

## RELIGION - POLITICS INTERPLAY: THE CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The article covers the problems of religion–state interaction in two Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan - and analyses how they influence each other. The methodology is based on the integral approach in the sociology of religion that presumes that the religion and the state are the social system's vital elements influencing each other as well as the system at whole. The article argues that in spite of the general similarities in the state's approach towards religion in the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods there are still different outputs in contemporary Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan deriving from many factors - among which are the basic difference between Kazakh and Uzbek religious identity as well as the performance and general politics of the state.*

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Politics, Religion, Central Asia

### INTRODUCTION

The inseparability and interconnection of social spaces, economy and sometimes politics during the many centuries of historical development have significantly contributed to the uniqueness of Central Asia. This interconnection has not only caused the wholeness of what today comprises the Central Asia, but still is the main reason of many political problems in various fields – ethnicity, boundaries, economy. As any other social space Central Asia is not a homogenous one and embraces a variety of life-styles and patterns of political and social behaviour. Religion is not exception – it varied from time to time as well as from one part of the region to another. Combined with the state's activity, religion became the dominant factor in the political landscape in the countries of the region and the primary source of social fault lines. The main questions to be answered are: how religion influenced the political entities of the region and how the states reacted or caused the change of the religious attitude.

These questions are the concrete manifestation of the broader problem of religion-society interaction and define a scholarly space to analyze the main theories of the sociology of religion and their applicability in Central Asia.

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In defining the methodological approach the article studies functionalism vs social change theories of sociology of religion. It argues that: 1) religion and state as elements of social systems are inevitably connected with the whole system being its product and reflecting its peculiarities; 2) as a part of the social system, religion as well as the state influence the other elements of the system (and each other) and cause its changes.

The article further analyzes the specific features of religious identity in two countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – and how state's modernization and post-modern challenges influenced it. These states are chosen for several reasons. First, they represent two different types of societies (whose history and ideology were influenced greatly by different ways of living – nomadic and settled). Second, today in the sense of a territory, population, natural resources Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are leading countries in Central Asia and analysis of the current situation in these two states is important for understanding the dynamics of the whole region. Finally, the religion-politics interaction is also prominent in these countries – the role of the state is extremely significant when it comes to regulating religious and inter-confessional processes. The same could be referred to the role of religion when it comes to analyzing the change of the political landscape.

The article concludes that different degrees of religious identity in these countries have shaped the state's different attitude to it and the state's approach towards religion has resulted in various types of religious behaviour.

### Religion-State Interaction: Integral Approach

In theoretical schools of various social science disciplines there are different approaches aiming at explaining the continuity and change in the studied subjects. In the sociology of religion in this respect there are two main approaches - the so-called functionalist one, stressing the systemic, integral, stable function of religion (classical - E. Durkheim, all-embracing system functionalism – T.Parsons, average level functionalism – R.Merton, neo-evolutionism – R.Bellah)<sup>1</sup> and approaches that consider religion as a factor of social change and not as a basis for stability (M.Weber) or as a factor of conflict and not of integration (K.Marx).<sup>2</sup> While

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1 Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, (New York: 1966). Talcott Parsons, "Sovremenniy vzglyad na Durkheimovu teoriyu religii (Contemporary View on the Durkheim's Theory of Religion)", Translation from English, in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*. (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996); Emile Durkheim, "Sotsiologiya religii i teoriya poznaniya (Sociology of Religion and the Theory of Cognition (Epistemology))", Translation from English, in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996); Robert Bellah, "Religiya kak simbolicheskaya model formiruyuschaya chelovecheskii opyt (Religion as a Symbolic Model Forming the Human Experience)", Translation from English in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996).

2 Max Weber, "Protestantism i Capitalism (Protestantism and Capitalism)". Translation from English, in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996); Max Weber, "M. Religioznye idei i interesy (Religious Ideas and Interests)", Translation from English, in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*. (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996); Karl Marx, "Religioznoye otchuzhdeniye (Religious Alienation)", Translation from English, in V.Garaja & Ye. Rutkevich (Ed.), *Religiya i obschestvo (Religion and Society)*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996).

system functionalism explores the question of stability and continuity – of all that keeps the system stable and predictable, approaches that consider religion as a factor of social change or of a conflict stress the importance of ideas, perceptions, collective values, economic or political changes – i.e. all that help to explain the local environment, changes and, broadly, differences among various societies.

