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Salafism and radical Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus during the conflict of ideologies

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Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, different views have been introduced regarding the role of Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus, depending on the historical context of the communist system and its collapse. The main question of this article is whether in the Central Asia and Caucasus region, radical Islam has intellectual and philosophical foundations or not. The hypothesis of this article is: "Radicalism has grown since the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to socio-economic crises, and also due to the influence of foreigners that is coincided with the identity crisis." On the other hand, in the post-Soviet era, we see that in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the religious tradition is redefined along with national and historical heritage and become as an element of legitimizing a system.

Keywords

Salafism, Radical Islam, Islamic Revival, Parallel Islam, Everyday Islam.

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Introduction

Patterns of radicalism vary from region to another, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In the North Caucasus, the resurgence of Salafism in Dagestan, which coincided with the war in Chechnya contributed to the radicalization of the Chechen resistance and spread to neighboring republics, and the presence of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the region, is contrary to what exists in Chechnya and neighboring regions. The rise of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia was the result of the weakening control of Soviet Union over religion and politics in the late 1980s (Crisis Group, 2003; 24). In other words, on the one hand the North Caucasus, backfire to the Russia's centralist efforts and it became destabilized latter. On the other hand, those groups that were created have been linked to foreign radical groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Qaeda (in the presence of) along with local affiliates. In addition, these groups in Central Asia have split into smaller entities that make it difficult to recognized and confront them. In general, it can be said that the view on the phenomenon of radicalism in Central Asia is mixed with ideologies and journalism and politics.

What is said about Islam in these areas is the view of journalists, politicians and Western security teams in this region, which, of course, lacks a scientific view and has created a skewed vision of Islam. In addition this kind of view on Islam that is introduces is skewed toward the radical Islamism. However, in this article, we have tried to examine these societies according to Durkheim's sociological point of view. We also take a look at the theories about Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus and based on those theories we will delve deeper into the societies in question and present an explanation that is commensurate with the existing facts, but before that we will first look at the genealogy of Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Finally, according to two perspectives, we will explain that that the radical Islam that is described by Western foundations, journalists, and politicians as a secondary phenomenon and the product of social and political conditions by is different by a religious revival that is rooted and original.

1. Theoretical framework (Durkheim: Anomie and Social Solidarity)

Before we get into the subject of our research, it is necessary to mention that any research needs a method. In fact, any research as whole based on the method that it use can shed light on some dark corners of social and political reality. The method may be mentioned either implicitly or explicitly in the text. In this article, we try to explain the situation of radical Islam in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union by using Durkheim's "anomie". He discusses the weakness of social solidarity and considers the basis of social order to be a moral factor, not a political or economic one. The most

important example of Durkheim's discussion of anomie is the discussion of suicide, which he believes is the result of the collapse of the moral fabric and solidarity of society. (Bashirieh, 2002; 48) Durkheim describes this situation as follows: "In this case, the bonds that connect man to life are weakened because what connects him to society is weakened." (Sidman, 2007, 64).

The basic concept adopted from Durkheim's sociology to explain how the conditions for group behavior and mobilization arise is that people are more prone to political mobilization than ever before in the face of the collapse of traditional solidarity and the absence of new solidarity. (Bashirieh, Hossein, 2002; 49) Radical Islam is also the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is accompanied by socio-political-economic crises. In fact, the collapse of the context of imposed values and ethics and the imposed ideological solidarity has led to a transition from a state of totalitarianism and ideology. And we know that Lukács also sees periods of transition as critical periods, but also as periods of modernization. "Every great historical period is a period of transition, and a contradictory unity of destruction and revival, a new social system and a new kind of human being will arise during an integrated process, although contradictory."(Sharabi, 2001; 241)

According to what has been mentioned, it can be said that Lukács and Durkheim's theory, despite their differences, are two sides of the same coin, because anomie also originates from the transition period. The transition period is the peeling period. As a result, it can be said that radical Islam is the product of this crisis and transition. And despite all the requirements, as Lukács stated, it is also a period of modernization, it is possible to see the religious revival of Islam in this region.

