

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Young Historians Conference

Young Historians Conference 2012

Apr 26th, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

Islam in Central Asia: A Religion and a Heritage

Jordan Pahl

St Mary's Academy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians>



Part of the [Islamic World and Near East History Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Pahl, Jordan, "Islam in Central Asia: A Religion and a Heritage" (2012). *Young Historians Conference*. 3.
<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2012/oralpres/3>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Young Historians Conference by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Islam in Central Asia: A Religion and a Heritage

Jordan Pahl
PSU Challenge Honors Modern European History
21 February 2012

“And when they ask me who is the president of Ubeki-beki-beki-beki-stan-stan I’m going to say, you know, I don’t know. Do you know? Knowing who is the head of some of these small insignificant states around the world — I don’t think that is something that is critical to focusing on national security and getting this economy going.”¹

The five Central Asian Republics have been all but forgotten. The name “Turkmenistan” prompts the question, “You mean Turkey?” A mention of the country Kazakhstan is met with the inevitable question about *Borat*. Even 2012 presidential hopeful Herman Cain could not muster the correct pronunciation of “Uzbekistan.” Central Asia has been lost among their neighbors: Russia to the north; Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to the south; China to the east; the Caspian Sea to the West.² Ignorance on the subject of these countries comes not from a failure to educate, nor from a failure to care, but from a failure to understand the historical relevance of these five nations.

The five Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan – are relatively new; they have only been sovereign countries since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Prior to that, they were simply the collective “Turkestan,” a name imposed on them by the Russian tsars who controlled the region and named it based on their limited understanding of the Turkish roots of the native peoples.³ Perhaps the most telling fact about these countries is that in 1923, they were 90% Muslim,⁴ and are now an average of 77% Muslim.⁵ Incredibly, these former Soviet states retained their Islamic identity in spite of the Soviet Union’s attempts to replace their religion with atheism. In the 1920s specifically, the Soviet government attempted to eradicate Islam in Central Asia by forcing a state-controlled, Soviet version of the religion on the natives of the region. However, in these five modern-day Central Asian republics, the religion survived Soviet attempts at elimination because of the

¹ Herman Cain. Interview with David Brody. Christian Broadcasting Network, October 10, 2011.

² See Appendix A.

³ “Turkestan” is synonymous with “Central Asia” for the purposes of this paper.

⁴ Lawrence Martin, “The World of Islam in 1923,” *Foreign Affairs*, 1923, accessed October 25, 2011, JSTOR.

⁵ “Central Asia,” CIA World Factbook, accessed January 12, 2012, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_cas.html.

blurred lines between those actually practicing the religion and those who only identified with Islam as their heritage, rendering the Soviet manipulation of practices and teachings in the region futile in controlling the influence of Islam on these peoples, paving the way for a region whose peoples still overwhelmingly identify with the religion the Soviet leadership attempted to eradicate.

Islam has a long history in Central Asia; it has been present in the Turkestan region since the ninth century, and the history of Islam in the region began even earlier, in the eighth century. Brought by Arabs, the religion flourished in Central Asia, where it thrived and molded to fit the needs of the Central Asian peoples. The conversion of these native peoples, however, was staggered, with the Uzbeks and Tajiks converting in the seventh and eighth centuries, with the more nomadic Turkmens, Kyrgyz, and Kazakhs converting as late as the eighteenth century.⁶ Most of the native peoples, despite their conversion, clung to “pre-Islamic” traditions, many of which still manifest themselves in what are now considered local Islamic traditions, specifically the practice of Sufism. These pre-Islamic practices – which are still a part of the region’s Islamic identity – differentiate this particular region’s traditions from that of other areas, even those of Iran and Afghanistan with whom the Central Asian republics share borders. Many sites in Central Asia (such as the city of Bukhara and Imam Bukhari’s tomb in Samarkand, both in Uzbekistan) are religiously significant and remain important pilgrimages for Muslims – even those from areas other than Central Asia – to this day.⁷

With the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922, “Turkestan” was absorbed into its vast empire. Russian occupation of the region, however, began years earlier with the “formal incorporation of parts of the region into the Tsarist Empire...and progressed rapidly after the

⁶ T. Jeremy Gunn, “Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia,” *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 3 (2003): 389-410, <http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/64/3/389.full.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

formation of a government-general of Turkestan in 1867,”⁸ and the region has historically had a large Slavic population (who were generally Christian or atheistic). However, this region was different from the rest of the USSR in one significant way: religion. In 1923, approximately 90% of the Central Asian region of the USSR were “Mohammedans” (Muslims), while the remaining parts of the Soviet Union were at the most 35%, or even as low as 2% Muslim.⁹