The functionalist theory in the sociology of religion (R.Bellah, T.Parsons, J.M.Yinger) states that societies are systems of mutually conditioned elements and because of this the religious elements could not be understood without the whole structure where they are placed.<sup>3</sup> It means it is necessary to analyze any religion in space and time: 1) within the broader context of its particular society/civilization's development; 2) during its particular stretch time. It is obvious that the same religion in different contexts would vary in forms. J.Yinger was correct by saying that “the consequences of interrelations between the Church and the state in England (Anglican Church), Spain (Catholic Church), Russian (Orthodox Church) and Japan (prewar Shinto) were absolutely different”.<sup>4</sup> R.Bellah defining the religion as a combination of symbolic forms in its own turn underlines that “there is no such totality of symbolic forms that could be able to perform the function of religion for all people. Rather we could say about the huge diversity of forms”.<sup>5</sup>

The above-mentioned approach helps to explain the structural interconnection in a particular space (in our context in Central Asia) between the religion and other elements of the system such as a state. But it fails to explain the different output in several parts of this social space (in our context – in different countries). These different results are due not only to the various degree of liaison between religion and state, but to the specific features of the religion itself, even if it is the same one (in our case it is Islam of a Sunni *madhhab*). These specific features reflect different, sometimes even opposite, collective values, perceptions and ideas within the same religion. Here we come to the question of the importance of the various levels of religiosity and religious identity in the same social space.

Using only a functionalist approach, it is difficult to explain changes in the system, while using the other, it is difficult to explain continuity. The integration of both types could explain continuity as well as change in our understanding of the role of religion and its interconnection with the state or the policy it conducts.

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3 J.Milton Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual*, (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p.56. Translation into Russian in: *Religion and Society. Reader in the Sociology of Religion*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996), p. 166.

4 J.Milton Yinger, *Sociology Looks at Religion*, (New York: Mac Millan Co., 1963), p.139-153, Translation into Russian in, *Religion and Society. Reader in the Sociology of Religion*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996), p. 165.

5 Robert Bellah, “Religion as a Symbolic Model Forming the Human Experience”, Translation into Russian in *Religion and Society, Reader in the Sociology of Religion*, (Moscow: Aspect-Press, 1996), p. 193.

### Religious Identity in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: Specific Features and Modernization's Challenges

Religious identity in these countries cannot be fully understood without considering the different ways of life – mainly settled and nomadic – of the people inhabiting the territory of the states. The specific features of the social and economic structures of settled and nomadic societies proceeded and caused differences in the processes of Islamization and modernization. It is obvious that the scattered character of the nomadic people (moving constantly along natural geographic lines in search of different pastures) was reflected not only in the division of Kazakh people into 3 main hordes (Big, Middle, Small),<sup>6</sup> but in the relatively late and poor spread of Islam and uneven convergence of people of different regions into this religion.

Islam was firstly introduced in what is now southern-eastern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as early as in tenth century AD (by the founder of Karakhanid dynasty – Karim Satuk khan) and after the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, it became the official religion of the Golden Horde.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars believe that the spread of Islam in the territory of modern Uzbekistan and south-eastern Kazakhstan took place between the eighth and tenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> The spread of Islam was not an even process – some khans (kings) such as Uzbek-khan in 1313 were stricter in following the faith while the others such as Abulhair-khan in the fifteenth century still used a pagan magic ceremonies and rites (for example, to call forth rain by using animals' gall-stones).<sup>9</sup> According to historical written texts in 1509, Sheibanids' spiritual leaders wrote a fatwa on jihad against Kazakhs since "they were apostates" and purposely violated Islamic law. Even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were new mass conversions into Islam.<sup>10</sup> Till the beginning of the twentieth

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6 The hierarchy of clans and tribes in the nomadic societies of Central Asia was a basic principle of the public and state development. In the middle age period tribes of each of the Hordes were united by the joint route of season migration, had a common ethnic territory. See, *Istoriya Kazakhstana (The History of Kazakhstan)*, (Almaty: Ysh Kiyan, 2003), p.71, 174.

