who followed the path of pure Islam, because of the presence within society of the *qojas* and others who live the pure path on behalf of the rest of society, and also the physical presence within the Kazakh landscape of the tombs of saints and other religious structures.

A problem with this type of analysis, however, is that it suggests the existence of coherent, localised formations of Islam, so that there is a distinctively Moroccan, Indonesian or Kazak Islam. These accounts do not sufficiently acknowledge the diversity of interpretation within a particular society as different groups compete in asserting their own vision of 'correct' Islam. Moreover, while they acknowledge the existence of a wider Muslim world, they do not take sufficient account of the linkages between local Muslims and ideas and trends circulating outside the local context. Perhaps most seriously, in directing their analysis towards showing that local practice is legitimately Islamic, for example that it is the local contextualisation of a global tradition[22] or the realisation of that tradition within a particular worldview[23], they are in effect making a theological statement about what should be regarded as Islam[24]. They are in danger of being drawn into local debates and struggles over meaning and knowledge in the same way as are analysts of post-Soviet societies who define Islam in terms of 'extremism' or 'tradition'.

A more productive approach is suggested by Talal Asad. Islam, he argues, should be studied as a discursive tradition that seeks to define the correct form and

meaning of religious practice. It relates conceptions of an Islamic past with an Islamic future through practices, institutions and social relations in the present. Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions, but orthodoxy is not merely a body of opinion about the correct interpretation of Islamic texts. Rather, it is a relationship of power. 'Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy'[25]. Rather than entering into debates about what can and cannot be considered as 'real' Islam, anthropologists should instead comment upon the processes and struggles through which local actors themselves attempt to define what constitutes true Islam and a good Muslim.

This has broadly been the approach followed by most anthropologists writing about Muslim societies in recent years. They have, for example, studied the discourses and struggles over what constitutes proper Muslim belief and practice[26], the different and competing modes of authority and knowledge[27], or they have looked at the linkages between local Muslim practice and global ideas and movements[28]. This is also the approach that contributors to this collection have taken with regard to Islam in post-Soviet space. Sergei Abashin provides a finely grained account of the competition for religious authority and influence in a village in Tajikistan in the mid 1990s. He identifies different actors in this competition, including those who claim descent from the family of the Prophet Muhammad or from Muslim 'saints'[29], a group called *mahsums* who are members of families locally recognised as having a continuous tradition of religious learning, and *hajjis*, a group of villagers who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca and have obtained a degree of religious learning and knowledge of how Islam is practised in the Middle East. Abashin describes the different means by which these actors have sought to legitimate their religious knowledge and authority. These included claims to an ascribed, hereditary status, acquired learning, and sponsorship of the construction of mosques and other religiously oriented charity. Most interestingly, he describes how local competition was intimately linked to national struggles taking place at the time between the Communist and Islamic political parties, and how Muslim reformist missionaries from neighbouring Uzbekistan were incorporated within the religious competition of the village.

Vladimir Bobrovnikov also describes the religious politics of a village, in this instance a village in a mountainous region of Daghestan. Although the parties in this conflict have been described as 'Sufis' and 'Wahhabis', he criticises the characterisation

of the conflict as one between 'traditional' and 'foreign' or 'extremist' Islam. He traces the historical roots of the formation of local Muslim communities not to some pre-Soviet custom but to the process of Soviet collectivisation itself and the local administrative structures instituted by the Soviet state. He describes how channels for the transmission of religious knowledge have been transformed since the end of Communist rule. The memorisation of 19th century lithographs of Arabic texts, which had been the dominant form of Islamic learning during much of the Soviet period, has been displaced as villagers have been able to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, Muslim missionaries have arrived from Turkey and the Arab Middle East, a network of secondary and higher institutions of Islamic learning has been developed, and Islamic literature in Russian and local languages has become freely available. Bobrovnikov gives an account how Islamic reformists have called for the 'purification' of Islam from what they consider to be non-Qur'anic local customs. They and their opponents both claim to represent 'true' Islam which they accuse others of having abandoned. The reformists in this debate have been labelled as 'Wahhabists', after the 18th century reformist movement in the Arabian Peninsula, while their opponents have been labelled as 'Sufists'. Bobrovnikov argues, however, that these are pejorative labels employed as tools in the ongoing theological debate rather than accurate descriptions of the actual practices or affiliations of the parties involved.

Most of the contributors to this collection have concentrated upon how struggles to define 'real' Islam take place among men. Habiba Fathi, however, provides an interesting and much needed perspective by showing how this struggle also takes place within the religious practice of women. Her contribution focuses upon female religious specialists in Uzbekistan called *otin-oyi*, who officiate at women's religious rituals and provide Islamic education for girls and sometimes boys in their neighbourhoods. She describes the historical development of this particular role in Central Asia, and relates it to women religious specialists in other Muslim societies. Since the end of Soviet rule, a new group of women, who have graduated from religious educational institutions, have begun to emerge and are competing with 'traditional' *otin-oyi* in defining 'correct' Islamic practice. While not all *otin-oyi* agree with the theological message of these 'new' practitioners, they are nevertheless respected for their skill in the chanted recitation of the Qur'an. Fathi also gives an account of the involvement of women within the quasi-state religious institutions, and how theological struggles are fought in that context as well.

