

Islam in Tajikistan: actors, discourses, conflicts

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Islam in Tajikistan

Actors, Discourses, Conflicts

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Islam in Tajikistan

Actors, Discourses, Conflicts

Interest in Islam has grown enormously in the secular states of post-Soviet Central Asia. The revival of Muslim values and ideas is particularly conspicuous in Tajikistan, where about 95 percent of the population follows Sunni Islam. The Tajik regime works hard to contain religious practice and propaganda and deprive organised religion of its social base. This affects not only illegal Islamist groups, but also institutionalised political forces like the Islamic Renaissance Party as well as independent religious authorities who successfully carry their teachings into society.

The Tajik regime justifies political containment of religion in terms of stability and security imperatives. Western politicians and political analysis support this perspective, not least on account of the country's geographical and cultural proximity to Afghanistan and the potential threat from jihadist groups operating there. The threat scenario is currently heightened by the involvement of Tajiks fighting with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

The focus on extreme forms of Islam associated with such alarmist perceptions, however, obscures the complexity of the political conflicts over religion and stands in the way of an appropriate assessment not only of the religious discourse itself, but also of the reasons behind the growing attraction of Islam and its potential for creating order. This study explores those questions, illuminating the social and political background to the revival of Islamic discourses, networks and practices in Tajikistan since the end of the Soviet Union, identifying the central actors, and laying out the intellectual and social coordinates of the symbolic struggles they are involved in.

A review of Islam in the Soviet era transpires to be enlightening. It reveals the extent to which the topics of the present-day religious discourse are pre-formed by the debates of the Soviet era and underlines how strongly today's central conflict constellation and the three central actors – the post-communist cadres of state religion policy, the Hanafite religious elite, and its hybrid Islamist challengers – are still rooted in historic figurations. This is particularly striking, given the extent to which independence in 1991 shook up the religious field.

The revival of Muslim religiosity was spurred by the positive reassessment and reinvention of national traditions during the process of post-Soviet nation-building. Islamic values and everyday practices that had survived the Soviet era became integrated as state-approved cultural heritage into the national narrative of the new nation-state. At the same time, the new freedom of religion and the opening of the media landscape fostered growing demand for religious education, and the configuration of actors itself became more complex.

Alongside the traditional Hanafite authorities whose religious understanding of the world had been formed during the Soviet era (and who represent institutionalised Islam) a growing number of actors now appeared who had studied in other Muslim countries after 1991 and thus in a very different context. These independent authorities, who are revered above all in the younger generation of believers, challenge the interpretative monopoly of the traditional authorities, as do the new virtual media of widely differing quality and provenance that are also used by many young people as a source of advice.

The actors that reject the monopoly position of the official religious institutions and their political cooptation by the regime include the Islamic Renaissance Party (Nahzat). Typologically, Nahzat represents a hybrid form uniting conservative mass party and Islamist protest movement, whose agenda includes both Islamic and secular principles. It seeks the role of a constructive opposition party, which is consistently denied to it by a regime that instead suppresses it with all available means. What the government overlooks in the process is that Nahzat could potentially integrate more radical protest potential and thus play a role in taming it. This opportunity is wasted by hastily criminalising religious dissent and driving it underground.

The state's desire to assert comprehensive control over the field of religion also harms the authority of the official Islamic institutions. The mosques, whose direct contact with believers grants them decisive influence over the shaping of mass religiosity, are of central importance here. The state seeks to restrict the potential power of religious personnel through a system of oversight and surveillance whose contours recall Soviet practices. This supplies arguments to all those who regard the state's interventions as evidence of the political elite's hostility to religion and a cynical violation of the constitutional principle of separation of state and religion. As well as risking its own cred-

ibility here, the state is also undermining the legitimacy of the clergy, and thus the local Hanafite Islam itself, whose educational tradition cultivates tolerance towards culture-specific ritual practice and secular lifeworlds, and which ultimately represents the foundation upon which the symbolic order of the Tajik polity rests.

In this context the persistent trend to reduce the teaching of religion at state-run educational institutions is clearly counter-productive. For the universalist currents of Islam, which reject culture-specific variants of Muslim religiosity and whose rigid interpretations of the sacred scriptures are liable to polarise society, have long since arrived in Tajikistan. These teachings cannot be repulsed using the tools of power and control. Countering them requires intellectual capacity and the ability to discriminate. And that requires sound religious knowledge.

There is, however, currently no sign of any change of course in state religion policy. That would mean, firstly, taking the interest of lay believers seriously, rather than ignoring it. Secondly, it would need to be accompanied by a recognition of the indispensable integrating role of Hanafite Islam. This would, thirdly, have to be visibly reflected in increased investment in good religious education. Germany and Europe should sensitively support such a change of course by encouraging the Tajik government to expand its provision of religious education. The dialogue on the issue of teaching Islam in state schools, initiated in 2011 by Germany, France and the European Union, could offer a suitable medium.

Soviet Islam and the Renaissance of Religion

In the pre-Soviet era, Muslim norms and rites were an integral social and cultural component of Central Asian societies. Colonial conquest by Czarist Russia in the nineteenth century initially changed little for the Central Asia's Muslims. While they were integrated into the imperial economy of the Russian Empire and placed under a new regime, the Czarist administration did not seek to assimilate them or accomplish any radical cultural transformation.¹ Under the protection of local Czarist governors, the religious elite (*'ulamā*), which in Central Asia follows the *Hanafite* school (*mazhab*),² was in fact able to consolidate its influence. Islamic law and the traditional educational institutions (*maktab*, *madrasa*) remained largely untouched. The reverence of *Sufi* authorities – religious specialists who adhered to gnostic and mystical traditions and were often organised in brotherhoods – also survived intact.³

The situation changed radically after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917/18. Soviet religion policy has had a lasting impact on Islam in Central Asia, and its interventions still define the parameters of Tajik religious discourse within which the central questions of dogma and orthopraxy are negotiated today. Even the religious renaissance set in motion by the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), and the associated processes of dynamisation, pluralisation and autonomisation of the religious field, are contained by institutional arrangements rooted in Soviet practice.

1 Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective", *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 231–51 (236).

2 One of the four schools of law in Sunni Islam; became established from the eighth century in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and later also in Anatolia and the Balkans.

3 Ashirbek Muminov, "Traditional and Modern Religious-Theological Schools in Central Asia", in *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, ed. Lena Jonson and Murad Esenov (Stockholm, 1999), 101–11; Devin DeWeese, *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia*, Arnham 2012.

Soviet Religion Policy and Discourse

The Soviet modernisation project sought a radical reordering of state and society. The aim was to lead the supposedly "backward" population of the Muslim East onto the path of progress and development and, in a sweeping cultural revolution, replace their traditional institutions with ones more suited to realising the Soviet vision of a classless society. Overcoming religious loyalties and replacing them with faith in the secular utopia of communism played a central role.

The attack on the old order began in 1926 with the destruction of the Muslim educational structures.⁴ In order to create space for a modern education system in the spirit of universal enlightenment and secularisation, Islam was banished from the curriculum of the new schools, and traditional schools and medressas were closed. Mosques were destroyed or repurposed and their assets (*waqf*) seized. The Soviets clamped down particularly hard on the *Sufi* brotherhoods and their spiritual leaders (*ishan*, *shaykh*), whose esoteric practices they regarded as the pinnacle of backwardness. Within a few years, with the aid of massive anti-religious propaganda, Islam had been effectively eliminated from public life. By 1932 the religious personnel had been systematically sidelined, banished to the gulags or murdered.⁵ The second component of the cultural revolution was the campaign against the veiling of women's faces and bodies (*farangi* and *chachvon*), which the reformers regarded as the most conspicuous symbol of women's oppression. This campaign, which targeted the very heart of the traditional order, patriarchal power, provoked vigorous resistance.⁶

The repression of the *'ulamā*, the downgrading of religious education and the destruction of the structures that conveyed it were accompanied by political and administrative measures that fundamentally transformed local societies. Soviet nationality policy

4 Khalid, "Backwardness" (see note 1), 242f.

5 Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mekka: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport, 2001), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

6 Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity and Unveiling under Communism* (Washington, 2006), 186–98, 225–28 (esp. chaps. 7 and 8).

comprised two central components: nativisation (*korenizacija*) of power structures through the creation of local cadres,⁷ and administrative division of the region along ethnic and linguistic lines.⁸ This led, between 1924 and 1929, to the founding of the Soviet national republics,⁹ whose existence was legitimised retrospectively by the construction of national identities. This process was associated not only with the establishment of national historiography and ethnography but also a reclassification of Islam, which was downgraded to a “relic” of past epochs,¹⁰ but accepted as an aspect of local tradition and folklore.

This ambivalent ideological treatment of Islam allowed Muslim ritual practices and associated values to survive as an everyday religion divorced from public discourse, restricted to the sphere of local communities (family, neighbourhood) and largely deprived of its intellectual foundations; collective rituals associated with Sufism such as pilgrimages (*ziyārat*) to holy tombs (*mazār*) also continued. These and other non-normative practices actually became more significant in the sense that religious law (*shari’a*) lost its status as an overall system regulating people’s lives.¹¹

7 Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2007), 86–93.

8 Francine Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities”, *Russian Review* 59, no. 2 (2000): 201–26. Such criteria had played no role in the Czarist territorial and administrative reorganisation of Central Asia, where economic, geographical and strategic administrative aspects were decisive. While the Governor-Generalships of the Steppes and of Turkestan, which covered most of modern Kazakhstan and adjoining regions, stood under direct Russian administration, political protectorates were established (between 1868 and 1873) over three quasi-states in the south: the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand; see Richard N. Pierce, *Russian Central Asia, 1867–1917: A Study in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 1960), chaps. 2 to 4.

9 The Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) emerged from the Governor-Generalships of the Steppes and Turkestan in 1925. The Emirate of Bukhara and the Khiva Khanate retained their semi-autonomous status until 1924, after which they were integrated into the Uzbek SSR, out of which the Tajik SSR was created in 1929. The latter’s territory included parts of the former Khanate of Kokand (in the north) and of the Emirate of Bukhara (in the west and south).

10 Devin DeWeese, “Survival Strategies: Reflections on the Notion of Religious ‘Survivals’ in Soviet Ethnographic Studies of Muslim Religious Life in Central Asia”, in *Exploring the Edge of Empire*, ed. Florian Mühlfried and Sergey Sokolovskiy (Berlin and Zürich, 2011), 35–58.

11 Khalid, *Islam after Communism* (see note 7), 98–104; Bakh-tiyar Babadjanov, “From Colonization to Bolshevization:

The Second World War led the Soviets to rethink their religions policy. In order to secure Muslim support in the mobilisation against Nazi Germany, the persecution of religion was suspended and new freedoms granted. The founding in 1943 of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia (*Sredne-Aziatskoe Duchovnoe Upravlenie Musul’man* or SADUM) had a dual purpose.¹² The ‘ulamā in Uzbekistan had already attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish such an institution in the 1920s as a central forum for the Muslims of the entire region.¹³ The creation of such a body now appeared possible, and with it the revival and survival of religious education in a hostile environment. For the state in turn, SADUM was useful as an organ of centralised control and oversight of religious activity. It also served foreign policy ends in cultivating a positive image of Soviet religious policies in the Islamic world.

The Tashkent-based Spiritual Administration was a hierarchical organisation. Ishankhan Babakhan ibn Abdulmajidkhan was appointed director, fulfilling the function of mufti, and the office remained in his family for almost as long as SADUM existed. The mufti presided over the decision-making Council of the ‘Ulamā and the SADUM offices (*qāziyat*, from *qāzi* “judge”) established in each of the Central Asian republics and responsible for oversight of registered mosques. Under the auspices of SADUM religious training resumed, producing qualified personnel for mosques, teaching and the administration of the Spiritual Administration and its regional branches. The renowned Bukhara *Mir-i Arab* medressa reopened in 1948, and in 1971 the *Imam al-Buchari* Institute was founded in Tashkent – as the only institute in the region to offer a number of hand-picked students from the republics (eight to ten

Some Political and Legislative Aspects of Molding a ‘Soviet Islam’ in Central Asia”, in *Central Asian Law: An Historical Overview*, Festschrift for the Ninetieth Birthday of Herbert Franke, ed. Wallace Johnson and Irina F. Popova (Topeka, Kansas, 2004), 153–71 (159).