7 In the early middle ages period Islam was not the only religion, although it became later a leading one. Apart from Islam local people believed in various faiths – firstly to pagan cults and shamanism, then – in Zoroastrism, Buddhism, Manikheism, Christianity (of a Nestorian type). See, *Istoriya Kazakhstana (The History of Kazakhstan)*, (Almaty: Ysh Kiyan, 2003), p. 86-89, 111.

8 Y. Abdullayev & L. Kolesnikov, "Islam I Religiozniy Factor v Uzbekistane (Islam and Religious Factor in Uzbekistan)", in *Uzbekistan: Obreteniye Novogo Oblika (Uzbekistan: Getting a New Look)*, (Moscow: RISS, 1998), p. 249. See also, M. S. Orynbekov, *Genesis Religioznosti v Kazakhstane (The Genesis of the Religiosity in Kazakhstan)*, (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2005), p. 186-191.

9 D. Stewart, "Obrascheniye Kazakhskogo naroda v Islam: Kornii Istoricheskogo Processa (Conversion of Kazakhs into Islam: Roots of the Historical Process)", in Islam: *Istoriya i Sovremennost' . Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii (Islam: History and Present Time. Materials of the International Conference)*. (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2001), p. 140-144.

10 Ibid., p. 144-145.

century Islam was interspersed with pre-Islamic beliefs and “pagan” practices such as Tengri, Zher-Umai cults, shamanism and thus represented a form of the so-called “people Islam”. This paved a way for the spread of Sufism, a non-orthodox and non-strict tolerant version of Islam that was a dominant feature of the peoples’ beliefs throughout the centuries.

Due to nomadism and the presence of an enormous civilisational divide in the form of the Russian Empire on the north and the Bukhara and Khiva Khanates in the south, the degree of Islamization among Kazakhs varied – from relatively loose in the northern parts to more intensive in the southern regions. This was reflected in adherence to different forms of law, differing numbers of mosques, Muslim religious schools (*makhtabs* and *madrassas*) and the existence of “small mosques”.

For example, the teachers (*ustads*) in *makhtabs* and *madrassas* (religious primary and higher school) were mainly Tatars in the north and from Bukhara in the south. Bukhara was regarded as a buttress of Islam and a source of a pure Muslim knowledge. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century Kazakhs preferred non-Kazakh *madrassas* for their superior quality, organization and curricula.<sup>11</sup> The nomadic character of the Kazakhs was reflected in their having fewer mosques than the Bukhara and Khiva khanates. The majority of mosques outside of the Khanates were found in the south, in the territory of Turkestan, which was closer to the well-known religious centres in Central Asia.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the relatively poor spread of Islam in the territory of Kazakhstan can be seen in the existence of the so-called *adat* (ordinary, non-Islamic law) according to which the Kazakhs regulated their social and economic relations. The *adat* was a major regulator of the Kazakh’s social life, although the *shariat* (Islamic law) was known to Kazakhs as well. In the territory of what is now Kazakhstan, unlike in Bukhara, Khiva or Samarkand, the Russian colonial administration introduced three forms of law – ordinary law of nomadic people (*adat*), Islamic law (*shariat*) and Russian (empire criminal). On the contrary, in the neighboring southern part with the predominant Uzbek and Tajik population there were only two forms of law – *shariat* and Russian criminal. It is interesting to notice that the southern Kazakhs, being profoundly influenced by Islam and their neighbors the Uzbeks and Tajiks, asked the colonial administration to allow them to follow mainly *shariat* and abolish *adat*. In 1907, for example, the Kazakhs living in the Syrdarya region made such a request.<sup>13</sup>

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11 R. Mustafina, “Islam v Kazakhstane (Islam in Kazakhstan)”, in *Islam: Istoriya i Sovremennost’. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii (Islam: History and Present Time, Materials of the International Conference)*. (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2001), p. 129.

12 Records show that this region contained 20 mosques in 1864 and 41 in 1910. *Ibid.*, 129-130.

13 A. Nurmanova, “19 Gasyrdyn Sony 20 Gasyrdyn Basyndagy Kazak Zandylygy (Adat pen Sharihat). (Kazakh Laws at the End of 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Adat and Shariat)”, in *Islam: Istoriya i Sovremennost’. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii (Islam: History and Present Time. Materials of the International Conference)*, (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2001), p. 74-76.