Within the Turkestan region, many different forms of Islam developed as it absorbed local pre-Islamic practices and evolved to include the influences of local culture. Most Central Asian Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, and, within this branch, the most prominent subgroups are the Hanafi school of interpretation, Sufism, and “popular Islam.” Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, is the most significant in the region, as “[i]t was via Sufi missionaries in the fifteenth century that Islam was first introduced among the Kazaks and Kirghiz [Kyrgyz],”¹⁰ as well as “popularizing, spreading, and implanting Islam in Central Asia.”¹¹ The teachings of Sufism are somewhat fluid, and designed to bring those practicing closer to God through abstinence and asceticism. G. P. Snegarev, a scholar at the Academy of Sciences in the USSR discussed the ways in which Islamic beliefs manifested themselves in the Soviet states:

They are, to start with, the *manifestations of fetichism*: carrying of amulets, magic prophylactic ceremonies, veneration of barely Islamized feminine deities such as Ambar-Ana, Bii-Fotyma, and others; residues of the totemic cult, magical ceremonies for the expulsion of demons, etc...¹²

⁸ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan: 1917-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 6.

⁹ Martin.

¹⁰ Roberta Micallef and Ingvar Svanberg, "Turkic Central Asia," in *Islam Outside the Arab World*, ed. by David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 153.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A. Bennigsen, "Traditional Islam in the Customs of the Turkic Peoples of Central Asia," *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 2 (1958): 227-233, accessed February 21, 2012, JSTOR.

It was because of a lack of strict practices or doctrine that ancient local cults proved influential in the development of popular practices of Sufism, such as in the development of the practices listed above.¹³

The Hanafi school of interpretation, largely influenced by Persian scholars, is the school of Sunnism to which most Central Asian Muslims adhere. The Hanafi school of thought especially impacted the Muslim communities in the modern-day regions of Afghanistan and the Indian sub-continent (mostly in what is now Pakistan), not to mention Central Asia.¹⁴ Most of the Islamic texts of the Hanafi sect were compiled in either Persia or India, not in Turkestan. Because most Islamic developments in Central Asia were imported from these areas, the Soviet Union restricted the importation of literature, which resulted in a suspension of development of Islamic developments and knowledge in the region.¹⁵

The notion of “popular” Islam also enjoys a large following in the Central Asian region. Popular Islam is defined as “*not* inconsistent with the Islam taught in the madrasas¹⁶ or practiced by Sufis...observed most readily in the pilgrimages (*ziyarat*) that people take to shrines (*mazars*).”¹⁷ The practice of popular Islam is based purely on upbringing; the family and their traditions primarily influence the members, not doctrine. Central Asian societies (Turkmenistan, most significantly) even gradually incorporated pre-Islamic practices, such as clans, elders, holy sites, and superstition, into their observance of popular Islam. This decentralized model of religious practice proved an asset when the Soviets prioritized religious eradication; the lack of a single central authority or determination of doctrine meant that the attacks on what were

¹³ Gunn.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Literally means “school” in various Arabic-influenced languages and can mean a religious or secular school, but generally refers exclusively to Islamic institutions when used in English.

¹⁷ Gunn.

considered by outsiders to be the major tenants of Islam in the region had little effect on the daily lives and religious practices of Central Asian Muslims. These different factions of Islam helped ensure the survival of Islam in the region due to the variations of practice and tradition.

Soviet policies of the 1920s were meant to eradicate Islam in its practicing forms, and to integrate former practicing Muslims into a more secular Soviet society. Soviet leader Mikhail Kalinin concisely explained the basic goals in the Central Asian region in 1929: “its aim was ‘teaching the people of the Kirgiz Steppe, the small Uzbek cotton grower, and the Turkmenain gardener the ideals of the Leningrad worker,’” indicating that the Soviet leadership did not intend to preserve the culture of this occupied region, but to turns its inhabitants into the Soviet idea of good citizens (i.e. factory workers).¹⁸ Because of the atheistic nature of Soviet communism, the idea of a population that was in places 90% Muslim proved threatening to the government, who decided that the religions influences needed to be controlled. Snesarev in particular cited the potential for developments in Islam as a threat to the Soviet regime, especially one that would attempt to modernize the Islamic dogma in order to reach a wider audience.¹⁹ However, the Soviets underestimated the extent to which Islam was already embedded in this heritage: more like a nationality than just a religion.