On the other hand, Western journalists and politicians consider radical Islam to be an important and serious issue in Central Asia and the Caucasus, while they see most historians and scholars of the region as proponent of tolerance and traditional Islam. However radicalism has tried to revive the past strength and has made the most from the opportunities. Due to the presence of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the idea of a caliphate also has supporters in the region. Radicalism grew in the region in the late 1980s and spread to the Muslim areas of the former Soviet Union. Russia and parts of Central Asia, especially the village of Fergana in Uzbekistan has been witnessed of toughest clashes and, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been hotbeds of Islamists. But the question is whether such a ruling should be made by looking at the surface of political phenomena or whether Islam is rooted in these areas and has a history? Hence, there is a need for a comprehensive look at "synchronicity" and "in time", in order to show the situation of

contemporary Islam in this region through the periods of Stalinism based on dominant theories,, and then show That radical Islam is not rooted in these republics, but is born from special conditions.

2. The presence of Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus from the history perspective

What has been done so far about the analysis of Islam in the former Soviet Union is religious extremism, which has been carried out mainly by journalists, politicians, international organizations, or, as Fawaz E. Georges say it is generally clear that Contemporary security interest and politics are more results of the concerns of the United States about Islamists and their conflict with them than the and culture, propoganda, and history. (Georges, 2001; 37) Many of these analyzes have examined Islamic extremism within poor societies, ethnic tensions, and repressive regimes. In most studies, scholars do not distinguish between the Islamic revival and the radicalization of Islam, although the two are different thing.

The analysis is carried out by social and political scientists with scientific insights is in the form of a scientific paradigm. They formulate the issue in terms of Islamic revivals. They study phenomena such as the increase in the number of mosques, the formation of Islamic political parties, and they consider the activities of foreign missionaries in the opposite direction. In their view, Islamic revival is taking place in all parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus. This revival involves a natural return to spiritual values that have been in coma for seventy years. The legacy that is left by the Soviet Union has made this region different from other parts of the Islamic world. The strength of this revival is mainly due to certain centers within this area. This is a very different matter from the Islamic tradition in this region. But this natural flow is buried under armed conflict and foreign missionaries. (zeyno., 2006, 14)

In the researches that have been done, the researchers believe in the duality of traditional Islam and radical Islam. In their opinion, the difference between traditional Islam and radical Islam is not in religious teachings, but the difference is due to historical conditions that give different interpretations of the text. The source of difference is not religion but ideology. (ISLAMICSUPREMECOUNCIL) Radical Islamists emphasize the need to resort to violence to achieve their political goals. (Fukuyama, 2007, 1086) however what attracted attention to them is not their political ideology, but it is the use of violence.

In general, it can be said that in their view, traditional Islam views religion as a covenant between man and God and believes in the tolerance. Based on this belief, no coercion can be used in religion. During the lifetime

of The Prophet of Islam there was Peace and Tolerance between religious groups, and differences of opinion were taken for granted; in contrast, the Wahhabi and Salafi ideologies and their followers embrace the concept of "political imposition" of religious beliefs and they don't accept different beliefs. In the Wahhabi view, faith is not optional. Coercion is delegated. Many Salafi / Wahhabi movements believe in forcing their religion through violence and, like in the Middle East, they oppose the rulers of their countries. While Radicalism in form of Islamism is a new phenomenon that has grown in the region. Traditional Islam in society has continued in various forms for instance in the form of religious rituals such as marriage, shrines, Sufis. In radical Islam, in fact, the roots of violence and militarism are related to ruling movements in the region, as Rezvan al-Sayyid points out about political Islam in the Middle East, the problem is that the essence of militant political Islam has emerged and grown in environments devoid of culture and politics (Al-Sayyid, 2004; 44). Therefore, this statement can also be true about this region during the Soviet era.