In contrast, the Uzbeks and Tajiks as settled people, were influenced more significantly by Islam in general, and *shariat* in particular. The Bukhara and Khiva khanates were centers of not only political power, but spiritual and religious power as well. Such specific feature of Islam (a non-division character of Islam between political and religious power) explains the mighty role of these Central Asian centers vis-à-vis the role of Islam among local population. This contributed greatly to the formation of a strong religious identity among the settled people – Uzbeks and Tajiks. Their religious identity once formed was less influenced by any external factors and historical events. Even the structural changes of the society (during Soviet regime) failed to destroy their identity or change it (at least informally). It was this religious identity that translated into a huge resistance – in the form of *Basmachi*/guerilla movements in the 1920s – to the Bolsheviks' attempt to form and build a communist society. Although the civil war in Soviet Russia was declared finished in 1920, the opposition towards the regime in Soviet Central Asia lasted sporadically till 1932.<sup>14</sup>

The processes of modernization imposed during almost a century of Soviet rule dramatically changed the beliefs and lifestyles of both the nomadic and the settled people, but religious identity did not altogether disappeared. In spite of a very aggressive atheist policy, which included closing madrassas and mosques, substituting secular laws for *shariat* and *adat*, replacing the Arabic script with Latin and then Cyrillic, banning Muslim rites and processions, people continued to follow their beliefs, at least in everyday life.<sup>15</sup> Several factors made this possible:

On one hand, as S. Akimbekov stresses, any tough and strict “attempts of a cardinal structural rebuilding of the Muslim societies under the socialist slogans inevitably led to the destruction and devaluation of the traditional values and paved the way for creating movements of the followers of “pure Islam”.<sup>16</sup> Hostility towards the new rulers and destroyers of the traditional system was a common feeling among the Muslims of the USSR. These feelings did not altogether disappear during Soviet rule, although they were not broadly and openly represented and institutionalized

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14 R.G. Landa, *Islam v Istorii Rossii (Islam in the History of Russia)*. (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1995), p. 203-205.

15 Prof. D. Kaushik describes a typical Central Asian as “*Homo Islamicus*” in as much as the lifestyle and traditions he followed were in many cases based on Islam.” He argues that “Islam persisted as a key element in the every day life of the Central Asian people who adapted themselves to the new circumstances. Even party members did not completely disown their Muslim identity while celebrating birth of a child or conducting a wedding. ... Religious festivals like *Id* were popularly celebrated. The inability to go to Mecca for the *Haj* resulted in people performing a substitute *Haj* by visiting graves (*mazars*) of Muslim holy people”. See, D. Kaushik, “Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia: An Appraisal”, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, Vol: 4, No: 3-4, July- December 2000, p. 4-5.

16 S. Akimbekov, *Afganskiy Uzel i Problemy Bezopasnosti v Tsentral'noi Azii (Afghan Knot and the Problems of Security in Central Asia)*, (Almaty: Continent, 2003), p. 78.

in Soviet Central Asia. Under the socialist system the state played an extremely high, suppressive and at the same time flexible role in dealing with the ideology and traditional beliefs in order to balance secular and religious interests. The state recognized and supported (ideologically, financially, administratively) official religious circles (the *Muftiyat* system) so as to effectively counter Islam's religious traditionalists.<sup>17</sup>

The dichotomy between "official religious circles and pure Islam's traditionalists" in the Soviet period was not an exceptional feature of that time. Before the socialist revolution of 1917, in the 1880-90s and later, in early twentieth century Russia there were two main streams of Muslim thoughts: the djadidists (*modernists*) and the kadimists (*traditionalists*). The Djadidists supported the renovation of Islam - its openness to new forms of education, the Europeanization of science, the adaptation to new times. Supporters of the enlightenment and advancement of Islam in Central Asia were basically the same as those in other parts of the world, in particular those in 1880s in India (for example follows of Sayed Akhmad-khan). It is worth stressing that the djadidists' ideas were mostly popular among the Tatar and Bashkir Muslims of Volga and Crimea regions (Ismail Bei Gaspryly, for example, came from such a background); in Kazakhstan the best known djadidist was Mustafa Chokai, who himself has received a European style secular education at the Russia's Saint Petersburg University and even worked as an assistant to the State Duma's deputy from Turkestan. However, some scholars (R. Landa) think that the djadidists' influence in Central Asia and Northern Caucasus was not so significant.<sup>18</sup> The *Kadimists*, on the contrary, admiring the traditional old version of Islam, believed it should be spread as a unified, all-embracing ideology and way of living. They equated the terms "nation" with Islam, which led them to assert the importance of Pan-Islamism for every Muslim, regardless of their ethnicity. The debates between the followers of the modern and traditional ways of living which began in Tsarist Russia continued into Soviet times.<sup>19</sup> Gradually, the spread of atheism and a resultant suppression of any radical thoughts enabled the modernists (those who were not opposed to Bolsheviks) to strengthen their position.