12 On the following see Bachtijar Babadžanov, “SADUM”, in *Islam na Territorii Byvšej Rossijskoj Imperii: Enciklopedičeskij Slovar’*, ed. S. M. Prozorov (Moscow, 2003), 69–72; and idem, “Babachanovy” [The Babakhanovs], *ibid.*, 12–14; Bachtijar Babadžanov, “Sredneaziatskoe Duchovnoe Upravlenie Musul’man: Predistorija i Posledstvija Raspada” [SADUM: Prehistory and consequences of its dissolution], in *Mnogomernye Granicy Central’noj Azii*, ed. Marta Brill Olcott and Aleksej Malašenko (Moscow: Moskovskij Centr Karnegi, 2000), 55–69.

13 Modelled on the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Russian Empire established in Ufa in 1788, under Catherine II.

per year) higher Islamic education, now supplemented with non-religious disciplines. The Spiritual Administration was also responsible for assembling delegations for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) and maintaining contact with Muslims abroad. A SADUM Department of International Relations was set up in 1961 and selected students from the Tashkent Institute to study at universities in friendly Muslim countries (Egypt, Syria, Libya).¹⁴

Probably the Spiritual Administration's most important responsibility was to issue religious legal opinions (*fatwa*), which from 1947 were published in the journal *The Muslims of the Soviet East*.¹⁵ Most of the fatwas were prepared at the instructions of the Council for Religious Affairs, which oversaw religious life in the Soviet Union in close consultation with the KGB, and also held authority over SADUM.¹⁶ Even formally, fatwas were couched as the implementation of decrees from the Communist Party, whose guiding principle was the struggle against harmful "remnants" of "backward" practices. Correspondingly fatwas were directed not only against habits that contravened sharia, such as alcohol and magic (for example healing and fortune-telling) but also against a complex of non-normative practices that were regarded by the local Hanafite legal tradition as absolutely compatible with Islam. These included the lavish exchange of gifts at religious celebrations, the extended mourning ritual, and above all the Sufi rituals associated with veneration of charismatic figures: pilgrimages to holy sites and the religious activities associated with these. Justifying verdicts against such practices therefore required drawing on other legal traditions outside the Hanafite.

There had already been attempts during the colonial era to realign local religious practice on the primary sources – the divine commandments of the Koran and the body of recorded sayings and actions

of the Prophet, the Sunnah – and leading representatives of the Soviet 'ulamā, including Ziauddin Babakhanov, who succeeded his father as mufti in 1957, had sympathised with these efforts.¹⁷ Saudi contacts cultivated by the Babakhan dynasty, imported writings by Hanbali scholars, and study visits by SADUM staff at Middle Eastern universities expanded the influence of Arab ritual purism among the Central Asian scholars.¹⁸ Some fatwas even contain references to religious custom in Saudi Arabia as the home of Islam.¹⁹ Thus the 'ulamā of the SADUM, in their striving to carry out the instructions of the Party ideologists while at the same time remaining true to their religion, in fact paved the way for the reformist and modernist currents that later became known as "Wahabi" and "Salafist".

The Spiritual Administration had a hybrid status. On the one hand there was a principle of separation of state and religion; on the other SADUM was part of the state bureaucracy and answerable to its organs. Consequently it was perceived in the first place as an executive organ of the state, whose authority to regulate the religious life of Muslims stood in contradiction to the firmly anchored hermeneutic principle of *ijtihad* ("utmost endeavour"), which encourages qualified jurists (*mujtahid*) to exercise independent reasoning on matters where neither the primary texts nor other scholars provide unambiguous guidance.²⁰ Many religious actors thus regarded SADUM's fatwas on dogma and law as non-binding.²¹

The *hujra* (literally "room [in medressa]") became the place to debate which practices conformed with the *Hanafiya* and which were "heresies" (*bid'a*) contravening sharia. Above all in the Uzbek and Tajik parts of the Ferghana Valley from the 1920s, these private teaching circles (as well as numerous unregistered mosques) became a refuge of Islamic education where the traditional forms of learning (with the centrality of the relationship between teacher and student) lived on.²² In the 1960s these circles brought forth an in-

¹⁴ Ashirbek Muminov, Uygun Gafurov, and Rinat Shigabdinov, "Islamic Education in Soviet and Post-Soviet Uzbekistan", in *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States*, ed. Michael Kemper, Raoul Motika, and Stefan Reichmuth (London et al., 2010), 223–79 (250–52).

¹⁵ On fatwas: Bachtijar Babadžanov, "O Fetwach SADUM Protiv 'Neislamskich Obyčaev'" [On the SADUM fatwas against "un-Islamic customs"], in *Islam Na Postsovetkom Prostranstve: Vzglyad Iznutri*, ed. Aleksej Malašenko and Marta Brill Olcott (Moscow: Moskovskij Centr Karnegi, 2001), 170–84; Babadžanov, "From Colonization to Bolshevization" (see note 11), 162–68.

¹⁶ John Anderson, "The Council for Religious Affairs and the Shaping of Soviet Religious Policy", *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 4 (1991): 689–710.

¹⁷ Ashirbek Muminov, "Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia", in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Uyama Tomohiko (Sapporo, 2007), 249–61 (256f.).

¹⁸ Muminov et al., "Islamic Education" (see note 14), 273.

¹⁹ Babadžanov, "O Fetwach SADUM" (see note 15), 176.

²⁰ Bernard Weiss, "Interpretation in Islamic Law: The Theory of *Ijtihad*", *American Journal of Comparative Law* 26, no. 2 (1978): 199–212.

²¹ Babadžanov, "O Fetwach SADUM" (see note 15), 178.

²² Muminov, "Fundamentalist Challenges" (see note 17), 258f.

creasingly critical mass of scholars who challenged the legitimacy of rulings by “government” ‘ulamā. However, the religious authorities of the *hujra* were anything but a homogeneous group. In fact there were many biographical and personal interconnections between them and the ‘ulamā of the Spiritual Administration,²³ and they had often been trained by the same teachers. The *hujra* were also a long way from a unified Islam discourse. The authorities teaching there included some who defended traditional Hanafite positions (even against SADUM fatwas), and others who accepted none of the schools of law and regarded Koran and Hadith (or the Koran alone) as the sole source of “correct” religious practice.²⁴

In the 1970s the hitherto marginal current that followed the reformist tradition gained in strength. These “young mullahs”, as they were known, argued vehemently for a revitalisation of Islam by returning to the primary sources. Their opponents called them “Wahabis” in reference to the Arab Wahabism that had become a synonym for the purist currents in Islam during the Soviet era (and remained so thereafter).²⁵ In questions of doctrine and orthopraxy, these “young mullahs” or “renewers” (*mujaddidin*), as they called themselves, espoused different positions. But what united them was their opposition to the traditionalism and conservatism of the Hanafite ‘ulamā and to its quietist stance on political questions.²⁶ In 1973 one of these renewers, Said Abdullo Nuri, founded a youth organisation in the Tajik SSR called *Nahzati Javononi Islomii Tojikiston* (Revival of the Islamic

Youth of Tajikistan) which laid the foundations for the later Nahzat party.²⁷

The Return of Religion

The 1980s ushered in a phase of opening and transformation of the religious landscape. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (where Central Asian cadres were also involved), and the Iranian Revolution the same year, sparked a wave of solidarity among the Muslims of Central Asian. The subsequent political and economic liberalisation in the course of the restructuring of Soviet society (*perestroika*) initiated under Mikhail Gorbachev dynamised the religious field in an unforeseen manner. The religious freedom law adopted by the Supreme Soviet in October 1990, replacing the law on religion of 1929,²⁸ permitted religious institutions to resume their core functions of charitable activity and religious instruction. Closed mosques and medressas reopened, clandestinely run ones operated openly, and new ones were established, often with financial support from Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan. The new law now also made it easier to import religious literature from Saudi Arabia and the Middle East and thus enabled free access to the Koran (possession of which had hitherto been severely restricted) and other religious writings including the theorists of politicised pan-Islamism (such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, the spiritual fathers of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood). And the new law was also accompanied by a physical opening of the borders, which eased networking with Muslim institutions abroad. Soviet Muslims could now undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca, and missionaries and representatives of organisations with all kinds of messages flooded into the region.²⁹

In this rapidly changing political and cultural context, the generation of reformist and increasingly internationalist Muslim intellectuals gained greater leeway for political activity and propaganda. This met with resistance among the Hanafite ‘ulamā, who rejected not only the dogmatic and ritual innovations of the “Wahabis” but also their demands for an Islamic

23 Stéphane A. Dudoignon, “From Revival to Mutation: The Religious Personnel of Islam in Tajikistan, from De-Stalinization to Independence (1955–91)”, *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011): 53–80.

24 Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, “Damulla Hindustani and the Beginning of the ‘Great Schism’ among the Muslims of Uzbekistan”, in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth – Late Twentieth Centuries)*, ed. Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Hisao Komatsu (London et al., 2001), 195–220; Muminov et al., “Islamic Education” (see note 14), 252–54; Babadžanov, “Sredneaziatskoe Duchovnoe Upravlenie Musul’man” (see note 12), 57f.

25 Babadjanov and Kamilov, “Damulla Hindustani” (see note 24), 200–206.

26 Bakhtiar Babadzhanov, “Islam in Uzbekistan: From the Struggle for ‘Religious Purity’ to Political Activism”, in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* ed. Boris Rumer (Armonk and London, 2002), 299–330 (310–12).

27 Qiomiddin Sattori, ed., *30 sol HNIT – zodai ormoni mardum* [30 years of IRPT– born from the ideals of the nation] (Dushanbe, 2003), 6.

28 Anderson, “The Council for Religious Affairs” (see note 16), 703f.

29 Muminov et al., “Islamic Education” (see note 14), 254ff; Khalid, *Islam after Communism* (see note 7), 118–25.

Map 1: Central Asia





Map 2: Tajikistan

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Islam in Tajikistan
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state. The religious dispute increasingly escalated into conflict, which was ultimately carried into the Spiritual Administration and accelerated its dissolution.³⁰ Shortly before this occurred, some of the reformers founded an *Islamic Renaissance Party* in Astrakhan, which stood for a revival of Islamic values and the establishment of an Islamic state in Central Asia.³¹ But this transnational impetus was soon overtaken by local agendas and conflicts when the Soviet Union broke apart at the end of 1991. An attempt to establish an Uzbek branch of the *Islamic Renaissance Party* in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley, where the politicised “Wahabis” were especially active, was blocked by the united resistance of the state and the Hanafite ‘ulamā. A number of groups that emerged at this point were banned and shifted their activities abroad (see pp. 20f.).