Researchers have tried to generalize their propositions about Central Asia and the Caucasus to analyze, other region such as the Middle East, based on those propositions, while the historical context of the region is different. This region has both experienced the growth and prosperity of Islamic civilization in the past, and has been dominated by communism. Any analysis outside of this historical background will misguide scholars. In other words, the presumptions of most of researchers who advocate radical Islam is that in the Stalin era Islam had no role in social life based on the the communists' views on religion; accordingly after the collapse of soviet union due to the ideological vacuum, and the prevailing movements in the Islamic world such as fundamentalism, and the war in Afghanistan, some have proposed radical Islam, which is a transient matter and lacks a philosophical worldview, and as a result, after the choas subsides, these movements will decline. However, Islam in this region, despite de-traditionalization, has a strong and deep-rooted tradition that has been the result of the history of these countries, and has been able to play a significant role in interaction with groups.

One hundred after the death of the Prophet his companions brought Islam to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Bukhara, Samarkand, and the Caucasus came under Islamic rule. And the shrine of those people are visited and respected by traditional Muslims. There are shrines in Bukhara, Dirbent, Dagestan, etc. What the Companions of the Prophet have established was the Islamic environment and way of life under the guidance of the Companions and their successors. Islamic teachings have been spread through religious

scholars who were in favor of tolerance and they were considered to be the mainstream of Islam. In fact, centers for Islamic Teachings moved from Baghdad to Tus, Merv, Bukhara, Samarkand, in fact it moved from the Middle East to east and north. Islam, continued to grow in the hearts of the people and spread by the teachings and efforts of religious scholars. After while Kazakhstan, Tatarstan and even some areas near the Soviet Union came under the Islamic rule. (ISLAMICSUPREMECOUNCIL) With the conquest of these areas, religious scholars had an important mission to expand and deepen religious teachings. Environmental, geographical and military conditions led to the construction of monasteries by Yousef Hamdani and Saad al-Din Kashghari. Many important cities in the Islamic world until the 18th century were: Bukhara, Merv, Tus, Herat and Samarkand. The emergence of these cities and mystical schools plays a role in the future of this region.

The Bahu' din and Naqshbandiyya schools have significant influence in Central Asia, along with their influencing branches in Yasawiyah, Samaniyah, Oveyssi, and the less influencing schools such as Qadiriyya and Suhrawardiyah schools. during the Mongol invasion, which result in the destruction of the Islamic world, this region preserved Islam and Islamic monuments, and encourage the Mongols to convert to Islam and as we know Ghazan Khan abandoned his religion and convert to Islam.

In the 19th century, educational institutions such as monasteries, endowed places, and schools fell under the Tsarist rule, however no conflict arose there, unlike in the Caucasus. The Tsar destroyed schools' spiritual power, and with the advent of communism Islam is banned and the people were forced to come under communist rule. During the Soviet period, religious practice became individual; this means that religious practices and beliefs have become widespread and large numbers of people go to holy places (ISLAM IN POST SOVIET AZERBAIJAN)

As a result, the religious tradition was preserved orally, and most religious books were kept out of the reach of the people, especially with the imposition of the new alphabet we were witnessed of a kind of de-tradition. Muslims people either fled or were exiled or died. Communism had no credit among religious scholars. Soviet schools abolished religious teachings and cut people off from their spiritual heritage. Although it seemed that Islam in the Soviet Union had been disappeared due to Stalin's homogenization, however due to that homogenization policy women scholars are introduced as Guardians of the religious tradition. In other words, during the Soviet era, the pattern of female communication in Islam changed. Since women were dominated by men and men were integrated into the Soviet system, the