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17 S. Akimbekov points to the "struggle" between state-recognized religious circles and those who believed in "pure" Islamic religious modernization. (I think this is what she meant) According to him, the difference between them was in the different approaches towards understanding the Muslim society. While the officially recognized religious circles stood for the balance of secularity and religiosity in Islamic societies, the followers of the pure Islam denied both this balance and the modern secular influence. See, S. Akimbekov, *Afganskiy Uzel i Problemy Bezopasnosti v Tsentral'noi Azii (Afghan Knot and the Problems of Security in Central Asia)*. (Almaty: Continent, 2003), p. 71-77.

18 R.G. Landa, *Islam v Istorii Rossii (Islam in the History of Russia)*, (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1995), p. 141-143.

19 It is important to call this debate a conventional one since during 1930s cleanings of intelligentsia many djadidists (modernists) were subject to repression and were killed or imprisoned.

Another reason why Muslims continued to follow their faith in Soviet time was the common socio-psychological elements shared by Islamic and communist ideologies. In R. Landa's view, both Islam and communism had such common features as the priority of the collective over individual, the subordination of man to a community, the important role of state power in political culture and the orientation of the people towards social justice rather than economic effectiveness. That is why even the collectivization of the property was not greatly opposed by Muslims – the *kolkhoz*, for example, was regarded as a form of state property or *avlod* (a form of family community).<sup>20</sup>

The fact that Islam survived in the Soviet Union is clear from the following figures – in Khrushchev's period 80 per cent of people openly classified them as Muslim.<sup>21</sup> Any modernization undertaken by the Soviet regime served as a kind of a cover or shell, while the Muslim beliefs and traditions remained and formed the essence of the society. This was more true of Uzbeks and Tajiks than of Kazakhs due to the different degree of religious identity present in these ethnic groups during pre-Soviet times.

Although the processes of modernization undertaken in Soviet times significantly influenced the religious identity of the people of Central Asia (particularly in the external performance of religion), it still did not undermine the whole basis of Islam in the region. Modernization continued to play an important role in everyday life. At the same time, the Soviet approach of balancing religious and secular interests impeded (temporarily) the revival of pure Islam and this, combined with other factors, contributed later to the formation of a potential instability within these societies. From the theological perspective there were not any open debates in Islam between the supporters of two main approaches – while the modernization apologists (with the wide support of the state) enjoyed relative freedom of expression, the adherents of the opposite side went underground, still hoping someday to publicly embrace their position.

### **Religion, State and Post-Modern Challenges**

The collapse of the Soviet Union inevitably changed this status-quo and strengthened Islamic identity. Among the factors driving this process were the following: a) The state was no longer a source of external pressure on Muslim belief and tradition; b) Religious ideas became mainstream and were given extensive support by many political actors (both inside and outside the countries) who were pursuing their own political interests; and c) The so-called good governance and democratization factor combined with the challenges of post-modernity further shaped the attitude of the state towards religion.

a) The change in the state's position led to a massive renaissance or revival of

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20 Ibid., p. 232.

21 Ibid., p. 239.

religious identity throughout Central Asia, reflected in the change of popular attitudes towards Islam, the building of mosques and madrassas, the politicization of Islam and the formation of political parties on a religious basis (Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, *Adolat* in Uzbekistan, *Alashi* in Kazakhstan).