In Tajikistan the development of political Islam took a different course. Like in Uzbekistan the origins of the movement lay in the Islamic parallel society of the Soviet era. It consisted of a network of young mullahs and their students and stood, as in Uzbekistan, in sharp opposition to both the communist cadres and the Hanafite establishment of the Spiritual Administration. The desire for national self-determination and political reform united reformers around Said Abdullo Nuri with secular intellectuals who had also begun to organise politically in the later years of perestroika. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the declaration of Tajik independence in September 1991 sharpened the antagonism between pro-Communist forces and groups seeking change. In October the Tajik Islamists left the Union-wide Renaissance Party, founded their own *Islamic Renaissance Party (Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston; in the following, Nahzat)* and joined an informal alliance with nationalist and democratic opposition groups to stand a joint candidate in the presidential election scheduled for November.³²

This process brought the Islamists closer to the discourses of their coalition partners. The ultimate objective of establishing an Islamic state, which originally

played a prominent role in their repertoire, receded in favour of appeals for a “national” awakening and a revitalisation of Persian and Islamic cultural heritage.³³ These demands were also supported by parts of the ‘ulamā. In 1988 Akbar Turajonzoda, one of the young reformers within SADUM and son of a well-known Sufi authority, was elected chief judge (*qāzi kalon*) of the Tajik branch of the Spiritual Administration and thus the country’s supreme Islamic authority. Turajonzoda, who had also been a member of the Tajik Supreme Soviet since 1990, argued not only for the official institutionalisation of fundamental Islamic customs (such as Muslim holidays) but also for the official registration of Nahzat as a political party.³⁴ But the post-communist regime of Rahmon Nabiev held stubbornly to the status quo, denying the opposition alliance any participation in power – even after the respectable showing of 31 percent for its presidential candidate, a well-known film director.

The ensuing power struggle initially took the form of demonstrations and occupations of central public squares in the capital Dushanbe, but escalated in spring 1992 when Nabiev’s inner circle armed militias from the south and brought them to the capital.³⁵ The unfolding violence led to a brutal civil war that affected the south of the country worst of all. The war was driven largely by antagonisms between regional power networks. Structurally fostered by the country’s fragmented political geography and a regionalism that was already pronounced in Soviet times, these tensions were exacerbated by two factors: firstly, a Soviet practice of elite recruitment that had favoured particular regions (Leninabad, today Khujand, in the Ferghana Valley and Kulob in the south); and secondly a mass resettlement from the mountains to the valleys in the course of the rapid expansion of cotton cultivation. Especially in the densely populated Vakhsh Valley, this created a precarious coexistence of communities with different political identities and loyal-

30 Babadžanov, “Sredneaziatskoe Duchovnoe Upravlenie Musul’man” (see note 12), 59–64; Babadžanov, “Islam in Uzbekistan” (see note 26), 309–14.

31 Stéphane A. Dudoignon, “Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989–1993”, in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, ed. Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frédéric Grare, and Shirin Akiner (Richmond, 1998), 52–85 (63f.).

32 Parviz Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan since the End of the Soviet Period”, in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia*, ed. Dudoignon and Komatsu (see note 24), 221–25, 237–39.

33 Dudoignon, “Political Parties and Forces” (see note 31), 65–67.

34 Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy” (see note 32), 234–36; Shahram Akbarzadeh, “Islamic Clerical Establishment in Central Asia”, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997): 73–102 (95–97).

35 On this and the following: Bess Brown, “The Civil War in Tajikistan, 1992–1993”, in *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, ed. Djalili et al. (see note 31), 86–96 (90–95); Dudoignon, “Political Parties and Forces” (see note 31), 70–73; Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy” (see note 32), 240–43; and (on the regional dynamic) 231–34; also Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham et al., 2005), 213–35.

ties who now became embroiled in a “war of the kolkhozes”.³⁶ Because the Islamist faction’s strongholds were largely in the marginalised regions from which the resettlers came, while the regime’s militias were mostly recruited from long-time residents of the south, whole families were wiped out in the violence simply on the basis of features identifying origin.

The militias of the post-communist regime, composed largely of Kulobis and Uzbeks and supported massively with arms by Uzbekistan, later also by Russia, quickly gained the upper hand. In winter 1992 Nahzat’s leaders fled to exile in Afghanistan under the protection of Pashtun and Tajik mujahideen, along with about one hundred thousand refugees. Other opposition members went to Moscow. But that did not mean the war was over. While the regime in Dushanbe consolidated, replacing Nabiev with Emomali Rahmon, a sovkhos director from Kulob who had been appointed leader of the Tajik Supreme Soviet in September 1992, its opponents conducted a guerrilla war in the largely inaccessible regions of Gharm and the Pamirs, which had remained under the control of opposition warlords.

UN-brokered peace talks began in 1994 between Dushanbe and the opposition, which had joined to form the *United Tajik Opposition* (UTO) where Nahzat remained the dominant force. For a long time the talks went nowhere because the regime, paying heed to Russian sensitivities, refused to share power with the UTO. Not until 1997, after the victory of the Taliban shifted the balance of forces in Afghanistan and consequently the interests of Russia and Iran, was it possible to reach an agreement between the parties. The peace agreement, signed by President Emomali Rahmon (elected in 1994), and Nahzat leader Said Abdullo Nuri, guaranteed the UTO a share of power in government on the basis of a 30 percent quota. It also gave Nahzat the status of a legal party.³⁷

The peace agreement consolidated the power of President Rahmon, who championed the secular state model, remained strongly dependent on financial and political support from Russia, and showed no inclination to break with the ideological legacy of the Soviet Union. But Islam had unmistakably returned to the daily lives of the population, and unlike its Soviet predecessors the Rahmon regime refrained from anti-religious propaganda. Since the 1980s growing inter-

est in national history and culture, in whose rediscovery and reinvention secular intellectuals and academics were central,³⁸ had also enhanced the status of the Islamic heritage. This was now seen no longer as an expression of backwardness, but as an uncontested component of the national culture. Reference to religious symbolism was consequently politically imperative and was demonstratively practised: taking the oath of office on the Koran, the president attending the *hajj* (1997) and the declaration of an “Imam Azam Year” in 2009 to honour the founder of the Hanafite school, Abu Hanifa (who was declared “son of the Tajik nation” for the occasion), to name just a few examples.³⁹ The public presentation of Islamic tradition, with which the post-Soviet regime sought to politically instrumentalise the return of religion to society, could not, however, disguise the fact that its ideological hegemony was by no means secure.

³⁶ Olivier Roy, *La nouvelle Asie Centrale, ou la fabrication des nations* (Paris, 1997), 154f.

³⁷ Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy” (see note 32), 245f.

³⁸ Khalid, *Islam after Communism* (see note 7), 126f; Dudoinon, “Political Parties and Forces” (see note 31), 65–67.

³⁹ “Annual Address to the Majlisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan”, 24 April 2010, <http://www.prezident.tj/en/node/2190>.

Islamic Institutions, Authorities and Groups

The religious renaissance initiated by the political transformations of the late 1980s led to a differentiation and pluralisation of the religious field. The historical exclusion of Islamic education from schools and universities and systematic atheist propaganda had left the general population with only rudimentary knowledge of Islam. This generally extended no further than the Islam of “custom and habit” (*urf, adat*), in the sense of the basic religious rites, practices and behavioural norms that had survived the Soviet era through being handed down, largely independently of class, in families and neighbourhoods.⁴⁰ The *domullo* or *mullah*, who provided religious advice and services and were consulted principally for the rites of passage (birth, circumcision, marriage and death) and in situations of physical or emotional distress, generally also drew their religious knowledge from the same sources.⁴¹ The new freedom of religion therefore brought with it great demand for religious education and instruction, which was further amplified by the opening of the media. Unhindered access to religious literature – of differing types and qualities – altered the forms and institutions of the communication of knowledge. This manifested itself in a growing number of actors claiming authority in religious matters and calling for life to be lived according to the rules of Islam. These actors are described in greater detail in the following.

⁴⁰ The author's discussion partners distinguished merely between “religious” and “unreligious” families, where the former were not restricted to those from the provincial rural and academic proletariat. Instead the “religious” included in particular “good families” belonging to or close to the Communist nomenklatura, who at the same time held particularly conservative values and an interest in preserving Islamic traditions (as “good manners”). This was not seen as any contradiction to communist ideals.

⁴¹ Nazif Shahrani, “Local Knowledge of Islam and Social Discourse in Afghanistan and Turkistan in the Modern Period”, in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Canfield (Cambridge, 1991), 161–80 (166–75).

Mosques, the Supreme Council of the 'Ulamā and the Islamic Centre

Mosques, whose numbers have leapt since 1990, are of central importance for the interaction of Muslims in public space. Whereas in 1990 only seventeen were officially registered in the whole country, the number rose to almost four thousand by summer 2013.⁴² Mosques fulfil a range of social functions. They are not only the location of communal worship, prayer and religious teaching, but also a locale to meet socially and exchange news, and an informal meeting space for the members of the local congregation (*mahalla*) or village. Funded exclusively through donations and exempt from taxes, mosques organise a broad spectrum of charitable services, ranging from pastoral care to material assistance for the needy (often in the form of food and goods).

Mosques are decentralised institutions. A new mosque may be established in a community of at least one hundred (for Friday mosques ten thousand) at the request of a group of at least ten founders.⁴³ Once a construction permit has been issued and a religious association registered, the mosque organises itself largely autonomously. The religious personnel of neighbourhood and village mosques – often only an *imam* (prayer leader), a deputy and a guardian (who often also acts as the *muezzin*, calling the faithful to prayer) – is chosen from among the congregation by the ten-member mosque committee. Formal religious education is not an automatic precondition; moral integrity, piety and social authority are much more decisive.

The approximately four hundred Friday mosques occupy a crucial position for the shaping of mass reli-

⁴² According to a verbal report from the state Committee for Religious Affairs, 3,493 of these were community or neighbourhood mosques (*masjidi panjvaqt*), and 407 Friday mosques (*masjidi jum'a*) (July 2013). Some discussion partners believed there to be a large number of unregistered mosques.

⁴³ The number required in the capital Dushanbe is higher: *Qonuni Jumhurii Tojikiston “Dar Borai Ozodii Vijdon Va Ittihodiyahoi Dini”* [Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On the freedom of belief and religious association”], (Dushanbe, 2009), chap. 3, art. 11 (3) and (4).

giosity, as they form the link between the congregations and the state structures, the lay believers and the ‘ulamā. They reach a much larger proportion of the population than the neighbourhood mosques. On Muslim holidays thousands of worshippers gather here to hear a sermon (*maʼvʼiza*) and pray together. Only the heads of Friday mosques (*imam khatib*) are authorised to read the Friday prayer (*khutba*) and preach in public, making them key figures in the field of religion. In the sense that they communicate the normative foundations of the symbolic order to a broad audience their function is at the same time a genuinely political one.

Candidates for these positions are also put forward from the local level. But approval is required from a state organ, the *Committee for Religious Affairs*,⁴⁴ in consultation with the *Islamic Centre (markazi islomī)*. The Islamic Centre is the successor to the Qāziat, which took over supervision of the field of religion in Tajikistan after the dissolution of SADUM. In 1992 the Qāziat was transformed into a muftiate in a move that formally enhanced the status of the ‘ulamā.⁴⁵ But the decision was reversed in 1996, when the muftiate was abolished and replaced with a *Supreme Council of the ‘Ulamā (shuroi oli ulamoi dini Tojikiston)*.⁴⁶ Its administrative arm, the Religious Administration (*idorai din*), was turned into the Islamic Centre in 2010 and transformed into a departmental umbrella organisation. The Council of the ‘Ulamā, which consists of twenty-five senior members of the ‘ulamā (almost all of them exercising the function of *imam khatib*) occupies a special position within this system. It is the corporate entity representing the Centre, possesses the right to issue fatwas, tests the religious knowledge of khatibs and elects the mufti, who in turn heads the Council of the ‘Ulamā and the Islamic Centre.⁴⁷ As such the ‘ulamā forms a relatively coherent body, comparable to a clergy. But its potential power is effectively contained by the law on religion. The law emphasises the constitutional separation of state and religion and grants the Islamic

Centre the status of an “extraordinary” religious organisation.⁴⁸ At the same time the law subordinates all religious institutions under the state Committee for Religious Affairs, which possesses sweeping planning and control functions (see below, p. 27).

The Council of the ‘Ulamā thus has a similar hybrid status to the Soviet-era Spiritual Administration (see pp. 8f.), but with reduced scope: the law grants it certain powers but no authority to issue directives, because in the final instance the decisions of the Committee for Religious Affairs are binding on religious institutions at all levels. While the ‘ulamā may play an advisory role here, its main function is to implement the decisions of the Committee for Religious Affairs and contribute to oversight and disciplining of religious institutions.