destruction of Islamic structures result in strengthening the role of women as "guardians of the religious tradition". In the Soviet era, women became custodians and transmitters of religious knowledge. They mostly went to holy places, and some even played the role of female clerics. Can be found in TOHIDI: 137-161)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, despite the de-religionization of society, we are witnessing the revival of religious traditions and practices in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Some former Soviet republics eagerly turned to Islam to instill the spirit of spirituality in the bodies of their yearning people. As a result, they fully supported the revival of Islam in order to rebuild the destroyed Islamic institutions. Uzbekistan took the lead. Millions of dollars were spent on mosques, schools and places. At the same time, bookstores in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara were full of books about Sufis such as Yasawiyah and Naqshbandiyyah, as well as religious poetry and commentaries on the Qur'an, hadith books, and writings from modern Islamists. In other words, they want to make up for the seventy years of backwardness from Islam and to quench the thirst for Islamic teachings. Religious schools of thought were run without genuine teachers during the communist rule. Hence, the revival of Islamic inclinations throughout Central Asia is happening based on these facts. The gap (meaning the gap in the tradition) that is created during the middle age, has also been filled by other institutions and teachings. Salafi and Wahhabi preachers have used this empty space and try to teach their own teachings in the name of (under title of) authentic teachings. By using their vast money and capital. This Islam, introduced from outside the true Islamic teachings, has marginalized and even erased the main components of traditional Islam. Undoubtedly, if the Wahhabis come to power, they will treat other people who don't know about Islam as unbelievers and they will exclude from society. The main focus of preachers is politics, not Islam. They argue that Islam is a religion of action in which religion and state are not separate. They reduce Islam to political and power-seeking goals and completely crushed the spirit of spirituality. They try to represent themselves as reformers and revivers of Islam. Introduce reformers. By introducing themselves as non-violent people, they introduce their ideology as the "Islamic State". (Islamic supreme council)

The early 1980s and 1990s saw the influx of Islamic radicals from Arab countries and Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and North Africa into Central Asia and the Caucasus. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, emerging nations had no source to fight the insurgency. The fighter who mostly trained in Afghanistan became one of the most important political forces in Central Asia and the Caucasus with the financial support of

Wahhabis. These radicals were entrenched on the Afghanistan-Russia battlefield. Their ideological supporters were some people such as Zawahiri and Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman and many Arab reformers such as Rashid Reza and Pan-Islamic thinkers and radicals such as Sayyid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, and Maududi. They were the center of Wahhabi ideology and the militaristic approach. In the name of traditional Islam, they focused on politicizing Islam.

Due to the history of the communist system, the debates about Islam in the region have faced difficulties in spite of the Islamic background in the region. The studies of social and political scientists are also being completed according to the criticisms made. In fact, with more scientific work, more horizons regarding the existing ambiguities about Islam in this region due to De-religionization in the Stalin era has become evident. What makes situation more complicated during Stalin era is the presupposition of homogenization.

Scholars have gone beyond the dualistic view of traditional Islam and radical Islam. Scholars and social scientists attribute several factors to the extremist or fundamentalist movements that have gained a foothold in post-Soviet governments and been attractive for local populations. In fact, Islamic radicalism is a subordinate and rootless phenomenon. Islamic studies in the region have been conducted in this narrow context. In the Soviet era, Islamic scholars are considered to be the potential threat to communist rule. In the post-Soviet period, research on Islam was conducted by Americans, which see the Islam more as of a security concern. In fact, what has been done is mostly done by government institutions and institutions that have looked at this region from a certain angle. These researches has not shed any light on the dark and unknown corners of Islam in this region. We need to look beyond concepts such as fundamentalism and traditionalism to reveal the dynamic interactions between actors in governments, quasi-religious administrations, independent and non-state-affiliated religious groups, and religious sects.

3. Conflict of Salafism and Secularism in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Radical Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus is separate from the religious context or cultural environment in the region. Extremists are a small minority in the region. There are two major forces in Central Asia and the Caucasus that the policies are made as results of their interactions. These two components of culture are deeply intertwined today and cannot be easily separated. Both components should be seen in relation to each other as two forces of strength and identity, not two opposing and weakening forces.

These two elements of social movement are strong and there is a harmonious relationship between them.