As early as Gorbachev's perestroika people began to rediscover Islam and reconsider its role in human development as a faith having deep and profound humanistic and ethical values and not an roadblock to progress. Consequently, after gaining independence this led to increased study about Islam in Central Asia, more frequent pilgrimages to holy places, the establishment of contacts with Islamic countries and organizations like the OIC and OEC and the education of clergymen abroad. Thus changed attitudes towards Islam quickly acquired new dimensions in the early 1990s and soon became an important part of public debate. As a deliberate policy, Central Asian leaders maintained a high degree of Muslim faith. To gain public support the newly elected presidents used the religious symbols to justify and legitimize their political decisions. For example Presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan took their oath of office on both the constitution and the Quran while Presidents of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan made a beeline to perform the Haj in Mecca.<sup>22</sup> In Uzbekistan, moreover, the Muslim *Kurban Bairam* and *Uraza Bairam* festivals were given official status and declared state holidays.<sup>23</sup>

b) Neighboring countries also tried to use shared religious (as well as a cultural and linguistic) identity as a basis for cooperation and joint development with Central Asian states. Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were all prominent actors who drew on these ties to pursue their interests vis-a-vis Central Asian states. The financial and human resources coming from these countries were used to build of numerous mosques, madrassas, Islamic centers and universities, as well as to publish theological literature. In Uzbekistan, for example, the number of mosques grew from 300 in 1989 to 6000 by 1993.<sup>24</sup> In Tajikistan 2000 mosques were opened during 1989-1991. Meanwhile in Kyrgyzstan there were "only" 1000 mosques by 1995<sup>25</sup> and in Kazakhstan 1402 by the end of 1990s.<sup>26</sup> Although in Kazakhstan there was the same Islamic revival as in other Central Asian countries, figures show it was far less prominent than in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Another vivid sample of external actors' activity was the spreading Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen's ideas on synthesis

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22 D. Kaushik, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia: An Appraisal", *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, Vol: 4, No: 3-4, July- December 2000, p.6.

23 Y. Abdullayev & L. Kolesnikov, "Islam I Religiozniy Factor v Uzbekistane (Islam and Religious Factor in Uzbekistan)", p. 249.

24 Ibid.

25 D. Kaushik, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia: An Appraisal", p.6.

26 Z. Djalilov, "Nekotorye Aspecty Modernizatsii Islama v Respublikah Tsentral'noi Azii (Some Aspects of Islam Modernization in Central Asian Republics)", in *Izvestiya MON, NAN RK. Seriya Obshchestvennykh Nauk (The Bulletin of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Social Sciences Series)*, No: 4, 2002, p.57.

of Islam with modernization. The activity of various schools run by the followers of this ideology from Turkey has been a remarkable feature of religious life in both in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan since the 1992-93. As Balci puts it “the neo-Nurcu presence in Central Asia is everywhere: in economic life, in the media and in the educational network”.<sup>27</sup>

c) The intensification of religious feelings in the region was a result of the inevitable process of post-modern development or globalization and the continuing economic disparity between developed and developing countries. In the last few years, globalization and its impact on religious identity have become more pronounced. Developing countries’ failure to answer the challenges of globalization due to bad governance, weak political institutions, regionalism, client-patron relations, corruption and lack of financial resources as well as other factors have resulted in uneven economic growth as well as instability and social tension. The Central Asian countries are no exception.

Collective identity was historically justified and was an important part of the social structure. Even during the Soviet rule, religion as a part of collective identity had not altogether disappeared, rather it adapted to the existing conditions. The forms of religious identity however vary for different societies in Central Asia. For the Kazakh society which is polyethnic and polyconfessional, strong religious identity had limited impact except in the southern part. In this case, maintaining polyethnic stability was more important. In Uzbekistan, on the contrary, religious identity was a major challenge for the authorities. The level of the religiosity of the population was a proportionate to their level of religiously-motivated politicization. But since any form of real opposition is prohibited, it acquired the character of an underground political movement with all its specific features such as receiving financial, military and manpower support from external forces. Underground politicoreligious movements as a form of a broad-based social opposition are prevalent in countries where Muslim identity is strongest.