Kristina Kehl-Bodrogi's contribution focuses on a contest over the control of a regionally important shrine in Khorezm, Uzbekistan, a tomb attributed to the Sufi mystic Yusuf Hamadani. On one side of this contest are imams appointed to manage the shrine by the national religious administration, who are educated at state registered institutions of higher Islamic learning. Opposing them is a group of *shaykhs* who have been ousted from the shrine by the officially appointed imams. These *shaykhs* base their claim to the shrine upon membership of lineages which have historically acted as its custodians, receiving the offerings of pilgrims and reciting prayers for them. Both these groups act out their competing claims and strategies within the broader context of the government's attempts to construct its own particular vision of national and religious identity, within which shrines such as this play an important part. While the officially appointed imams might prefer to take firmer action to discourage the veneration of saints by pilgrims, a practice they regard as idolatrous, their freedom for action is circumscribed by the fact that government ministers and the president himself have undertaken pilgrimage to major shrines. Overly active discouragement by the imams risks placing them in opposition to the regime's own discourses.

Kehl-Bodrogi highlights the effect that the policies and active interventions of central government have had on local struggles and debates, something which is evident in most of the contributions in this collection. Indeed, the relationship between the state and Islam has been an important topic for anthropologists working in Muslim societies. Anthropologists have studied such issues as the place of Islam within civil society and democratic processes[30], the attempts of state authorities to dominate the transmission of religious knowledge[31], or the effects of state power on the gendered practice of Islam[32]. Anthropologists working in post-Soviet Muslim societies are in a privileged position to provide insights into this relationship. While in many Muslim majority countries central governments have sought to regulate religious expression and have incorporated religious institutions and personnel within some form of state-controlled hierarchy, the Soviet Union arguably went further down this road than most. The policies and discourses of many post-Soviet governments, and the way these are operationalised by state officials and others, continues to have a major impact in defining the possibilities and limits of religious expression.

The first anthropological analysis of this dynamic within the Soviet Union was Gillian Tett's study of a village in Tajikistan during the *perestroika* period. She draws on Nancy and Richard Tapper's analysis of the Turkish context[33] to suggest a gendered

division of religious practice. Local practice was shaped by life within an authoritarian state which curtailed pubic religious expression. Men were more likely to be engaged in the public sphere and state employment and tended to be associated with the Communist and modern side of village life. Women on the other hand were associated with domestic space and perceived as central to its traditional values. Their performance of religious duties and adherence to local ideals of proper female behaviour helped to maintain the community's sense of Tajik and Muslim identity[34].

The effect of state power on Muslim religious expression is the central concern of Edmund Waite's contribution in this collection in which he deals with Islam among China's Uyghur minority. Although China cannot of course be described as 'post-Soviet', the experience of Uyghur Muslims living under the Chinese version of state socialism parallels in significant ways the experience of Muslims in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia. As in the Soviet Union, religious expression in China has been subjected to periods of active suppression and relative tolerance. Moreover, again paralleling the situation in many post-Soviet societies, religious freedoms for the Uyghurs were once more restricted from the late 1990s in response to fears of separatist and Islamic political movements. Waite analyses how changing state policy has influenced the way in which Uyghurs have been able to express themselves as Muslims. He argues that the effect of state interventions has been to privilege the memorisation of key religious texts in Arabic as the primary means of gaining Islamic knowledge, and to reinforce the position of the elders who mediate this transmission. Despite increasing trans-national ties with neighbouring states and the increased availability of religious literature printed in the regional capital of Xinjiang, state control of the main mosques and the imams who manage them effectively prevents those with a reformist agenda from openly preaching their beliefs

The remaining contributions deal with what might be called processes of self formation through which individuals explore and negotiate what it means to be a good Muslim. Maria Louw describes how Muslims in Uzbekistan re-establish a sense of 'normality' and moral direction in a situation where previous certainties and securities have been shattered, and in which they feel helpless and dislocated. Through visiting the shrines of Muslim saints, and through dream encounters with these saints, they establish a connection with divine knowledge and power which endows them with the agency to intervene successfully within a changed world. Saints and their shrines provide a moral foundation upon which they can imagine an alternative sphere of being, which restores

their sense of themselves as good Muslims. She uses the phrase 'morality in the making' to convey the sense of how 'Muslimness', a local way of being Mulsim, is an ongoing process of exploration and negotiation rather than a distinct and reified Uzbek version of Islam, even though the post-independence government is attempting to fix it in this way.