The most important instruments here are the regular testing of the qualifications of imams introduced in 2007,⁴⁹ participation in drafting curricula for the six officially registered medressas,⁵⁰ the Islamic Lycee in Dushanbe and the country’s only Islamic university,⁵¹ organising training for serving imams through the *Training Centre for Imam Khatibs* established in 2010,⁵² and participating in compiling approved texts for the Friday sermons, which the Committee for Religious Affairs sends to the imams weekly and whose observance is monitored (at least sporadically).⁵³ The training measures also draw on experienced imams who are not members of the Council of the ‘Ulamā. Finally, the payment of salaries to the khatibs of the Friday mosques, introduced in spring 2014, which makes them de facto state employees, is of special significance for ensuring the loyalty of the religious elite.⁵⁴ Their corporate status is also underlined by the uniform apparel introduced in spring 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid., chap. 3, art. 11 (6). The full name is *Kumitai din, tanzimi an’ana va jashnu marosimhoi millii Tojikiston* [Committee for religion and regulation of traditions, festivals and national rituals]. See p. 27.

⁴⁵ And possibly for the same reason that led to the creation of SADUM in 1943: to bind the ‘ulamā to the regime during wartime. This became particularly pressing after Akbar Tura-jonzoda, *qāzi kalon*, joined the opposition in 1992.

⁴⁶ On the background: Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy” (see note 32), 256f.

⁴⁷ According to staff of the Islamic Centre and members of the ‘ulamā (Dushanbe and Sughd, summer 2013).

⁴⁸ *Qonuni Jumhurii Tojikiston “Dar Borai Ozodii Vijdon Va Ittihodiyahoi Dini”* (see note 43), chap. 2, art. 5 (2) and chap. 3, art. 9 (2).

⁴⁹ Farangis Najibullah, “Tajikistan: Authorities Impose Religious Tests on Imams”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, 9 August 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078040.html>.

⁵⁰ As of summer 2014.

⁵¹ *Donishgohi Islomī Imomi Azam Abu Hanifa* (Dushanbe), also formally under the auspices of the Islamic Centre.

⁵² *Markazi Bozomuzi Imom Khatibon*.

⁵³ Discussions with representatives of the Committee for Religious Affairs in Sughd und Khatlon (2013/2014).

⁵⁴ Mechrangez Tursunzoda, “Muftij ozvučil primernuju zarplatu imam-khatibov”, *Asia Plus*, 14 January 2014, <http://www.news.tj/ru/news/muftii-ozvuchil-primernuyu-zarplatu-imam-khatibov>.

In this way the law on religion binds religious personnel to the secular regime and ensures the emergence of a uniform professional profile in harmony with the secular ideology of the state. This is especially significant in relation to the younger generation of imams, whose religious socialisation occurred in the post-Soviet period. Many of them studied for years at Middle Eastern, Saudi or Pakistani universities and thus in a context that differs starkly from that of the post-Soviet states. Their educational experiences are very different to those of the older generation of imams – many of whom also spent time studying in other Muslim countries in the 1990s, but whose religious understanding of the world was largely formed in the colleges of the Soviet era, in Bukhara and Tashkent, where they internalised a homogenous canon tailored to the needs of a secular ideology.

Independent Authorities

Alongside the imams officially authorised to preach to a mass audience and for that purpose have at their disposal the powerful resource of the mosque, there is also an almost endless number of independent authorities offering religious services. These range from authoritative voices like the Turajonzoda brothers (see below), to *domullo* who gather only a small number of students and do not necessarily disclose their activities to outsiders.

Many of them originate from families that emigrated to Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Islamic countries during the civil war, or sent their children away to study (in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran). Many of them left Tajikistan for economic rather than religious reasons and only embraced Islam in Cairo, Medina, Islamabad or Tehran.⁵⁵ Many of these foreign students were recalled to the country in autumn 2010 after the Tajik government realised the extent of educational emigration and its apparently uncontrollable repercussions on the country's religious discourse.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ David M. Abramson, *Foreign Religious Education and the Central Asian Islamic Revival: Impact and Prospects for Stability*, Silk Road Paper (Washington: Central Asia/Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, March 2010), 36–41.

⁵⁶ Zarina Ergasheva, "Tajikistan: Islamic Students Told to Come Home", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)*, 24 November 2010, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cf4f7b6c.html>. Subsequently a package of legal amendments was adopted to tighten control of religious activity: Alexander Sodiqov, "Bill Banning Children from Mosques Adopted in

But after returning to Tajikistan they find little opportunity for employment. Despite possessing religious qualifications from foreign universities, entry to the Tajik establishment is barred to most. Not only does the number of candidates significantly exceed the number of available posts at mosques, medressas and other educational institutions,⁵⁷ but their qualifications are not recognised (or only after an additional study at Dushanbe Islamic University). Moreover, those who enter mosque service are expected to conform to a code of conduct that demands modesty (*khoksoṛi*) and subordination (*itoat*), which some returnees regard as an affront.⁵⁸ For they speak fluent Arabic – often better than the established imams – and often possess deeper knowledge of Islam than the generation trained during the Soviet era. The latter still enjoy great respect, especially as some studied under notable *hujra* authorities and thus belong to the tradition that guarded Islam under a hostile regime. But a growing segment of youth follow representatives of the post-Soviet generation whose dress, speech and habitus distinguish them from the Soviet-era *domullo*, and who challenge the traditional religious authorities and embody a "modern" Islam.

Many of the returnees give private lessons (*sabaq*). Although private Arabic and religion instruction was given throughout the Soviet era to make up for the lack of religious education (see above, pp. 9f.), the popularity and demand of such courses has been increasing rapidly since independence. Parents who send their children to private religious instruction see it as a central component of moral education offering orientation in a world that has become confusing.⁵⁹

Tajikistan", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 124 (28 June 2011): [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=38104#.VDKVBGOqJKo](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=38104#.VDKVBGOqJKo). Now particular conditions must be fulfilled before studying at an Islamic university abroad: Abdukajum Kajumzod, "Mulloj mozet stat' ne kazdyj" [Not everyone can become a mullah], *Radio Ozodi*, 25 May 2011, http://rus.ozodi.org/content/changes_in_religious_law_/24200767.html.

⁵⁷ Out of 2,705 students who had been brought back from foreign Islamic universities by January 2014 (out of a registered total of 2,874), only 237 had found places at Tajik education institutions by January 2013: Mechrangez Tursunzoda, "Cholikov: V islamskich stranach na segodnjašnj den' ostajutsja 169 tadjikskikh studentov" [Kholikov: 169 Tajik students still in Muslim countries], *Asia Plus*, 14 January 2013, <http://www.news.tj/ru/news/kholikov-v-islamskikh-stranakh-na-segodnyashni-den-ostayutsya-169-tadjikskikh-studentov>.

⁵⁸ Discussions with returnees and established imams (2013/2014).

⁵⁹ Manja Stephan, "Education, Youth and Islam: The Growing Popularity of Private Religious Lessons in Dushanbe,

But it is not only children who are sent to a *domullo*. Young adults and even members of the parental generation attend religious circles to learn about “true” Islam or to make up what they missed earlier. Many young women attend private religion courses with female religious instructors (*bibi otun, otunbucha*). Their motivations are diverse. Interest in Islamic values and their implications for family life and raising children are naturally foremost. But such courses often also offer the only opportunity to escape the confines of the home for a time and meet together with other women. Acquiring religious knowledge also offers a possibility to enhancing their status vis-à-vis their husbands and in the family.

But these private teachers are taking great risks, because since 2011 a licence has been required for private religious instruction.⁶⁰ Those who teach without one, and thus illegally, therefore have every reason to be discreet about their activities. Of course this does nothing to bring clarity to the informal religious scene. Instead the ban on private religious teaching exacerbates the general trend for decentralisation in the religious field and contributes to it becoming ever less transparent. The growing importance of the internet and virtual social networks – which are increasingly used as media for communication on religion – plays an important role in this connection, increasing both the supply of advice and the demand for religious teaching.

That demand is served professionally and systematically by a website (www.turajon.org) run by three prominent religious authorities, the Turajonzoda brothers. Under the heading *savolu javob* (“questions and answers”) they publish fatwas addressing questions of sharia and the religious way of life.⁶¹ The internet presence of the Turajonzoda brothers demonstrates very well how the global trend of religion decoupling from both the state and established religious institutions, observed in connection with the

Tajikistan”, in *Youth in the Former Soviet South: Everyday Lives between Experimentation and Regulation*, special issue of *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 4 (2010): 469–83.

⁶⁰ Sodiqov, “Bill Banning Children from Mosques” (see note 56); see also *Zakon RT “Ob otvetstvennosti roditel’ev za obuchenie i vospitanie detej”* [Law of RT “On the responsibility of parents for the education of their children”], chap. 2 (9), <http://islamnews.tj/legislation.html>.

⁶¹ On the website and the brothers’ biographies, see Tim Epkenhans and Shahnoza Nozimova, “Negotiating Islam in Emerging Public Spheres in Contemporary Tajikistan”, *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 67, no. 3 (2013): 965–90 (971–84).

fatwa discussion, has arrived in Tajikistan.⁶² The 2012 decision by the Islamic Centre to do the same and set up its own website (www.muftiyat.tj) suggests that the Council of the ‘Ulamā has recognised which way the wind is blowing and feels forced to respond. In January 2013, shortly after launching its website,⁶³ the Islamic Centre issued a fatwa in which the Council of the ‘Ulamā called for religious actors to exercise restraint in publishing fatwas, on the grounds that such pluralism was dangerous. For statements on problems of religious law, it asserted, the Islamic Centre held sole responsibility.⁶⁴

This intervention is unlikely to have done anything to reduce the attractiveness of competitors who are independent and well-versed in the use of electronic media. But their influence is limited too, and there is no sign yet that “the internet has changed the patterns of giving advice radically”.⁶⁵ The popularity of online advice is no substitute for direct interaction between a religious authority (*domullo, mudaris*) and his followers or students (*shogird, murid*). Whether a *domullo* teaches privately or works as an imam in a state-licensed mosque and receives students and advice-seekers between prayer times is secondary. What is central for his authority are his reputation as an expert (*olim*) of the faith and his personal charisma. The choice of who to follow and who to seek for advice depends on individual biographical and local networks, and the choice is rarely exclusive. Instruction from one of the *mudaris* of the younger generation, who have studied at a respected Islamic university abroad, is often supplemented by participation in a discussion circle (*gap*) held by a *domullo* of the Soviet generation.⁶⁶ Thus the pluralisation of sources of religious instruction does not necessarily erode the importance of the traditional channels. But the greater diversity of actors and

⁶² Johannes Reissner, *Islam in der Weltgesellschaft: Wege in eine eigene Moderne*, SWP-Studie 19/2007 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2007), 24.

⁶³ Its “Questions and Answers” section is apparently little-used, possibly due to the website’s obvious lack of maintenance.

⁶⁴ Abdullo Ašurov, “Sovet ulemov Tadžikistana zajavil, čto nikto ne imeet prava vynosit’ fetvy bez ich razrešenija” [Spiritual Administration of Tajikistan declares that nobody has the right to issue legal opinions without its approval], *Radio Ozodi*, 20 January 2013, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/24878680.html>.

⁶⁵ Epkenhans/Nozimova, “Negotiating Islam” (see note 61), 967.

⁶⁶ Discussions with scholars and students in Sughd and Khatlon (2013/2014).

communication media does lead to a growing polyphony on normative questions. This makes it increasingly difficult for the religious elite to defend its position as legitimate representative of the symbolic order.