The real issue that the Soviets had with Islam was not its principals, but its social ideals.²⁰ Islam does, in fact, lend itself to the equalitarian principals characteristic of communism, however the social ideals are quite different. Many tenants of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) can be considered communistic in certain aspects. For instance, the teachings of Jesus on loving one’s neighbor and sharing what you have are often accusing of being socialist or communist in nature when they are referenced in modern-day social and

¹⁸ Michael Rywkin, *Moscow’s Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1982), 112.

¹⁹ Bennigsen.

²⁰ Rywkin, 87.

economic policy. Similarly, one of the pillars of Islam is almsgiving (*zakat*). It was not this aspect of Islam the Soviets found threatening, but rather the other pillars – the declaration of faith (*shahadah*), daily prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimages (*hajj*) – that intimidated and worried the Soviet leaders because of their potential to bring those considered by Moscow to be “dissidents” together in a religious capacity. These social ideals combined with the potential for modern adaptations of a religion they feared in its traditional state pushed the Soviets to the point of being so uncomfortable with the religion’s coexistence with Communism that leaders determined that a complete reform of the religion under the guise of simple governmental control was necessary.

The invading Soviets not only had a problem with the idea of religion in their empire, but especially concerned themselves with the implied gender inequalities that appeared to them to be synonymous with Islam. In more traditional forms of Islam (coincidentally not widely practiced in Central Asia), women did not enjoy the same rights as men. The invading Soviets saw traditions such as the wearing of the headscarf (*hijab*) – as well as other common traditional practices, some of which predated Islam – as oppressive to women, and launched the liberation of women (*raskreposhchenie zhenshin*) campaign in 1927 with a “massive propaganda storm launched in Uzbekistan.”²¹ Known as the *hujum*, it at first “encompassed not only unveiling women, but destroying traditional practices of arranged marriage, bride-price, the marriage of young girls to adult men, the seclusion of women from public life, polygamy, and other customs,” and later (1929-1930) “moved large numbers of women into the workforce.”²² This forced abandonment of their traditional values in turn led to violence by local, more

²¹ Shoshana Keller, “Trapped between state and society: Women’s liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941,” *Journal of Women’s History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 20-43, accessed October 25, 2011, <http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.pdx.edu>.

²² *Ibid.*

fundamentalist Muslim men against those women who followed government orders: “an article in the journal *Antireligioznik* estimated that 270 Uzbek women had been murdered in 1928 for unveiling.”²³ Women in Soviet Central Asia were faced with a dilemma: remove the veil and risk violence, or keep the veil and risk troubles with the antireligious Soviets. Men, in Uzbekistan, in turn, were steadily losing control over parts of their life that they had previously enjoyed, and exercised what was left of their control over their family, especially over the women in their home.²⁴ Concerned men, worried about the loss of traditional values, began a new tradition: emphasis on the home and familial practices to carry on the influence of the religion on their families, something over which they could exercise control. Some men forced the women in their families to wear the veil, and were violent if they refused, even though the women feared persecution.²⁵ In the case of the *hujum* especially, the forced integration of Soviet values onto the Central Asian (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan especially) population had little success in stamping out Islam, and in fact drove some further into the traditions the invaders hoped to eradicate. Despite the Soviet’s best efforts, the percentage of Muslims in the Turkestan region has decreased by only 13% in the 88 years from 1923 to 2011, and this does not factor in the general decrease in the religiosity of a population in a progressive time, as well as the migration of non-Muslim peoples to the region.²⁶ In fact, between 1850 and 1950, approximately thirteen million Russians moved to Central Asia and Siberia.²⁷

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ It is important to make clear that the percentage of men who forced women to wear the veil, and then those who beat the women is very small, but is still a necessary fact to mention.

²⁶ Since the 1980s, religion has significantly decreased even in the United States. This shows that even in a religiously non-oppressive state, the tendency for a decrease in religiosity in a population to decrease is normal, especially over such a broad time period.

²⁷ Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846-1940” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 155-189, accessed February 21, 2012, JSTOR.