3-1. Salafi tendency

Islam is not the only religion that has flourished in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Before the Arab and Muslim invasions in the seventh century AD, this region was the main place of Zoroaster. This religion gave the East and West the meaning of heaven and hell and directly inspired others. Central Asia has also been the center of Buddhism. Islam in this region, has characteristics that distinguish it from other regions. First, Islam in this region has a coherent practical character, for instance merchants who converted to Hanafi Islam that has a secular system with a disciplined and practical approach among Sunni Islamic sects. Secondly, this religion has flexibility that easily interacts with secular teachings. Central Asia has a powerful role in the formation of Islam. Third, they are indifferent to superficiality because of their Sufi nature.

What is rooted and has been able to protect itself in the Stalin era is Islam, which has the ability to absorb and tolerate other schools. Radical Islam does not belong to this region, and it is mostly created by organizations and groups outside the region, that infiltrate into the region due to lack of sovereignty and ideological vacuum. What can be inferred from radical Islam is that Salafi and Wahhabi groups try to take advantage from the spirit of Islamism. For instance, in case of Azerbaijan, the first Salafi missionaries came to this republic were from the North Caucasus in the mid-1990s, that most of them were from Chechnya and Dagestan, where the Salafis have presence. The Salafis have a strong presence in Chechnya. They have been able to spread the teachings of Salafism / Wahhabism from the villages of Karamaksi and Chuban Makhi in Dagestan. They could not stay in Chechnya and Dagestan due to the war and consequent conditions, and as a result, they expanded their activities to the surrounding areas, including the Republic of Azerbaijan. At first, they did not gain support among Azeris. In Azerbaijan, nationalist and pan-Turkic groups opposed the Salafis. But due to the geographical conditions and poverty of the people after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we see how salafis have gained a foothold in the republic, thanks to the financial resources. (Khalili and Majidi, 2009, 43)

According to statistics, 70-65 percent of Azerbaijanis are Shiites, and as a result there is little room for Salafi's influence. However, despite the fact that Shiites have a majority in Azerbaijan, the northern region of Azerbaijan is Sunni, which is considered actually as the gateway of Salafis to be this country.

The second wave of Salafist expansion was at the beginning of 1998 coincided with the second Chechen-Russian war. As a result of siege by Russian forces in the war, the Chechens took refuge in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In 1999-2000, according to statistics, 8,000 wanted Chechen refugees came to Azerbaijan. (Islam-Azerbaijan)

At the same time, we see that missionaries from Arab-Wahhabi / Salafi countries are increasing their influence in Azerbaijan. By 2003, 65 mosques were under the control of Salafis and some of them had been established. One of the largest Salafi mosques in this country is Abu Bakr Mosque. This mosque was built in 1997 by the Azeri branch of the revival of the Kuwaiti community of Islamic heritage. This mosque is one of the most successful mosques in Azerbaijan. Mosques in the Azerbaijani society play an important role in attracting Muslims. Hence, the two religious sects, Shiite and Sunni, try to compete with each other over controlling the administration of mosques and encouraging people to come to the mosque. According to statistics, while Sunni and Shiite mosques are able to attract approximately 300 people on Fridays, Abu Bakr Mosque attracts 5,000 to 7,000 people. The imam of the Abu Bakr Mosque is Gammaet Suleymanov, a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina, one of the most important Salafi educational centers (www.silkroadstudies). According to what has been mentioned, it can be said that Radicalism is not born from Islam but it is resulted from the conditions of the region that have led to the growth of radicalism. Based on the political sociology analysis, radicalism is result of social or economic crisis or the repression of opposition forces. These explanations have limited validity in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It is a socio-economic crisis or political repression that radicalizes opposition forces. These explanations have limited validity in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In post-Soviet republics, identity crises result from ethnic hatred, regional rivalries, partial deprivation, and in general advertising of foreign groups. (zeyno, 2006: 7) which leads to radicalism

3-2. Secular orientation

Central Asia and the Caucasus, just as they were able to manifest their spirit of adaptation during historical periods and under certain circumstances, were able to maintain their Islamic identity in the communist era despite all the difficulties. However, it seems that we can no longer talk about Central Asia without the communist experience. This region has had experience of seventy years of communist rule, which should be taken into account in the political sociology of these regions. Islam and the indigenous culture of this region are influenced by the communist system. So secular politicians are main force among political forces in this region.