The Islamic Renaissance Party

Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston (Nahzat) occupies a special position among the actors in the field of religion. Its status as a legal political party stems from the peace agreement of 1997, which guaranteed the opposition a share in power (see above, p. 14). The agreement led in 1999 to a constitutional amendment that emphasises the secular character of the state but permits the establishment of religious parties, and thus opened the way for Nahzat's integration into the political system.⁶⁷ That integration process, manifested above all in participation in parliamentary elections (since 2000), required the party to make compromises with the post-communist regime that alienated former supporters and allies – but also paved the way for strategic realignment and modernisation.

That process was initiated under Said Abdullo Nuri, who was reelected as leader in 1999.⁶⁸ After his death in 2006 he was succeeded by his protégé Muhiddin Kabiri against the resistance of the conservatives in the party. Kabiri was a newcomer who played no part in the civil war (unlike most of Nahzat's leadership), possesses a secular education and supports the separation of religion and politics. He has consistently continued the modernisation course set by Nuri. Under his leadership Nahzat has developed into a parliamentary party whose programme appears positively “post-Islamist”.⁶⁹ Today the party's statutes reflect nothing of its days as champion of Muslim interests, seeking an Islamisation of society.⁷⁰ Islam now appears only as a general frame of reference for goals and activities so inclusive that the entire spectrum from conservative religious to secular intelligentsia can feel equally comfortable. The statutes convey the image of a respectable mainstream party that respects liberal and demo-

cratic principles (freedom of conscience and opinion, multi-party system, free elections) on the basis of Islamic values, but subjugates the latter to the national interest rather than absolutising it over other beliefs.⁷¹

The Islamist character of Nahzat, which remains almost invisible in its external projection, does nonetheless play a role in the everyday life of the party, where the distinction between “what is Islamic and what is not”⁷² plays a central role both in internal self-description and in the framing of its adversaries.⁷³ Typologically Nahzat is thus akin to a protest movement that criticises perceived social and economic asymmetries from the perspective of an ideal society, namely, one governed by Islamic values. This ideal society is democratic, participatory and egalitarian, and thus the opposite of what the present regime embodies in the eyes of its critics, whether Islamist or secular. Typically, criticism of the regime in the name of Islam (as the epitome of democracy and social justice) is tied to *da'wa*, the call to Islam,⁷⁴ which plays an important role in the Nahzat's recruitment practice. Here religious knowledge is a central resource, but not the only one.

To that extent the description of Nahzat as a “post-Islamist” party is only partly true. But it is unmistakable that Nahzat is seeking to emancipate itself from its role as a protest party. Its willingness to work constructively within existing institutions and agree compromises with the government, which have characterised its political stance since its institutionalisation, is recognisable at all levels of the party. In its struggle for recognition as a political player Nahzat differs fundamentally from other Islamist groups and parties, such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and the (not openly political) *Salafiya*, as well as from jihadist groups like the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, and *Jamo'ati Ansorulloh*, which propagate stricter ethical and cultural norms and a clearer and more coherent Islamist programme than

67 *Konstitutsijai (Sarqonuni) Jumhurii Tojikiston*, chap. 1, art. 1 and chap. 2, art. 28, <http://www.prezident.tj/ru/taxonomy/term/5/112>.

68 Naumkin, *Radical Islam* (see note 35), 236–40, 243–56.

69 Ihsan Yilmaz, “An Islamist Party, Constraints, Opportunities and Transformation to Post-Islamism: The Tajik Case”, *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika* 5, no. 18 (2009): 133–47.

70 Dudoignon, “Political Parties and Forces” (see note 31), 64–67.

71 Guaranteeing religious liberties (as part of civil liberties) is explicitly mentioned: *Oinnomai Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston* [Statutes of the Islamic Renaissance Party] (1.4), <http://nahzat.tj/dar-borai-hnit/oinnoma>; on democracy, see Rahmatulloi Rajab, “Demokratia va Intikhobot” [Democracy and elections], *Nahzat.tj*, 16 January 2015, <http://nahzat.tj/13867-demokratiya-va-intihobot.html>.

72 Reissner, *Islam in der Weltgesellschaft* (see note 62), 20.

73 Discussions and interaction with *Nahzatis* in 2013 and 2014.

74 On the typological connection between Islamism, protest and *da'wa*, see Reissner, *Islam in der Weltgesellschaft* (see note 62), 20–22.

Nahzat's, and which categorically exclude any cooperation with the ruling regime (see below).

By stepping up recruitment among the youth in all parts of the country and working with migrant communities abroad (especially in Russia), which with about 1.5 million (or half the male population of working age) represent a significant political force,⁷⁵ Nahzat seeks to integrate protest potential and prevent radicalisation. It makes use of modern media, especially social networks, as well as mouth-to-mouth propaganda and has been able to gain support among the Ismailite minority in the Pamir region of Gorno-Badakhshan, which was not originally Nahzat territory. But the party owes its growth in membership from 20,000 in 2000 to 41,000 in 2014 largely to the recruitment of women, who make up 53 percent of its membership.⁷⁶ This confirms a general trend of growing female interest in Islam (see above, p. 18).

This makes Nahzat by far the largest opposition party.⁷⁷ It has participated in parliamentary elections since 2000, consistently polling between 7 and 9 percent.⁷⁸ Its failure to clear the 5 percent hurdle in the March 2015 vote, which left it excluded from parliament, is partly accounted for by the regime's great efforts to discredit it morally and politically during the run-up.⁷⁹ It must also be presumed that irregularities occurred during the campaign and the count.⁸⁰ The chronic repression directed against the party suggests that the government believes Nahzat's base to be considerably broader than the official figures would

suggest. As well as consistently seeking to reduce Nahzat's political leeway, the government also systematically obstructs its offers of cooperation.⁸¹ This leaves it trapped in its protest role and allows the regime of President Rahmon to present itself as the guarantor of peace, unity and stability⁸² against the Islamist "troublemakers". Here the regime can also count on the religious elite, which rejects the utilisation of Islam by political parties on the grounds that religious institutions should be kept free of political agitation.⁸³ This position matches the provisions of the law on religion, which prohibits political activity by representatives of religious organisations on the grounds of separation of religion and politics.⁸⁴ The background to the ruling is that Nahzat has always enjoyed support among parts of the clergy and independent religious authorities and in the past has often used medressas and mosques to propagate non-conformist ideas.

Illegal Groups

Since independence Islamist groups of various persuasions have sought to gain a foothold in Tajikistan. At the beginning this meant above all the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU). The IMU emerged out of the reformist currents in Islam that grew during the perestrojka era in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley and inspired the founding of various Islamist groups there following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. They were, however, very quickly banned in Uzbekistan and in 1992 their leaders fled to Tajikistan and Afghanistan where they joined the Tajik Islamists in the civil war, along with several thousand Uzbek fighters. In the course of the peace negotiations between the UTO and the Rahmon regime, however, the leaders of the Uzbek units parted ways with the

⁷⁵ Andrea Schmitz and Alexander Wolters, *Political Protest in Central Asia*, SWP Research Paper 7/2012 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2012), 13–14.

⁷⁶ Information from party headquarter (May 2014).

⁷⁷ Discussion with representatives of political parties in Dushanbe (summer 2014).

⁷⁸ In the 2010 election the party was credited with 7.74 percent and two seats. Its actual share of the vote was in all probability larger. Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), *Republic of Tajikistan, Parliamentary Elections 28 February 2010*, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report (Warsaw, 6 July 2010), 22, 25–28.

⁷⁹ The repertoire ranges from smear campaigns and bureaucratic obstruction to systematic intimidation and violence against individual members. One example: "Tajikistan: Dirty Tricks Discredit Opposition Ahead of Parliamentary 'Vote'", *EurasiaNet*, 12 February 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/72036>.

⁸⁰ OSCE/ODIHR, *International Election Observation Mission, Republic of Tajikistan, Parliamentary Elections 1 March 2015, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, Dushanbe, 2 March 2015.

⁸¹ Discussions with Nahzatis in Sughd and Dushanbe (2013/2014).

⁸² This semantic field plays an important role in stabilising the regime. Tim Epkenhans, "Zwischen Mythos und Minenfeld: Historiographie in Tadschikistan", *Osteuropa* 62, no. 3 (2012): 137–50.

⁸³ Discussions in Dushanbe, Sughd and Khatlon (2013 and 2014) with representatives of the 'ulamā – who admittedly ignore the fact that the regime itself uses the religious associations as a political resource.

⁸⁴ *Qonuni Jumhurii Tojikiston "Dar Borai Ozodii Vijdon Va Ittihodiyahoi Dini"* (see note 43), chap. 2, art. 5 (3).

UTO and founded the IMU.⁸⁵ The goal of the movement was to depose President Karimov and establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. It received support from Saudi donors, including Osama bin Laden, and from the Taliban in whose medressas and camps numerous IMU fighters were trained. At the end of the 1990s the IMU repeatedly attempted to penetrate Uzbek territory from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but the US invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 2001 forced it to withdraw to Pakistan, where it became embroiled in local conflicts. One branch of the IMU, the Qaeda-connected *Islamic Jihad Union*, subsequently resumed the struggle in Central Asia, carrying out a series of suicide bombings in Uzbekistan in 2004.⁸⁶ But the focus of both groups shifted to Afghanistan and Pakistan, where support from the Taliban supplied considerably better conditions for armed struggle than in Central Asia.

That does not, however, mean that radical Islamists entirely lost interest in the region. In summer 2010 the IMU claimed responsibility for an ambush on a Tajik army unit in the east of the country, whose impassable mountains had long served as a refuge. Only a few weeks later a group named *Jamo'ati Ansorulloh* ("Community of the Helpers of Allah") claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on a police post in the northern Tajik town of Khujand.⁸⁷ Since then there have been repeated arrests of supposed members of the group,⁸⁸ which says it operates independently of the IMU, presents itself as a Tajik organisation with an internationalist outlook, and claims a leading role in jihadist activities within the country. *Jamo'ati Ansorulloh* expli-

citly rejects the Islam propagated in Tajik state media, which it calls a "product of communism", a perverted Islam of "hypocrites" (*munofiq*) who prevent believers from living by the laws of their religion. Those who do so, they say, are excluded in the name of tolerance and democracy, while the regime inflicts the pseudo-religion of democracy upon Muslims, even at the price of many deaths.⁸⁹

The civil war in Syria and the advance of the *Islamic State* has opened up a new arena of jihad in which at least 1,500 fighters from Central Asia are involved (with some sources citing much larger numbers). According to official data, between two and three hundred of them are said to come from Tajikistan.⁹⁰ Most of these were recruited not at home but in Russia, working as seasonal labourers under generally difficult conditions in an often hostile environment. It is apparently more belief in the cause and the prospect of recognition that makes "holy war" attractive to these men (and increasingly also women) than material incentives.⁹¹ The internet plays a growing role as a medium of recruitment and propaganda. In that context the appointment of a Tajik fighter as *Islamic State* emir in the Syrian province of Raqqa, reported in August 2014,⁹² was a significant propaganda move. The Tajik government has apparently realised that the threat of punishment will not stem the successful recruitment of Tajiks to the new front of the "holy war" and has offered immunity to those who return voluntarily.⁹³ Prominent religious authorities have also called upon

85 On the history of the IMU: Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven et al., 2002), 137–86; Martha Brill Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad* (Washington et al.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 253–85; Babadzhanov, "Islam in Uzbekistan" (see note 26), 314–19.

86 Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad* (see note 85), 290–97.

87 Tilav Rasulzoda and Parvina Khamidova, "New Militant Force in Tajikistan?" *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 22 October 2010; "Tadzhikistan: Otvetsvennost' za šachidskuju ataku v Chudžande vzjala na sebja organizatsija 'Džamaat Ansarullach'", [Tajikistan: Jamo'ati Ansorulloh claims responsibility for suicide attack in Khujand], *Kavkaz Center*, 8 September 2010, <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2010/09/08/75108.shtml>.