In addition to specific attempts at eradication such as the *hujum*, the Soviet Union implemented much broader tactics in an attempt to dilute the influence of Islam in their empire, such as the following, specifically the following tactics used to manage religion in the Soviet Union: “...(i) laws and institutions designed to control religion; (ii) promotion of an ‘official’ Islam; and (iii) suppression of dissidents, particularly Islamists.”²⁸ These Soviet anti-religion tactics are still in use by some Central Asian secular governments – most significantly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan – who fear the ramifications of religious freedom and worry especially about Islamist dissidents. In Turkmenistan, for example, religion is completely controlled by the state (even the appointment of the clergy), and all religions except Islam and Russian Orthodoxy are prohibited.²⁹

While the Soviets were committed to purging Islam from society, those in charge were aware of the deep roots the religion had in both the social and economic spheres of the society.³⁰ Snegarev even went as far as saying, “‘Anti-religious education as it is presently conceived... does not reach certain aspects of the religious conscience, such as concepts and rites, and loses, thereby, its efficiency by affording complete freedom of action to all sorts of religious influences.’”³¹ The tactical decision was made, however, by the leaders to stamp out the religion in the region, despite the strength of its local influence. In particular, women’s rights activists in the Soviet Union were especially committed to the dismissal of traditional roles, including Serafina T. Liubimova, a prominent activist and Sredazburo’s (the Central Asian Bureau) Zhenotdel (the Women’s Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1919 to 1930). Declaring the traditional roles women played in Islamic society in

²⁸ Gunn.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan: 1917-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 206.

³¹ Bennigsen.

Central Asia as “‘women’s slavery,’” these practices (bride-price, polygamy, seclusion, the giving of underage girls in marriage) were reported to be “‘in contradiction to economics and hampers the movement among broad masses of women toward economic independence.’”³² These ideas “eventually found [their] way into the program of the Communist Party, Article 13 of which states that the Party ‘is guided by the conviction that only conscious and deliberate planning of all the social and economic activities of the masses will cause religious prejudices to die out.’”³³ Despite the ruling Communist party’s contradictions with Islam, it was not uncommon for Muslims in the early days of the empire to hold relatively high-ranking positions within the government, thus proving in the early stages of the occupation that Islam and communism could, in fact, peacefully coexist. It was this prevailing idea that convinced early Soviet Muslims that it was not necessary to abandon their traditional values in order to fit in to their new Communist way of life. While relative religious tolerance was established with the 1905 publication of Lenin’s “Socialism and Religion,” this established lenience only lasted until the decree of December 28, 1922, by the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan republic, which “established a system of public supervision and control over the administration of these [properties of pious foundations] properties.”³⁴ This decree ushered out the times of acceptance, and replaced it with prejudices and bigotry. In the years to follow, state scholars such as Snegarev and M. R. Rahimov would criticize the government’s policy’s on anti-religious teachings, not because of its inherent intolerance, but because of its ineffectiveness. While the opening words of the 1922 decree reasserted the right to religious freedom, the following articles in fact so severely restricted this right that, from then on, the freedom of religion in Soviet Turkestan could be considered nominal at best.

³² Keller.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Park, 218.

Although the Soviets were attempting to eliminate Islam from their Turkestan region, the Soviet government also realized that complete annihilation was unlikely. Snegarev concluded that the popular opinion that Islam – as well as the general idea of religion – in the USSR was dying out was misguided; “‘This opinion is false...because, though certain religious manifestations may have reached the disappearing stage, others survive and some are even at the stage of formation...’”³⁵ The religion was engrained in the minds, hearts, and traditions of the society to an extent that would not allow elimination by decree.³⁶ Leaders therefore turned to developing an official, “Soviet” version of Islam: one that they could comfortably tolerate and which weakened the dogma and strengthened the state.³⁷ However, a large obstacle to the eradication of Islam were the sheer number of mosques and religious schools in the region; mosque schools (*maktabs*) and seminaries (*madrasas*) focused on Islamic dogma, threatening the imposed Soviet atheism. The active closure of religious schools began in 1928, and “the extent of Soviet measures is also reflected in the reduction of the number of mosques in the USSR from 26,279 in 1912...to only about 450 in 1976.”³⁸ The Soviet Union replaced the traditional religious schools with their own secular schools:

Prior to the revolution, only 97 lay schools with an attendance of less than 3,000 children were available to the native population of Turkestan. And these offered instruction only on the most elementary level. In contrast, 7,290 *maktabs*, whose course of instruction consisted in most cases of transcribing and memorizing passages from the Koran,

³⁵ Bennigsen.

³⁶ Another conclusion of Snegarev; when examining the basic structure of Uzbek society, he found few practices that were not influenced by the centuries-old Islamic traditions of the region.

³⁷ Martha Brill Olcott, “Soviet Islam and World Revolution.” *World Politics* 34, no. 4 (1982): 487-504, accessed October 25, 2011, JSTOR.

