Book Discussion

Hélène Thibault, *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018).

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Examining Remnants of Soviet Policy on Religion in Central Asia

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Western monographs on Tajikistan as distinct from the rest of the Central Asian "-stans" (with the exception of Turkmenistan, which suffers profusely from a dearth of scholarly research) have been few and far between. Until 1991, only two monographs were exclusively devoted to Tajikistan: *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: Case of Tajikistan* by Teresa Rakowska Harmstone, published in 1970, and Muriel Atkin's thoughtful 1989 study on the perceived threat of Islam, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan*. Both works remained undeservedly unnoticed by Hélène Thibault's book, *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. During the Cold War, the role played by religion in Central Asia was the subject of heated debates. Dean of Soviet Islamic Studies Alexandre Bennigsen's central thesis was that Islam is not only a religious and social ideology but also a political force in the Soviet space, while Atkin saw no evidence of political activism and dissent among Soviet Muslims.

With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, English-language literature on Tajikistan increased. The country attracted the attention of Western scholars mostly for two reasons: First, Tajikistan was the only post-Soviet republic that suffered a devastating civil conflict, notable both for its rapid escalation to war in 1992 and for its relatively quick conclusion through a settlement negotiated in Mos- cow in June 1997. Second, Tajikistan famously became one of the centers of Islamic activism in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. Political Islam in the country stemmed more from Tajik realities of the late Soviet period than from scripture and Islamic history.

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After independence in 1991 and continuing through the civil war in 1992–1996, the peace process in 1994–1997, and the integration into government in 1999–2000, Tajik Islamists (with the exception of a short-lived consensus with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan from 1992–1996) did not take the Islamic state fantasy seriously. Instead, they savored the fact that they had been allowed into the national political scene via a plebiscite. The plebiscite once again legalized the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) which, via parliamentary elections, was allotted a few seats despite the party's flaws—until, that is, the party was once again banned in 2015. The new ban by Tajikistan's Supreme Court came at a time when the popularity of the IRPT as the chief opposition party in Tajikistan appeared strong. Today, Tajikistan continues to restrict and delegitimize political Islam in various ways, with the government viewing all Islamist groups as fundamentally the same—for example, it sees no difference between the Islamic State (IS) and IRPT.

Transforming Tajikistan: State-Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia is thus a unique ethnographic study. It is based on fieldwork conducted mostly during the first half of the 2010s, when the IRPT was legal and scholars could study problems related to religion without being accused by the authorities of supporting terrorism. The government's concern about terrorism, including the new membership of over 1,500 Tajik nationals in the IS and the banning of the IRPT, dramatically limited academic freedom around Islam and Islamism. Thibault's book is a welcome attempt to move the "Tajik debate" from civil war and post-war reconstruction to the consolidation of independence. Her major aim is to prove that the Soviet legacy of state management of religion is still alive in Tajik politics and society. Thibault sees this legacy in four spheres: the repression of religious opposition, assimilation of Islamic forces, creation of religious administrative structures, and adoption of laws that define the parameters of religious life. In fact, the authority of Sunni Islam is fragmented in Tajikistan, with various state-supported and state-formed institutions holding little importance in the average believer's life. Real authority has always be- longed to various informal leaders: *sheikhs* and *ishans*, the hereditary heads of Sufi brotherhoods, who often have thousands of disciples (*murids*), and whose influence has historically been much greater than that of the (often-educated) *mullahs*. In 1925, there were about fifty *ishans* in Tajikistan, each having five hundred to ten thousand *murids*. These informal leaders of Muslim communities possessed a mechanism of social mobilization—"*ishan-murid* groupings" (a KGB expression)—which were capable of instigating destructive mass involvement, rapid breakdown of civil–military relations, and hazardous destabilization of the system. This happened in Tajikistan in the 1920s and again in the 1990s.

In the second half of the 1930s, a significant transformation of Central Asian politics took place. The isolation and liquidation of Basmachi guerillas, the national delimitation of 1924, growing economic development, women's emancipation, and the successes of secular education cleared the way for a more stable *modus vivendi* between state and local powers. This inevitably involved the separation of religion from the political sphere, leading to an era of relative stability. The Muslim community moved towards political quietism and submission to political authority (despite the state's non-Islamic character), and the orthodox *ulama* adopted a strategy of mere survival, safeguarding the continuity of Tajik Islam.

These years of "muted Islamic politics"[1] were followed by the reanimation of the "Islamic factor" in Tajik politics, starting with the victorious Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year. Today, secular elites who rule over Tajikistan fluctuate between the policy of strengthening their defenses by combating Islamists and efforts to "domesticate" Islam and subjugate it to the national project.