88 Most recently: Mvljuda Rafieva, "V Sogde zaderžany 12 podozrevaemykh v členstve 'Džamoate Ansorulloh'" [12 suspected members of Jamo'at Ansorulloh detained in Sughd], *AsiaPlus*, 12 November 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/v-sogde-zaderzhany-12-podozrevaemykh-v-chlenstve-v-dzhamoate-ansorullokh>.

89 "Baioniai ,Jamo'ati Ansorulloh' ba hukumat va kumitai amniati milli va nuskaash ba millati dinparvari sharifi Tojikiston" ["Declaration of Jamo'ati Ansorulloh to the government, the national security committee and to the nation of the honoured believers of Tajikistan"], *Irshod: Rohnamo ba sui islom* [Admonition: Guidance to Islam], 27 September 2013, <http://irshod.com/index.php?newsid=1440>.

90 "Kazakh Pundit Says Large Numbers of Central Asian Militants Fighting in Syria", *BBC Monitoring Global Newline*, 17 September 2014; Joanna Paraszczuk, "Islamic Center Slams Tajik IS Militants Who Want to Wage Jihad at Home", *RFE/RL*, 8 January 2015, <http://www.rferl.org/content/under-black-flag-tajik-militants-islamic-center/26783304.html>.

91 "Tajikistan Struggles to Stem Rise of Jihadi Recruits", *EurasiaNet*, 12 August 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/69511>.

92 "Uroženec Tadžikistana stal emirom 'Islamskogo chali-fata' v provincii Ar-Rakka Sirii" [Tajik becomes emir of Islamic Caliphate in Syrian province of Raqqa], *AsiaPlus*, 26 August 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/urozhenets-tadzhikistana-stal-emirom-islamskogo-khalifata-v-provintsii-ar-rakka-sirii>.

93 "Tajikistan Struggles to Stem Rise of Jihadi Recruits" (see note 91).

the jihadists to return with the argument that the war in Syria is not in fact jihad: that one could not speak of “holy war” where Muslim was fighting against Muslim. Those who were calling for it, they said, had not understood Islam.⁹⁴ But the addresses of those admonitions, as their prompt response demonstrates, are not open to scholarly distinctions as these represent an Islam they reject.⁹⁵ It is thus questionable whether the interventions of Hanafite authorities lend themselves to stopping those who have adopted the perspective of the Islamist fundamental opposition.

This category also includes *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (Islamic Party of Liberation), which was founded in 1953 in Saudi Arabia and Jordan and began operating in Central Asia at the end of the 1990s. The ultimate objective of the party, which is banned across Central Asia, is to overcome the secular nation-state and other Western models and to unite the Central Asian republics under a caliphate. Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects the use of violence to achieve this end, preferring instead systematic persuasion employing both traditional and modern technologies.⁹⁶ In common with all clandestine groups, there are only very rough estimates of its size, some of them based on dubious sources.⁹⁷ What can be said with certainty is that it achieved great early successes above all in Uzbekistan and in the Tajik and Kyrgyz parts of the Ferghana Valley. In Tajikistan disappointment with Nahzat and its cooperation with the regime is likely to have played a role. The attraction of the universalist orientation of Hizb ut-Tahrir, with its explicit ideology of a caliphate utopia, over

the nation-oriented and ideologically less consistent Nahzat, has, however, been overestimated.⁹⁸

Hizb ut-Tahrir also faces competition from other revivalist movements that regard themselves as unpolitical. One of the largest globally operating Islamist movements is *Jamo'ati Tabligh* (Society for Spreading Faith), whose roots lie in the Indian subcontinent. It has been present in Central Asia since the second half of the 1990s, being most popular in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Many of the Central Asian Tablighi became acquainted with the movement while studying in Pakistan. The movement seeks spiritual renewal through the call to Islam (*da'wa*) by word of mouth, and regards itself as strictly apolitical. It was nonetheless banned in Tajikistan in 2006, partly because of its successful and largely uncontrollable missionary work, and partly because of fears that radical groups could also disseminate their teachings under the cover of its work.⁹⁹

The situation is similar with the *Salafiya*, which has grown in popularity since 2005 and like the Tablighi originated with returning foreign students.¹⁰⁰ As elsewhere, actors today designated as “Salafists” in Tajikistan orientate on the “pious predecessors” of early Islam (*as-salaf as-salih*), reject any differentiation between Islamic legal schools, and therefore distance themselves vehemently from Hanafite normative doctrines and liturgical rules (such as personal supplication [*du'a*] after formal prayers), which they reject as heresy (*bid'a*). They differ from the reformist Islamism of Nahzat through their abstinence from politics.¹⁰¹ The *Salafiya* was added to the list of banned organisations in January 2009,¹⁰² but lives on as an informal net-

94 One example: “Chodži Mirzo: Rossija stala logovom po rekrutu tadžikskoj molodeži v Siriju” [Hoji Mirzo: Russia has become recruiting ground for Tajik youth for Syria], *Radio Ozodi*, 14 May 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25384552.html>; Mirzoi Salimpur, “Domullo Hikmatulloh: Vaqte fitna khest, ba dast shamsheri chubin bigir!” [Domullo Hikmatulloh: If sedition arises, take a sword of wood!], *Radio Ozodi*, 11 January 2015, <http://www.ozodi.org/content/fmous-tajik-cleric-doullah-hikmatullah-rejected-jihad-in-syria/26787278.html>.

95 “Otvjet tadžikskich ‘džichadistov v Sirii’ predstavitelju duhovenstva” [Response of Tajik “jihadists in Syria” to a representative of the clergy], *Radio Ozodi*, 27 May 2014, <http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25399751.html>.

96 Rashid, *Jihad* (see note 85), 115–24.

97 In 2003 the International Crisis Group put the number of members across Central Europe at about 20,000: International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, Asia Report 58 (Osh and Brussels, 2003), 17.

98 See for example Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, Central Asian Studies Series (London and New York, 2010), 96–101; similar Kathleen N. Collins, “Ideas, Networks, and Islamist Movements: Evidence from Central Asia and the Caucasus”, *World Politics* 60 (October 2007), 64–96 (75–89). Karagiannis (*Political Islam in Central Asia*, *ibid.*, 72) puts the number of members in Tajikistan at about three thousand.

99 Nargiz Hamrabaeva, “Tajik Clampdown on Islamic Group Could Backfire”, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 9 October 2009. On the Tablighis in Kyrgyzstan see Aksana Ismailbekova and Emil Nasritdinov, “Transnational Social Networks in Central Asia: Structure, Travel, and Culture of Kyrgyz Tablighi Jama'at”, *Transnational Social Review* 2, no. 2 (2012): 177–95.

100 Abramson, *Foreign Religious Education* (see note 55), 41f.

101 Discussions with imams and young people in Sughd (2013/2014).

102 Farangis Najibullah, “Salafi Ban Reflects Tajik Officials’ Growing Fear”, *RFE/RL*, 9 January 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/>

work whose purist interpretations of Islam are very prevalent in the religious discourse. The Salafiya's classification as an "extremist organisation" in January 2015 (joining IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Tablighi),¹⁰³ is unlikely to change that in the medium term.

content/Salafi_Ban_Reflects_Tajik_Officials_Growing_Fear/1368347.html.

103 Achliddin Salimov, "Tečenie 'Salafija' priznано v Tadžikistane ekstremistskoj gruppirovkoj" [Salafiya movement in Tajikistan classed as "extremist group"], *AsiaPlus*, 12 January 2015, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/techenie-salafiya-priznано-v-tadzhikistane-ekstremistskoi-gruppirovkoi>.

Symbolic Struggles

The actors outlined in the previous section do not form closed discursive communities. Instead they represent different discursive milieus with flowing transitions, on a spectrum between two opposing intellectual traditions. At one end is an Islam anchored in the Hanafite tradition, which derives its normative standards from the principles of Hanafite jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*). These are based on the divine revelation (the Koran), the body of recognised sayings and actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) and the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the scholars on the interpretation of these sources. This approach distinguishes sharply between legal and ethical norms and accepts the ensuing tension between worldly legal rationality and individual religious practice.¹⁰⁴ Epistemological scepticism and tolerance towards normative pluralism characterise this intellectual tradition, which developed a tendency for ritual purism during the Soviet era (see above, p. 9). It is represented by the clergy, as well as most of the older generation of independent religious authorities.

The Islam of the Hanafite religious elite shares its ritual purism with the second strand of discourse, which emerges out of reformist and revivalist traditions, but has taken the rejection of culture-specific variants of Muslim religiosity to extremes. This current of thought is decidedly anti-clerical and anti-intellectual, attacking all the legal schools and their educational principles or declaring them irrelevant, and rejecting the separation of law, religion and ethics. Any recourse to the authoritative scholars of a tradition (*taqlid*) is rejected as blind imitation. Instead it upholds the principle of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) based on the primary sources (Koran and the sayings and actions of the Prophet [*hadith*]). To the reformists, their interpretation, which in traditional jurisprudence presupposes scholarly education, requires no special training. Instead the message of divine revelation appears directly and unquestionably out of the primary scriptures, and is therefore uni-

versal and unrelativisable.¹⁰⁵ This current, which bypasses historical traditions, is attractive to all those who seek change. It contains a broad spectrum ranging from jihadist Salafism at one end to the domesticated Islamism of Nahzat at the other. The latter represents a hybrid form to the extent that the party explicitly acknowledges Hanafite Islam as part of the national cultural tradition and distances itself from the universalism of the Salafist movements.

These two intellectual poles, the Hanafite traditionalism and the reformist impetus of the Salafist school of thought, mark the bounds of the discursive field on which the dispute over the relationship between religious and state authority, secular norms and religious ethics, evolves. So what are the critical topoi that reveal the lines of conflict? What positions can be differentiated? And what roles do the interventions of state religion policy play in the symbolic struggles?

Themes and Positions

The controversy ignites over two sets of issues. The first relates to the question of who can claim the legitimate right to speak in the name of Islam, and how much state intervention is permissible there. The second concerns practical problems in implementing the word of Allah.

The latter include, for example, a ban on the participation of minors in communal prayer in mosques introduced in 2011.¹⁰⁶ This provokes anger because the practice is widely held to comply with the Sunnah and is firmly rooted in religious custom. The ban is therefore often ignored, which can lead to awkward questions or even charges. Similarly contested – and much more consequential – is the question of the *hijab* (the female head veil that leaves only the face exposed) at state schools and universities. Under an education ministry decree from 2005 the garment is not permitted. The state justifies the ban on the grounds that

¹⁰⁴ On *usūl al-fiqh*: Baber Johansen, "Introduction: The Muslim Fiqh as a Sacred Law", in idem, *Contingency in a Sacred Law* (Leiden et al., 1999), 1–76.

¹⁰⁵ On the relationship between *taqlid* and *ijtihad*: Devin DeWeese, "Authority", in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford, 2010), 26–52.

¹⁰⁶ *Zakon RT "Ob odgovornosti roditeljev za obučenie i vospitanie detej"* (see note 60), chap. 2 (8).

this form of veil is not part of the national cultural tradition, just like mini-skirts and other revealing garments that are not tolerated either.

For those who follow the rules of the Koran, the ban unequivocally contravenes the religious commandment for women to cover themselves in the presence of men who do not clearly fall into the category of *mahram* (the closest blood relations, those excluded from marriage).¹⁰⁷ In fact the rule is accepted by all religious actors, including the ‘ulamā, who however refrain from criticising the state ban and instead tolerate this and other imperfections of worldly governance as long as the freedom to practice religion is largely preserved.¹⁰⁸ But for many this is not enough. Representatives of Nahzat, independent religious authorities, as well as Western NGOs,¹⁰⁹ criticise the hijab ban in schools, universities and state (as well as many private) institutions as a violation of the fundamental rights of women that stigmatises all those who wish to follow the rules of sharia. Behind this, they say, lies the state’s intention to suppress the influence of religion.¹¹⁰

This assessment is widely shared by believers, and for many it produces a dilemma. Faced with the choice of following the secular law or the religious commandment some parents deny their daughters a university education, and not a few women will turn down a job where they are not permitted to wear the hijab. The fact that it is often husbands who force their wives to make this choice changes nothing in the outcome: disjoint between the secular principles of state policy and the religious needs of a growing segment of the population worsens the trend of increasing numbers of women either not working or enjoying access only to poorly paid work. This is all the more problematic where the absence of husbands working abroad leaves many women in need of additional income to feed their families.