³⁸ Rywkin, 87-88.

provided elementary education for 69,864 children, and 375 *madrasa* with an enrollment of 9,627 students offered instruction in the ‘Arab sciences.’

Despite the closure of so many schools, the literacy rate improved – especially for girls – during the reign of the Soviet Union. Though religious schools closed, they were simply replaced with more secular schools. This Soviet control of schools and mosques led to the development of two distinct factions of Islam within the various Turkestan communities: “official” and “parallel” Islam. However, there was little regard for the education provided in the home by the Soviets. With a region that was 90% Muslim, the Soviets were shortsighted in hoping that the simple closure of religious schools and mosques would suffice in stamping out religious education; families turned to providing their children’s own religious education, rather than entrusting it to the schools, consequently intensifying the engraining of traditions into the young people.

In Tsarist and Soviet times, Spiritual Boards of Muslims (*muftiates*) “supervised Islamic activities,”³⁹ making sure that those who were practicing Islam did so in the “correct” way. However, many Central Asian Muslims operated outside of the established Soviet system, practicing in illegal, unregistered mosques. This alternative form of Islam became known as “parallel” Islam, and is still prevalent today in the Republics where forms of practice are still outlawed (most prominently Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan).⁴⁰ In general, these states do not make overt attempts to control these practices, and officials will often work with the imams of the illegal mosques.⁴¹ Even in Turkmenistan – a country considered to be controlled by one of the most authoritarian governments in the worlds – people are able to exercise general religious toleration. In an interview with Zarina – a teenage Muslim girl from Dashoguz, Turkmenistan, currently living in Moscow – when asked if she had religious freedom, said, “Yes, of course [we

³⁹ Gunn.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

have religious freedom],” she said. “I have [total] freedom of religion...I have never had any problems or conflicts because of my religion.”⁴² Zarina is lucky to belong to one of the two “state approved” religions in her country, and has little to fear from the government in regards to compliance with her faith. However, when asked the same questions, Madina – a Protestant Christian girl born and raised in Uzbekistan but of Tatar⁴³ and Russian descent – responded, “Yes and no. I would probably have problems at school or at work (if I worked for the government) if they found out what my religion is. Emotional pressure would have place in this situation...Very few people here are of the same religion.”⁴⁴ As an aside, she also included: “Very few people are of the same religion here as I am. Islam is a dominant religion. Only males can attend Mosques. Muslim females can practice their religion only by praying and keeping religious traditions.”⁴⁵ When Zarina was asked about the ways she practices her religion, she responded that her family is “medium religious” and “celebrate[s] [their] Muslim holidays, [and] do charities,”⁴⁶ while Madina “go[es] to Church every Sunday” and prays, but only considers herself “somewhere in between medium religious and not very religious.”⁴⁷ These simple discrepancies between the perceptions of two girls of different religions in these countries tells of a much larger issue than simply teenage girls fitting in with their peers; their opinions of religious freedom hinges on the level of tolerance they experience for their own religion. To someone whose religion is legal and the government regulations allow them to practice as they wish, freedom of religion exists.

⁴² Zarina Babadurdiyeva, interview by author, January 10, 2012. Appendix B.

⁴³ Tatars are an ethnic group found primarily in Russia (in the Republic of Tatarstan region), in the Caucasus region of the Eurasia and South and Central Asia. They are primarily Muslim.

⁴⁴ Madina Davletkildeeva, interview by author, January 9, 2012. Appendix C.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Babadurdiyeva.

⁴⁷ Davletkildeeva.

The religious injustices of the forcefully atheistic Soviet Union shifted from direct and overt in 1920s to a covert business still practiced by Central Asian governments. In interviews with two other Uzbek Muslims of varying degrees of religious commitment, each cited different degrees of religious freedom. One said, “I think our society is too conservative when it comes to freedom of religion. I would like it to be more tolerant to the variety of religions.”⁴⁸ The second, however, when asked if he considered himself to have freedom of religion, responded, “Yes, I think I have no...pressure personally that makes me to practice any type of religion. Moreover, it is common scene in my country that people are free to choose any religion they want to practice. It is even written in our constitution.”⁴⁹ While it is apparent to many that they have freedom of religion, the conflicts are still relevant for the members of minority religions, whose summer camps are closed and who fear the ramifications if others knew of their religious persuasions. Religious conflict is very much alive in Central Asia, not unlike the rest of the world.