The Soviet government established the kind of Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which was stagnant, and without awareness and its characteristics. The Soviet government suppressed most Islamic institutions and reduced them to an ostensible ritual, along with removing it from the public sphere. The communist educational system imposed secularist teachings on most people. Until the 1960s, anyone could perform their religious rites, get married, however he was able to fully participate in the secular world. The people of this region lived and were educated in the secularist atmosphere of Stalinism. This unification in the post-communist period, along with the remained Islamic heritage, forms the basis of new identities. The future of politics in these regions will be shaped by the clash of secularist and Islamic ideas. A new formation will emerge from the union of these ideas. In fact, today, for the traditional and secular inhabitants of the region, this political order is inadequate and insufficient, and this conflict seems to be a normal thing after the collapse of Soviet Union.

For the people of this region, the current time (situation) is a place of turmoil that needs to be settled. However, in these circumstances, "Islamic radicalism has emerged as a spillover of psychological gaps that have abandoned secular modernism and traditional Islam." (zeyno, 2006: 7).

There is no doubt that Central Asian governments support Islam in life of their people as Islam has grown for centuries. In Turkmenistan, despite the government's strong opposition to Islam rituals that are considered to be illegal, government interests are inextricably intertwined with Islam and religious and secular leaders are united.

Conclusion

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the general desire for Islam increased. Since the Muslim republics gained independence, they have gained more freedom of religious expression and have been able to communicate with the rest of the Muslim world. Unlike situation where Islam was suppressed, or At best condition; Authoritarian governments have reluctantly tolerated it, in many successive governments, the ruling elites have actively embraced Islam as a legitimizing factor for their regimes and as an element in their state-building project (plan).

However, this does not mean that all interpretations of Islam and all forms of Muslim action are able to compete on equal terms (can express themselves equally). Continuity of religious expression in different republics is regulated by quasi-governmental religious administrations. In Uzbekistan, for example, the Karimov regime promoted Islam as an element of Uzbek national culture. Regarding Islam as a national heritage is raised from the

state discourse, and this include celebrating the achievements and prominent figures in Islamic history that are related to the current territory of the country.

In fact, they try to present the national heritage in accordance with the religious tradition. They revive their public figures and Sufis, for example, Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, the author in the ninth century, who wrote the most comprehensive book of hadith, or Bahauddin Naqshband, the founder of Naqshbandiyya. They are also reviving their religious traditions, such as holding rituals and celebrations of Sufi traditions in Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, Hanafi School is the only form of Islam that is allowed. Any religious practice or expression outside of this narrative (approach) is severely repressed.

But this does not mean that in these republics, the forms of religious revival are the same, however they are in proportion to (accordance with) the political and social atmosphere and the various forms of religious life in this region. For example, in the case of Tatarstan and Dagestan in the Russian Federation, the official Islamic delegations that operated outside the formal religious administrative structure during the Soviet era appoint Sufi leaders. The main challenge to their authority is the reformist movements, which reinforce an extreme interpretation of the Islam. They oppose local practices and regard them as non-Islamic heresies, deny the existence of esoteric and secret knowledge, and they believe that the divine grace is only available to Sheikh Sufi, and advocate a personal and direct relationship between every Muslim and God through a conscious interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

However, it can be argued that the religious and political landscape in the former Soviet republics can be challenged. The conditions for analysis by those who study Islam in the region can change evenly. Recent studies on Islam, however, have seen significant continuity with Soviet-era Islamic studies. Concerning contemporary Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus, due to the lack of formation of religious forces in political games, the political future of Islam in this region is not predictable. But it is clear; Today, Islam may play a limited role in the political arena, and a small number of people may want the idea of an Islamic state, which is due to the long tradition of secularism in Central Asia and the Caucasus or that the nationalist movements that has a secular character are at war with political Islam. But because the political elites cannot improve the living conditions of the majority of the people, the people express their dissatisfaction through political Islam.

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