The conflict between secular and religious norms manifests itself not least in the status and function of the religious personnel of the mosques (imams and

khatibs) and of the ‘ulamā. Their position entitles them to comment – in the form of sermons and (in the case of the Council of the ‘Ulamā) fatwas – on questions of rite and dogma and to show believers the righteous path to paradise. Just as important as the inner attitude of the believer is how this is manifested in everyday life. The Islamic ethic is – like that of all religions of redemption – principally a social ethics that, as a “systematised and rationalised totality of explicit norms”,¹¹¹ also touches on the relationship to worldly power. The religious personnel, therefore, enjoys sweeping power of interpretation and on account of their prominent status reach a large audience. This places the clergy, at least potentially, in a relationship of competition to politics, which for its part seeks to restrict their power.

The most important instruments for controlling religious personnel and ensuring their loyalty are outlined above (p. 16). The introduction of knowledge tests, where representatives of the ‘ulamā and the Committee for Religious Affairs regularly check the qualifications of the imams, was especially controversial, including among the clergy themselves. The then *qāzi kalon* (“chief judge”), Akbar Turajonzoda, had attempted unsuccessfully to introduce such a test at the beginning of the 1990s.¹¹² Today too, representatives of the senior clergy tend to support the measure, which they regard as a sensible and – in view of the often inadequate formal knowledge of the imams of the village mosques – also necessary means of quality control, and one that lends itself to guarding the specific dogma and liturgy of Hanafite Islam from the influence of other (especially Salafist) currents.¹¹³ Others regard the test as a violation of their dignity, and even secular critics of Emomali Rahmon were indignant about the state interference.¹¹⁴

Critics of the state religion policy perceive the dissemination of approved texts for Friday sermons by the Committee for Religious Affairs as a particularly odious example of the disempowerment of religious authority. In fact the texts almost always concern questions of religious ethics, about which there is broad consensus,¹¹⁵ and the imams themselves regard

107 Mostly citing Surat an-Nūr 24: 31.

108 Discussions with representatives of the ‘ulamā in Sughd, Khatlon and Dushanbe (2013/2014).

109 For example United States Department of State, *2013 Report on International Religious Freedom – Tajikistan*, 28 July 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53d907078.html>.

110 One example: “Ch. A. Turajonzoda: ‘Religioznyj vakuum zapolnilsja fanatizmon’ [Fanaticism fills religious vacuum], *Radio Ozodi*, 7 October 2013, http://rus.ozodi.org/content/turajonzoda_tajikistan_interview_/24097223.html.

111 Pierre Bourdieu, “Genese und Struktur des religiösen Feldes”, in idem, *Religion*, Schriften zur Kultursoziologie, vol. 5, ed. Franz Schultheis and Stephan Egger (Frankfurt am Main, 2011), 30–90 (54).

112 Mullojonov, “The Islamic Clergy” (see note 32), 234.

113 Discussions with imams (2013/2014).

114 Najibullah, “Tajikistan” (see note 49).

115 Examples in the author’s possession.

them as “recommendations” that leave plenty of room for interpretation.¹¹⁶ But occasionally they also contain affirmative comments on state policies (for example references to speeches by the president). While this offers ammunition to the critics, the imams are generally not inclined to dramatise the matter, as they regard the state’s policies as essentially compatible with Hanafite doctrine and not obstructive to the practice of belief.

The outlined examples point not only to the tensions between state and religious authority, but also to the principles of legitimisation of the latter, which rest upon two different roots: proof of formal competence (which implies internal hierarchies) and charismatic qualification (legitimised by a following). Most believers have only basic religious education, but they expect more from an imam than knowledge of Koran and Sunnah. Force of conviction, approachability and personal integrity are decisive for the reputation of an imam. Believers are generally well aware of the state oversight of the imams and the curtailment of the autonomy of religious associations, but most accept these as a necessary evil that does no harm to a respected imam or his mosque.

But among growing numbers of believers, especially the younger generation, anger at state intervention in religious questions is growing – and with it also dissatisfaction with official religious authorities and their willingness to cooperate with the regime. In particular the growing numbers who possess their own formal religious education or draw religious knowledge from publicly accessible sources such as the internet hold a low opinion of official religious authorities. They accuse the khatibs of preaching only a state-approved Islam, instead of criticising violations of religious commandments by a regime that prescribes the separation of state and religion but itself contravenes that rule.

Here the mindset of relativisation, compromise and pragmatism that is so characteristic of the religious elite encounters a habitus of zeal and religious fervour that sociology of religion describes as heresy and sociology of communication as protest.¹¹⁷ It is thus unsurprising if Nahzat and other Islamist groups treat the ‘ulamā as the centrepiece of state interventions in the

¹¹⁶ Use is certainly made of this leeway (participant observation in Sughd, 2013/2014).

¹¹⁷ Bourdieu, “Genese und Struktur” (see note 111); Niklas Luhmann, “Protestbewegungen”, in idem, *Protest: Systemtheorie und soziale Bewegungen*, ed. Kai-Uwe Hellmann (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 201–15.

sphere of religion and question their credibility.¹¹⁸

But unlike the radical Islamist opposition, Nahzat also seeks dialogue with the ‘ulamā.¹¹⁹ Nahzat’s communication with its religious opponent – like with its political adversary – oscillates between criticism and cooperation. But the political and religious authorities have different reasons for their rejection. For the regime the party is a disagreeable rival. And to some extent this perception also underlies the stance of the ‘ulamā, whose existence depends on the patronage of the political rulers. But the diverging interpretations of the ‘ulamā and their critics over the relationship between state and religion and their respective spheres of influence are at least as significant.

The debate over a fatwa issued by the Council of the ‘Ulamā in September 2014 provides an illuminating example. There were two aspects to this widely discussed and highly controversial fatwa. On the one hand it was directed against “agitation” and “propaganda” aiming to destabilise society and condemned any cooperation with mass media, organisations or political parties at home or abroad whose actions were directed towards that goal as a “grave sin”. The same verdict was issued against any Muslim participating in wars against Muslims in other countries or joining terrorist organisations.¹²⁰ While obviously directed against all those who joined the fighting in Syria and Iraq or were thinking of doing so, the fatwa remained vague with respect to the agents of destabilisation. This part of the fatwa, namely, was attacked by the critics, and provoked very forthright interpretations: The Council of the ‘Ulamā, they said, was openly serving the regime, which wished to curtail the constitutional right of freedom of expression. The fatwa, it was said, represented a political intervention where the ‘ulamā had overstepped its powers and violated the secular principle. Fatwas should relate only to questions of sharia, it was said, and instead of speaking out

¹¹⁸ Two examples: “Imom-khatibi mardumī, na attestatsionī: Muloqoti Raisi HNIT M. Kabirī bo javonon” [Popular imam-khatib, not certified: Meeting of IRPT chair M. Kabiri with youth], *Nahzat.tj*, 15 October 2014, <http://nahzat.tj/13159-emoshatibi-mardum-na-attestatsion.html>; “Otvēt tadžikiskich ‘džichadistov” (see note 95).

¹¹⁹ One example: “Kabirī guft, omōdaast bo Abdulqodirzoda rubaru suhbat kunad” [Kabiri says he is willing to meet with (mufti) Abdulkodirzoda], *Ozodagon*, 16 May 2014, <http://www.ozodagon.com/16193-kabir-guft-omodaast-bo-abdulodirzoda-rbar-sbat-kunad.html>.

¹²⁰ “Mufti na straže mira” [Mufti as guardian of peace], *AsiaPlus*, 8 October 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/muftii-na-strazhe-mira>.

against freedom of expression and pluralism the Council would do better to criticise corruption and unemployment. The Council of the ‘Ulamā rejected the criticism, arguing that it was not only its right but its duty to remind citizens to guard peace and stability. These, it said, represented the precondition for citizens to be able to exercise their religious and civil rights at all.¹²¹

This line of argumentation fits perfectly with the Hanafite school of law, which draws a clear distinction between state and religion, but regards the unity and stability of the state as a necessary condition for the protection of rights and religion. While religion can exist without the protection of the state, the latter is necessary if religion is to be maintained as a social system and way of life.¹²² This functional interpretation of the relationship between law, religion and the state corresponds to the status of the scholars, whose task is to “ensure the unity of profane and sacral, of state order, social practice and individual religious life” and work for an appropriate relationship with both state and society.¹²³

The debate over the fatwa makes it clear that opinions about what can be regarded as appropriate in this relationship diverge sharply and that the binding authority of the scholars to regulate that relationship is challenged by parts of society. The critical moment is plainly the relationship between the ‘ulamā and a state that intervenes strongly in the sphere of the religious in the name of secularism.

Religion Policy Interventions

The Tajik constitution guarantees both the secular order and the right to freedom of religion. But the latter is not one of the “immutable principles” of the constitution while the former is. The constitution places a higher premium on the secular principle than on freedom of religion, by prohibiting religious

associations from interfering in matters of state – but not state interference in matters of religion.¹²⁴ The state does indeed intervene massively in the freedom of religion, through specific laws,¹²⁵ whose implementation is controlled and overseen by a state agency, the *Committee for Religious Affairs*.

In the course of various rearrangements of the state executive apparatus, the Committee for Religious Affairs became attached to the presidential administration in 2010, underlining its prominent status. It possesses extensive executive, representative and legislative powers that are laid down in a government decree of May 2010.¹²⁶ As well as advising the government on questions of policy, the Committee also puts forward draft laws and proposals for legal amendments and oversees their implementation in collaboration with local security organs. The Committee for Religious Affairs coordinates the relationship between state organs and religious associations and is responsible for the administrative control of mosques, whose khatibs are answerable to it. The Committee functions as a censor in approving religious literature for legal dissemination. It coordinates the foreign contacts of religious associations and presents state religion policy at conferences at home and abroad as well as through its own publications. It also organises the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, defining a specific contingent of pilgrims each year, calculating the cost and the number of accompanying staff needed, and administers the travel contributions raised from the pilgrims.

This makes the Committee for Religious Affairs a kind of super-agency that unites political and administrative functions, possesses sweeping powers to take decisions and issue instructions, and even controls the implementation of its own measures. Its configuration reveals the paternalistic desire of the state to channel and steer the religious needs of the population and thus ensure stability in the field of religion.¹²⁷ Meas-

¹²¹ One example: Mechrangez Tursunzoda, “Muftijat: sotrudničestvo so SMI – ‘destabilizatorami’ – ‘velikij grech” [Muftiat: Cooperation with “destabilising” mass media is a “grave sin”], *AsiaPlus*, 27 September 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/muftiyat-sotrudnichestvo-so-smi-destabilizatorami-velikii-grekh>.

¹²² Baber Johansen, “Staat, Recht und Religion im Sunnitischen Islam: Können Muslime einen religionsneutralen Staat akzeptieren?” in idem, *Contingency in a Sacred Law* (see note 104), 263–348 (278–83).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹²⁴ *Constitution (Basic Law) of the Republic of Tajikistan*, chap. 1, art. 1 and 8, <http://www.president.tj/en/taxonomy/term/5/28>.

¹²⁵ Such as the laws “On the freedom of belief and religious association” (see note 43) and “On the responsibility of parents for the education of their children” (see note 60).

¹²⁶ *Pravitel'stvo Respubliki Tadžikistan, Postanovlenie o Komitete po delam religii pri Pravitel'stve Tadžikistan* [Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, decree on the Committee for Religious Affairs under the government of the Republic], *IslamNews.tj* (heading Komitet po delam religii), undated.