United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveled to Central Asia in October 2011. At a town hall meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, she made the following comment regarding religion:

The problem for many societies in transition who have a predominant religion in their society, which they respect and cherish because it is their national tradition, a particular religious orientation, is how to make sure you do not impose religion but you create space so that religion can operate...I believe that everyone is entitled to practice their faith, but no one is entitled to impose their faith on someone else. So how do you balance those two very strong principles? That's what you have to work

⁴⁸ Rushana Karimova, interview by author, January 11, 2012. Appendix E.

⁴⁹ Sanjarbek Aliev, interview by author, January 11, 2012. Appendix D.

out in this country and so many other countries.⁵⁰

Secretary Clinton's remarks in Central Asia provide an important connection; these Central Asian countries are not isolated. The issues these countries face are not limited to the mountains of Tajikistan and the deserts of Turkmenistan; the tactics used to deal with the issues in these at the moment obscure countries will provide important precedents for the future. The Central Asian Republics are a model of both failure and success: the failure of Soviet Union to eradicate centuries of religious traditions, and the success of the people in maintaining their religion following oppression on such a large scale. Despite an eighty-eight year tradition of oppression, fear, and intolerance, Islam survived in Central Asia. It survived because of families and their willingness to pass on traditions to their children; it survived because of its importance not only in the religious community, but because it is infused into the secular aspects of life; it survived because no one Islamic entity existed to tell people how to worship, making complete corruption close to impossible; it survived because leaders underestimated the lengths to which the Central Asian peoples would go to preserve their religious and cultural traditions. The whittling away at traditions may have succeeded in forcing some women to remove their veils, closing schools that taught around 78,000 children, and closing 26,000 mosques, but it failed to smother Islam – a religion and a heritage.

When Herman Cain dismissed the importance of Uzbekistan as “a small insignificant state,” he not only insulted the people of Uzbekistan, but also those of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, by dismissing their passionate struggle to preserve an age-old religion. The struggle, however, is not over yet; the Soviet secular ideal remains

⁵⁰ Jill Dougherty, ““Could Central Asia have an ‘Arab Spring?’”, *CNN*, last modified October 22, 2011, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/22/could-central-asia-have-an-arab-spring/>.

a cloud overhead in “Turkestan,” a pendulum swung from the extreme time where preservation of Islam was a priority to a time when the priority is the peaceful coexistence of religions, in a time when it is more and more common to find religions coexisting and mixing, even within families;

“‘What religion is your family?’

‘It’s complicated. Most of Tatars are Muslims...but the situation in our family is more complicated. My dad is Muslim as well as relatives from his side, my mom and I are non-baptized Christians...’”⁵¹

⁵¹ Davletkildeeva.

Appendix A

Commonwealth of Independent States - Central Asian States



“Commonwealth of Independent States – Central Asian States (2002),” University of Texas, accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth.html>.

Appendix B: Interview with Zarina Babadurdiyeva

Babadurdiyeva, Zarina. Interviewed by the author. January 10, 2012.

Conducted January 10, 2012

Pahl: What country do you live in?

Babadurdiyeva: Right now I live in Moscow, Russia

P: Where were you born/where are you originally from?

B: I'm from Dashoguz, Turkmenistan.

P: What religion is your family?

B: We are Muslims.

P: What religion are you?

B: I'm a Muslim.

P: How do you practice your religion?

B: We celebrate our Muslim holidays, do charities.

P: Do you consider yourself very religious, medium religious, not very religious, or non-practicing?

B: My family is medium religious.

P: If you do practice your religion, how do you usually practice it?

B: We go to Mosque, we fasting in certain months.

P: What – if any – barriers have you encountered that make it difficult to practice?

B: We always try to do something not to have any barriers, but if we have them we do our best to overcome them.

P: Do you consider yourself to have freedom of religion?

B: Yes, of course. I have a totally freedom of religion.

P: Are most of your friends/the people around you the same religion as you are?

B: No, I have friends with different religious, even at the place where I work people that surrounding me, they are from different countries, and they have different culture and religion.

P: Have you ever encountered difficulties because of your religion, or had any major conflicts with other people because of your religion?

B: I have never had any problems or conflicts because of my religion.

Davletkildeeva, Madina. Interviewed by the author. January 9, 2012.

Conducted January 9, 2012

Pahl: What country do you live in?

Davletkildeeva: Uzbekistan

P: Where were you born/where are you originally from?

D: Uzbekistan

P: What religion is your family?

D: It's complicated. Most of Tatars are Muslims (I am Tatar and Russian by ethnicity), but the situation in our family is more complicated. My dad is Muslim as well as relatives from his side, my mom and I are non-baptized Christians (protestant)

P: What religion are you?