Negotiations and debates about what constitutes 'real' Islam are not confined to distinctively religious sites such as mosques, madrasas, and the shrines of Muslim saints. Nor is it only those recognised as religious specialists of one sort or another who engage in it. Julie McBrien's contribution shows that the Muslim public sphere where such debates take place can also encompass communal celebrations such as wedding feasts, and how discussions which take place in this public sphere feed into the process by which individuals construct themselves as good Muslims. She describes the impact of a new, religiously oriented form of wedding celebration which is being adopted by some households in a town in southern Kyrgyzstan. These new celebrations are distinctive in that an attempt is made to conform to what are perceived to be Islamic principles. Thus, alcohol is not served, the guests are segregated by sex, and there is none of the music or dancing which typically forms a central part of the evening phase of local wedding celebrations. A significant innovation is a religious sermon, usually given by well known preachers from outside the community. McBrien describes how inhabitants of the town explore alternative ways of living a Muslim life through attendance at these new wedding feasts, and how they provide a focus for discussion within the town about what it means to be a 'real' Muslim.

Since the restrictions upon religious practice have been relaxed a number of new religious movements have appeared in the post-Soviet states. These draw upon diverse religious and philosophical sources, but in the Muslim republics many have taken on a distinctly Muslim cast. Pawel Jessa describes one such movement in Kazakhstan called Aq jol (Pure Way). This movement is founded upon local traditions of healing and the visitation of the shrines of Muslim saints, and advocates that individuals express their faith in God through developing and maintaining a state of spiritual purity. The central ritual of this movement consists of a healing ceremony held on Thursday evenings during which the blessings of the ancestors are called down upon participants. The movement is expanding as members acquire their personal protective spirits, become healers and found their own affiliated groups. Such movements have not generally been studied by anthropologists of Muslim societies. This may be because

they are not recognised by analysts as being truly Islamic, or perhaps because they are not commonly found in the societies they study. However, much of the doctrine and ritual of Aq jol derives from Islam as it is practised in Kazakhstan and most of its members describe themselves as Muslims. In studying Islam in post-Soviet societies Aq jol and new religious movements like it cannot be ignored as they are part of the wider, ongoing debate about what it means to be a Muslim.

Conclusion

This collection advances our understanding of Islam in post-Soviet societies by moving the analysis beyond the simplistic opposition between 'traditionalism' and 'extremism' which has long dominated academic commentary. The contributions draw attention to the local dynamics of debates about what it means to be a Muslim and explore the stakes involved in these struggles. Anthropological studies of Islam in other parts of the world have been addressing these issues for some time. They have explored conflicts between followers of scripturalist interpretation who seek to 'purify' Islam from non-Qur'anic custom, and those for whom locally rooted practices are integral to their Muslim faith and an essential part of their relation to the divine. They have examined the influence of global trends and translational movements on local practice. Most importantly, they have sought to study the lived practice of Islam on its own terms, without prejudging what might constitute 'real' or 'genuine' Islam. The present collection has extended these insights to the study of post-Soviet Muslims.

A contribution which the study of this region can provide within the broader anthropology of Islam is to highlight the importance of exploring not just these processes and conflicts themselves, but also the conditions of possibility within which Muslims are able to express their faith and engage in debates about what it means to be a Muslim. The state, because of its active interventions in the religious sphere in many post-Soviet societies, has an important influence on this. The contributions of Waite and Kehl-Bodrogi illustrate particularly clearly how government policies and discourses directly shape the way in which their citizens are able to express themselves as Muslims. However, it is not simply a case of state authorities directing power downward upon a less powerful population. Rather, debates of what it means to be a Muslim, and struggles to define 'orthodoxy', occur within relations of power in which participants draw upon multiple persuasive and coercive strategies and resources in putting forward their particular views. The coercive capacities of the state are among

these resources and can be utilised within the personal projects of actors, both state officials and others.

Abashin's analysis of religious conflict in Tajikistan is illustrative of this. He shows how competition within a particular village between different religious specialists is based upon differing claims to knowledge and authority, on kinship relations and control of economic capital. At the same time these local conflicts are not isolated from national events. The changing fortunes of national Islamic and Communist political parties influence local conflicts, sometimes privileging certain groups and then others. This is not because central government directly intervenes in local processes, but because the shifting national environment alters the possibilities for action at the local level.

In a separate publication[35] I have argued that the narrow interpretation by the regime in Uzbekistan of what is acceptable Islam, its willingness to ruthlessly suppress any form of expression it deems 'extremist', and the often arbitrary implementation of this policy by law enforcement agencies, has created an atmosphere of vulnerability surrounding religious practice. The label 'Wahhabi' has come to represent any religious expression of which people are unsure, which does not fit into the category of the clearly 'acceptable', and which might make those associated with it a target for the state security services. Parties in local rivalries are able to use the 'Wahhabi' label to discredit their opponents (whatever their actual beliefs or practice might be), to portray them as being a threat to the regime. Thus, the regime's intolerant and repressive mode of engagement is generalised throughout society.

We need to study the lives of post-Soviet Muslims on their own terms. We need to explore the way in which people in this region are constructing themselves as good Muslims, the different sources of knowledge and authority they are calling upon in doing this, and the relations of power within which this is taking place. Rather than taking a position as to what constitutes 'real' Islam ourselves, we need to explore the conditions under which Muslims themselves are able to ask this question, and the different answers they are proposing.

Introduction

Notes:

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