¹²⁷ “Ne stoit sozdat' stereotypy čto v Tadžikistane vse zapreščeno: Interv'ju predsedatel'ja komiteta po delam religii pri pravitel'stve RT Abdurachima Cholikova” [Stereo-type that everything is banned in Tajikistan is unfounded: Interview

ures pushed through since 2010 reveal two thrusts: Firstly the forming of a quietist unitary Islam by activating those elements of the Hanafite tradition that are compatible with the demands of the secular state and have already proven their usefulness in the secularised order of the Soviet era. The most important measure for keeping control are exerting intense influence on appointments to religious institutions, standardisation of job profiles for religious personnel, and standardising the curricula for the religious education institutions, whose number has been gradually reduced in the course of the past decade.¹²⁸ Conversely, religious authorities who criticise the state religion policy or disseminate views that deviate from the accepted norm (for example on the hijab question) are branded as troublemakers.¹²⁹

Secondly, the pressure to conform generated by the comprehensive enforcement of rules and regulations is amplified by the establishment of structures akin to those of an official church. The top of the hierarchy is the state Committee for Religious Affairs, flanked by the Islamic Centre and the Council of the ‘Ulamā. The latter has the status of a consultative organ, but no authority to issue directives (see above, p. 16). The religious associations – the mosques that shape the immediate contact to the believers – are answerable to the Committee for Religious Affairs. The khatibs of the Friday mosques now receive a monthly salary from the state, which consolidates the vertical hierarchy and directly reveals the underlying relationship.

In the coordination of religion policy and the oversight of the religious associations the Committee for Religious Affairs works closely together with the state security organs. This is justified in terms of the need to ensure religious stability and protect religion from abuse by actors pursuing “extremist”, “terrorist” or “self-serving” objectives.¹³⁰ And indeed such miscreants are regularly detected, and the mass media, especially state-run television, regularly report on

with the chair of the Committee for Religious Affairs of the government of the Republic of Tajikistan, Abdurahim Kholikov], *IslamNews.tj*, 11 July 2011, <http://islamnews.tj/interview/20-ne-stoit-sozdavat-stereotipy-cto-v-tadzhikistane-vse-zaprescheno.html>.

128 While there were still nineteen registered medressas in 2004, the number had fallen to six by summer 2014.

129 One example: Avaz Juldašev, “Brat’ja Turadžonzoda prizyvajut vlasti prekratit’ ‘iskat’ vragov” [Turajonzoda brothers call on regime to call off “hunt for enemies”], *Asia Plus*, 7 May 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/node/187945>.

130 One example: “Ne stoit sozdavat’ stereotipy” (see note 127).

security operations. Measured by the number of arrests, religiously motivated terrorism in Tajikistan is a marginal phenomenon. But in the media discourse the threat scenario is very present. Evoking danger supposedly presented by terrorist groups keeps society in a permanent state of alert and makes the surveillance of religious institutions a question of national security and stability.

This development is also promoted by the policies of foreign states. Russia, China, and the West too, all perceive Central Asia above all as a potential hotbed of instability and religious extremism and respond with measures designed to reinforce the existing state institutions. This particular focus has led to extremely questionable partnerships, thanks not least to profound (but for reasons of political correctness unspoken) reservations against Muslim values, which both the post-communist elites and large parts of the Western public associate with backwardness and hostility to progress. The tacit agreement that an Islamisation of Central Asian societies is undesirable turns these “partners” into veritable accomplices.

The argumentative linkage of Islam and security that is firmly established in the public discourse and the political practice it legitimises have far-reaching consequences. Firstly, this stabilises a distinction that already characterised the Islam discourse of the Soviet epoch, namely, the dichotomy between a (basically unproblematic) private everyday Islam and a (problematic, basically “dangerous”) political Islam. Secondly, the discursive coupling of religion and stability has proven an effective weapon for placing any religiously motivated political initiative under suspicion of extremism. This is clearly demonstrated by attacks not only on Nahzat, but also on popular independent authorities who resist the domesticisation of religion by the state. This leads, thirdly, to religious deviations from the norm of whatever kind being driven into the private sphere, which thus becomes the symbolic place of “true” Islam, just like the *hujra* of the Soviet era. This does not make the religious field any more transparent, but, on the contrary, ever more confusing, leading to ever increasing regulation and surveillance.

This fixation and the instrumentalisation of the ‘ulamā for enforcement of state measures have, fourthly, led to religious institutions becoming perceived as executive organs of state policy and weakening their legitimacy as conveyors of faith – above all among the young, for whom authenticity and credibility are the yardsticks of religious truth,

even more than education and knowledge. That is especially problematic where the ‘ulamā stands for an educational tradition that cultivates nuanced distinctions and is thus in principle ideally equipped to keep alive a religious tradition adapted to a secularised state and society.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The Power of the Believers and the Powerlessness of Politics

The end of the Soviet era was accompanied by a growing interest in Islam. Everyday Muslim practices and morals had survived the atheist state ideology but retreated into the private sphere. Religious knowledge, education and teaching had been largely organised by the Spiritual Administration (SADUM), an institution of the state bureaucracy that collaborated closely with the Soviet power apparatus. SADUM's authority was increasingly challenged by religious actors who criticised the quietism of the "state mullahs" and their cooperation with the atheistic regime and demanded a stronger application of Islamic ideas and principles by returning to the religious primary scriptures, whose dissemination was officially prohibited.

Independence was followed by a power struggle between the post-communist regime and a coalition of anti-communist groups fighting for a revival of national cultural traditions and Islamic governance. The post-communist forces won the power struggle, but demand for religious education and instruction remained strong. The return to Islam as a source of moral and practical orientation has been assisted by the liberalisation and transnationalisation of the education and media landscape. The unhindered dissemination of religious literature in the country itself and the possibility to acquire religious education abroad have had a profound impact on the forms and institutions of communication of knowledge.

Alongside the organised religious authorities of the 'ulamā (Council of the 'Ulamā and the religious personnel of the mosques and medressas) there now appeared a growing number of independent teachers, many of them self-taught, striving to convey the normative foundations of Islam to believers. The knowledge of these authorities derives from different educational currents, including traditional Hanafite Islam with its tolerance towards culture-specific rituals and secular lifeworlds, but also diverse variants of reformist and universalist teachings that already found their way into the religious discourse during the Soviet era and inspired the emergence of Islamist groups with different programmes and objectives. The easy availability of the primary sources and a broad supply of comprehensible interpretations of these newer readings of Islam also fostered their dissemination. In

rejecting the monopoly of the traditional Islamic educational elites in favour of individual interpretation of the texts, and thereby tending towards a literal interpretation, the reformist approaches satisfy an obvious and pronounced desire among lay believers not only for clear guidance,¹³¹ but also for a democratisation of knowledge.¹³²

The consequence of this development is growing polyphony in the landscape of actors and discourses, which the regime seeks to contain by tightening oversight of religious institutions and creating structures that bring them ever more closely in line with the state. In this way the religious personnel is integrated into the surveillance of the religious field. The declared goal is to prevent propaganda by actors that oppose the secular order and seek an Islamic state (like Hizb ut-Tahrir and various jihadist groups). This is supposedly to ensure security and stability and preserve the ethical and liturgical integrity of Tajik Islam. In practice, however, stigmatisation extends even to Islamist groups and charismatic authorities that exhibit no such tendencies, but operate outside of the state-controlled religious institutions (like Nahzat) and openly resist political cooptation efforts (like the Turajonzoda brothers and other independent authorities). State religion policy is plainly guided by a conviction that this strategy renders the religious field more orderly and thus more controllable.

The strategy suffers two grave deficits. Firstly, it fails to recognise that unwanted discourses cannot be made to go away by suppressing prominent protagonists. The new universalist teachings have, conveyed both in person and via social networks, long since entered mainstream society. The reason these teachings are so popular is that they operate using simple distinctions and thus meet the needs of a largely poorly educated body of believers. Intellectualist movements like Hizb ut-Tahrir or the revolutionary utopias

¹³¹ This need is reflected not only in the Friday sermons, which sometimes go into very concrete detail on practical matters, but also in the problems brought to the *domullo*, whether in person or via the internet.

¹³² Demonstrated not least by the growing proportion of women engaging in the religious field, for example founding discussion groups or joining reading circles.

of jihadist attract only a minority. The majority of believers are seeking orientation in a world that has become confusing and clear answers to the question of how to live in concordance with the word of God.

Secondly, state interventions in the field of religion undermine the authority of the state-approved Hanafite Islam, which in fact offers convincing answers to the questions of interest to believers. This is witnessed by the respect enjoyed by many imams and preachers at the state-controlled mosques. They fulfil their roles very individually and some enjoy great respect even among those who perceive the mosques as places of “state-controlled” Islam. The overwhelming majority of believers supports the secular state, but expects it to protect the freedom of religion. The youth in particular exhibit a pronounced sensitivity for the power functions of religious institutions and their instrumentalisation by the state apparatus. The effect of state harassment is to put religious personnel on the defensive, specifically in relation to this group. The pressure of legitimisation that bears down on the official religious authorities forces them to resort to simplifications and refrain from complex argumentations, as these might be perceived as dilutions of religious prescriptions.

Local experts are also critical of the state religion policy. Instead of, for example, banning children from participating in prayers and supplying arguments to all those who perceive the state as the enemy of religion, they recommend improving conditions for good religious education, for instance by expanding the teaching offered in the mosques.¹³³ The state would indeed be well-advised to follow this recommendation. For the demand for religious education cannot be suppressed by reducing the supply. All that accomplishes is to lead those seeking religious instruction for themselves and their children to resort to other sources, whose quality is just as hard to assess as the implicit messages they transport. The exclusion of teachers operating outside the state institutions is likewise counterproductive, as it exacerbates the polarising tendencies in the field of religion.

This needs to be counteracted by looking to earnest integration measures that accept the growing diversity of actors in the field of religion rather than fighting them. But this would presuppose a fundamental

change of course in state religion policy based on a recognition of the indispensable role that Hanafite Islam plays for integration of society and acknowledging this by transferring responsibility to the religious institutions. This implies firstly enhancing and expanding (optional) religious education at mosques, state schools and universities and would need to, secondly, include targeted investment in the training of teaching staff under the supervision of experienced scholars and imams. The signs for such a change of course are however, currently not auspicious. Religion teaching at state schools has been progressively reduced in recent years and the number of medressas cut. In itself, it is a sensible step to standardise their curricula and include secular disciplines, but this will do nothing to reduce the demand for religious teaching.

The possibilities for Germany and Europe to persuade the Tajik government to rethink its strategy and encourage a change of course are in this context extremely limited. Attempts made in the past have come to nothing. Back in 2001 the German foreign ministry initiated a dialogue between secular and Muslim forces conceived as a confidence-building measure, which was later continued by the Swiss. The programme was revived in 2011 by Germany and France with participation by the EU representation in Dushanbe, now focussing on Islam teaching in state schools. On the Tajik side representatives of the education ministry, the Committee for Religious Affairs, the Islamic Centre and Nahzat were involved. Although the project was accepted only very cautiously by the Tajiks, ways should be sought to continue it meaningfully and to win the government over to a constructive approach towards religious education. The present strategy of suppression, however, risks further eroding what is probably the country’s most important cultural resource.

Abbreviations

DRS	Districts of Republican Subordination
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRPT	Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RFE	Radio Free Europe
RL	Radio Liberty
SADUM	Sredne-Aziatskoe Duchovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia)
UTO	United Tajik Opposition

¹³³ One example: “S čem vernutsja v CA ‘gastarbaitery džichada?’ [What do the “guest workers of jihad” bring back to Central Asia?], *Asia Plus*, 19 September 2014, <http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/s-chem-vernutsya-v-tsa-gastarbaitery-dzhikhada>.