D: Protestant Christian, not baptized yet.

P: How do you practice your religion?

D: I started attending Sunday gatherings at Church at the age of nine, and I also went to Christian summer camps plenty of times

P: Do you consider yourself very religious, medium religious, not very religious, or non-practicing?

D: Well, I'm somewhere in between medium religious and not very religious.

P: If you do practice your religion, how do you usually practice it?

D: I go to Church every Sunday, I have discussions with Christian people, and I pray

P: What – if any – barriers have you encountered that make it difficult to practice?

D: None, except for that the officials wanted to close our Church. They have already closed Christian summer camps here. If any of these camps still exist, they have to be concealed.

P: Do you consider yourself to have freedom of religion?

D: Yes and no. I would probably have problems at school or at work (if I worked for government) if they found out what my religion is. Emotional pressure would have place in this situation.

P: Are most of your friends/the people around you the same religion as you are?

D: Very few people here are of the same religion.

P: Have you ever encountered difficulties because of your religion, or had any major conflicts with other people because of your religion?

D: Most of protestant Christians don't talk about their religion in public, and don't let others know what their religion is. I haven't had any major conflicts because of my religion, but I

know for sure that people in our country have a lot of stereotypes about Christians other than Orthodox and Catholics. All other Christians are considered to be in religious sects which have a bad influence on the society and even are viewed as a potential danger. While in high school, we were gathered twice a year in a hall to watch a documentary about religious sects in our country. Baptist Churches were also there.

P: Is there anything else you have to add about religion where you live/are from?

D: I'll just mention again that very few people are of the same religion here as I am. Islam is a dominant religion. Most of the population of Uzbekistan are Muslims. Only males can attend Mosques. Muslim females can practice their religion only by praying and keeping religious traditions.

Appendix D: Interview with Sanjarbek Aliev

Aliev, Sanjarbek. Interviewed by the author. January 11, 2012.

Conducted January 11, 2012

Pahl: What country do you live in?

Aliev: I live in Republic of Uzbekistan or simply Uzbekistan

P: Where were you born/where are you originally from?

A: I was born in Uzbekistan, in city called Jizzakh, the heart of Uzbekistan.

P: What religion is your family?

A: All of my family members are Muslims.

P: What religion are you?

A: I observe Islam religion.

P: How do you practice your religion?

A: I usually practice it on Fridays; in mosque in Muslim we usually have big Namaz (Pray to Allah) and I try to pray with public every Fridays.

P: Do you consider yourself very religious, medium religious, not very religious, or non-practicing?

A: I consider myself as medium religious person. However, in future my intention is to put religion as a big part of my life.

P: If you do practice your religion, how do you usually practice it?

A: As I mentioned above I usually practice it in mosque, on Fridays also I try to practice religion deeply during religious holidays such as Eid.

P: What – if any – barriers have you encountered that make it difficult to practice?

A: I should admit that there are no any barriers from government side to practice religion. However, usually my study keeps me busy that I cannot practice religion.

P: Do you consider yourself to have freedom of religion?

A: Yes, I think I have no any pressure personally that makes me to practice any type of religion. Moreover, it is common scene in my country that people are free to choose any religion they want to practice. It is even written in our constitution.

P: Are most of your friends/the people around you the same religion as you are?

A: Yes, because Islam is the most popular religion in my country.

P: Have you ever encountered difficulties because of your religion, or had any major conflicts with other people because of your religion?

A: Absolutely no, because our political and cultural life controls freedom of religion for every single citizen. It prevents any religious misunderstandings. I personally did not have conflicts because of religion and respect if people observe other religions.

P: Is there anything else you have to add about religion where you live/are from?

A: Islam is the most popular religion in Uzbekistan and more than 90% people are Muslims.

However, both legal and cultural determinants defend other type of religious people such as Christians, Buddhists or other. One can easily choose any religion he/she wants to practice and will have same rights as every citizen has.

Appendix E: Interview with Rushana Karimova

Karimova, Rushana. Interviewed by the author. January 11, 2012.

Conducted January 11, 2012

Pahl: What country do you live in?

Karimova: Uzbekistan

P: Where were you born/where are you originally from?

K: Uzbekistan

P: What religion is your family?

K: Islam

P: What religion are you?

K: Islam

P: How do you practice your religion?

K: I share the values of Islam, try to observe its rules related to everyday behavior and attitude towards people around me, though I do not perform its rituals like prayers 5 times a day (namaz).