The degree that Islam spread in different parts of Uzbekistan varied, as it did in Kazakhstan. There were three main regions: 1) western and north-western; 2) central and eastern; and 3) north-eastern (the Ferghana valley). The western and north-western parts except Khorezm, were profoundly influenced and assimilated by the nomadic tribes and culture. These tribes have accepted the “nomadic” liberal version of Islam and hence there is the moderate approach towards Islam and its preservation in the form of traditions and rituals. Islam was integral to social life in the central and eastern part of the country which was marked by a highly developed urban Tajik-Persian culture. The relatively high level of education and the significance attached to religion have led to the moderate and stable position of the “traditional”, i.e. *Khanafi madhhab* version of Sunni Islam. On the contrary, in the third region, Ferghana valley, the official Islam was not deeply incorporated in

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27 Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol: 31, No: 2, 2003, p.153.

the tradition and spirit of the followers. Historically the Sufi version of Islam as a semi-opposition to the officially recognized branch was very popular. This explains why the Saudi Arabia missionaries following other version of Islam – *Khanbali madhhab* – relatively easily influenced the minds of the people of the Ferghana valley, especially the youth. Economic backwardness, high population growth rate and limited access to resources for the people led to the relatively easy spread of *Vahhabi* or *Khanbali* sect of Islam in the Ferghana valley.

It should be noted that one of the first religion-based political parties in Uzbekistan – the *Adolat* party – was formed in 1991 in Namangan, a region within the Ferghana valley. It was later banned because of its criticism of the government's policy, its demands for social justice, its efforts to make Islam a state religion and its campaign against corruption. With this ability to mobilise people, the *Adolat* party was seen as a political rival and an aggressive competitor to the ruling party and the state. This explains why Uzbek President Islam Karimov has come down heavily on the party's activities and its efforts to spread religious fervour.

Initially the opposition movement in Uzbekistan in early 1990s had not only a religious base but a civil one as well (for example, the activity of *Erk* party whose leaders had to emigrate from the country). Here it is worth mentioning that the activity of civil opposition in Kazakhstan faced the same fate although not to such an extent as to be totally dismissed from the political arena.<sup>28</sup> It could be argued that due to the repressive policies of President Karimov's regime the place of the civilian opposition was occupied later by religious movements and the opposition itself acquired a religious character. The recent developments in the country after the tragic events in Andijan in 2005 have forced the state to use even more fierce suppression of any forms of religious activity. This time the target was (along with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) the *Akromiya* movement which some scholars consider "a kind of Islamic 'protestant' community where virtues is pursued in this world through hard work, entrepreneurial success and profit sharing with community members and the poor."<sup>29</sup> Alisher Ilkhamov stresses that from this point of view *Akromiya* is an Islamic movement and not yet political one which has more in common with social, that is, quite moderate Islam; it is a Central Asian variation of Nursi-Gulen's ideas.

## CONCLUSION

In analyzing Islam in Central Asia and the state's attitude towards it one should not forget such prominent feature in Islam as the inseparability of politics and religion.

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28 In this respect some leaders of the opposition such as RNP (Republic People Party of Kazakhstan) party leader A. Kazhegeldin was forced to leave the country due to the corruption scandal.

29 Alisher Ilkhamov, "Akromiya": Islamic Extremism or the Islamic Brand of Social Democracy?", *UNIS-CI Discussion Papers*, No: 11, May 2006, p.188.

This feature is derived from Islam's structural organization – there is no church in Islam and it is impossible to separate Umma from the society because these are the same. This particular feature of Islam is a powerful source of spreading pure political ideas in the mind of its followers and is also a basis for a social and political mobilization of the Umma members through the use of religious slogans; it is an essential pre-requisite for Islamic identity to be manifested in and by the politics.

The inseparability of politics and religion can be seen in Uzbekistan in both the strong religious identity of Uzbeks (when compared with the Kazakhs) and the specific attitude of the state towards Islam in the nation-building process.

The religion-state interaction in different countries varies depending on the role that religion and the state play in the social system. The uneven degree of religious identity amongst Kazakhs and Uzbeks led the state to be more strict in response to religious development in Uzbekistan. On the contrary, the religion was less politicized in Kazakhstan due to its weak religious identity of the country's citizens. Opposition to the regime was and is still founded along the civil identity lines. On the other hand specific elements of the state's behavior (i.e. the policy and political culture) shaped each state's response. These specific responses, coupled with the inseparability of the religious and political spheres has caused the present turmoil in Uzbekistan and explains the different problems both countries have to deal with today – the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Akromiya movement in Uzbekistan and civil political opposition in Kazakhstan.

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