P: Do you consider yourself very religious, medium religious, not very religious, or non-practicing?

K: I think I'm not very religious.

P: If you do practice your religion, how do you usually practice it?

K: I practice only those rules of Islam that are widely accepted in my country and that are acceptable under the circumstances of modern life. It means I do not wear hijab (clothes that cover all parts of the body), and have an opportunity to have equal rights with men etc.

P: What – if any – barriers have you encountered that make it difficult to practice?

K: The only difficulty I might face would be time shortage for prayers. We do not have special breaks for praying at schools and workplaces. But I can follow the rule in Koran that says: "One hour of studying is equal to forty hours of praying".

P: Do you consider yourself to have freedom of religion?

K: From judicial point of view, I do have the freedom of religion and no government official can hinder my practicing any religion I want. But the society where I live is conservative in terms of religion. If I would choose any religion other than Islam I might face disapproval of many people. However, people of the nationalities such as the Russians, the Koreans, the Armenians etc. who usually practice other religions are not disapproved at all.

P: Are most of your friends/the people around you the same religion as you are?

K: Mainly, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Persians (the most widespread nationalities where I live) practice Islam. So all of my acquaintances of these nationalities practice the same religion as I do. But I have many friends of other nationalities who are Orthodox, Baptist, Catholic etc.

P: Have you ever encountered difficulties because of your religion, or had any major conflicts with other people because of your religion?

K: I have never been in conflicts concerning religion. Because I've met people who respect my religion so far, and I respect other religions and try to understand their values.

P: Is there anything else you have to add about religion where you live/are from?

K: I think our society is too conservative when it comes to freedom of religion. I would like it to be more tolerant to the variety of religions.

Bibliography

- Alaolmolki, Nozar. *Life After the Soviet Union: The Newly Independent Republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Aliev, Sanjarbek. Interviewed by the author. January 11, 2012.
- Babadurdiyeva, Zarina. Interviewed by the author. January 10, 2012.
- Bennigsen, A. "Traditional Islam in the Customs of the Turkic Peoples of Central Asia." *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 2 (1958): 227-233. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4323016> (accessed February 21, 2012).
- Chenoy, Anuradha M. "Islam, Women and Identity in Contemporary Central Asia." *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 9 (1996): 516-518. www.jstor.org/stable/4403854 (accessed October 25, 2011).
- "Central Asia." CIA World Factbook. Accessed January 12, 2012. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_cas.html.
- "Commonwealth of Independent States – Central Asian States (2002)," University of Texas, accessed January 10, 2012, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth.html>.
- Davletkildeeva, Madina. Interviewed by the author. January 9, 2012.
- Dougherty, Jill. "Could Central Asia have an 'Arab Spring?'" *CNN*. Last modified October 22, 2011. <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/22/could-central-asia-have-an-arab-spring/>.
- Gunn, T. Jeremy. "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia." *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 3 (2003): 389-410. <http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/64/3/389.full.pdf> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- Karimova, Rushana. Interviewed by the author. January 11, 2012.
- Keller, Shoshana. "Trapped between state and society: Women's liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941." *Journal of Women's History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 20-43. <http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.pdx.edu> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- Kurat, Akdes Nimet. "Islam in the Soviet Union." In *The Cambridge History of Islam: Volume IB*, edited by P.M. Holt, 627-643. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Martin, Lawrence. "The World of Islam in 1923." *Foreign Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1923): 138-139. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20028238> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- McKeown, Adam. "Global Migration, 1846-1940." *Journal of World History* 15, no. 2 (2004): 155-189. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068611> (accessed February 21, 2012).
- Micallef, Roberta and Ingvar Svanberg. "Turkic Central Asia." In *Islam Outside the Arab World*, edited by David Westerlund and Ingvar Svanberg, 149-165. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999.

- Olcott, Martha Brill. "Soviet Islam and World Revolution." *World Politics* 34, no. 4 (1982): 487-504. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010331> (accessed October 25, 2011).
- Park, Alexander G. *Bolshevism in Turkestan: 1917-1927*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957.
- Rashid, Ahmed. "The fires of faith in Central Asia." *World Policy Journal* 18, no. 1 (2011): 45-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40209731> (accessed October 12, 2011).
- Rywkin, Michael. *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1982.
- Takeyh, Ray and Nikolas K. Gvosdev. *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet: The Rise and Fall of Radical Political Islam*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2004.
- Walker, Edward W. "Islam, Islamism and Political Order in Central Asia." *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2003): 21-41. EBSCOhost (accessed October 25, 2011).