Tajikistan is an important source of new scholarly political science vocabulary: *mahalgaroi* (localism or appreciation of community), presented by Oliver Roy, and John Heathershaw's *tinji* (peace or peacefulness). More recently, another related concept, introduced by the state, emerged in Tajikistan's political vocabulary: *shukrona*. The expression *Shukronakuned* (count your blessings) suggests that citizens should be grateful for an independent, peaceful, and unified Tajikistan. "Do *shukrona* for Tajikistani Muslims being able to perform all rituals of our sacred religion of Islam freely … *Tinji va amoni* [peace and security] is our priority. Attaining wealth is easy: just work harder. Sustaining peace is crucial."[2] This is how Tajikistan's president, Emomali Rahmon, instructs the Tajik audience during public presentations. The message is clear: do not complain, work hard, and be grateful for peace and security. Doing *shukrona* allows Tajiks to agree with state politics towards religion and live in *tinji.* Thus, as Thibault rightly argues, state interference in religious affairs does not seem to represent a particular problem for most Tajiks. Her book provides a foundation for highly topical and complex academic discussions pertaining to the interrelationship of state, society, and religion in post-SovietCentral Asia.

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1 C. Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 111.

2 Emomali Rahmon, "Congratulatory address of the President on the occasion of Id-e Qurbon," October 14, 2013, http://president.tj/node/5408.

An Anthropological Lens into 'Religious Revival' in the Post-Soviet Moment

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Hélène Thibault's monograph is a welcome change from the majority of books on Central Asia, which tend to focus on radicalism and authoritarianism. The author aims, instead, to trace the legacies of the Soviet secularization process in Tajikistan's state policies, identities, and narratives within a post-civil war context. The book also explores the gender dimensions of the religious revival and discusses how Islam is employed as a source of morality in Tajikistan (not unlike its employment in the neighboring Uzbekistan, as documented in *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* by Johan Rasanayagam).

Thibault's interdisciplinary approach, rooted in political ethnography, offers an anthropological lens that helps illuminate the intersections of Islam and state-building practices through a select number of Tajik informants whose lives have been directly impacted by official state responses to the "religious revival" that began in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union. This approach is a welcome respite from analyses of the region that approach Islam and governance using political science and a top-down approach centered on state institutions and their fears of radicalism as opposed to individual actors and diverse displays of piety.

The book is well-organized but almost too formulaic in its approach—a common problem for dissertations turned into books. One has to wonder whether the second chapter's exploration of Marxism, Leninism, and atheism is necessary when the book targets an academic audience that is already familiar with that history and with discourse on secularism. The core of the field- work does not really begin until Chapter 3. While it is worth waiting for, there is a great deal of extraneous material to get through first.

The author did enjoy rare and privileged access to a variety of official and individual actors and collectives, including the Committee for Religious Affairs, the Council of Ulema, and the office of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) in Khujand, the regional seat of opposition at the time. As the author attests, there is less space for such dialogue and opposition now, as the IRPT was banned in 2015.

The author also includes that she was denied an interview with Mufti Said Mukarrami Abduqodirzoda in Dushanbe. Thus, she maps out the boundaries of possible access to explain and chart the absences in her research stemming from certain actors being off-limits. Marking which discourses and accesses were permissible is a valuable contribution to the historical record and to other scholars working in the region now and in the future. Thus, the book is not only an important contribution to studies of the anthropological landscape of Islam in post-civil-war Tajikistan but it is also an ethnography of the research endeavor itself—a unique and important artifact of access and engagement.

On the other hand, the author does not have much background or expertise in Islamic Studies, which she freely admits. As this work is an anthropological study of Islam, the stress is overwhelmingly on the social, political, and cultural aspects of Islamic identity and embodiment instead of competing interpretations of Islamic doctrine, theology, and jurisprudence. However, concern over this absence may be attributable to my own personal research bias and activities.

The author displays the limits of her knowledge of Islam when she expresses surprise that a wedding to which she was invited (a *nikoh* ceremony) was not officiated by a religious authority and lacked music or dancing. She was also surprised that Muslims drink vodka during Ramadan. This would come as no surprise to scholars who had worked in the region previously. Nevertheless, her honest and humble display serves as a useful tool for educating readers who lack a background in the region and its customs and traditions. By showing how her own thinking moved beyond the religious–secular dichotomy, she invites the reader to do the same.

The author also wisely notes her own subjectivity as a Western, agnostic female studying religious revival in Tajikistan. One of her informants, Iskandar, notes that if she really wanted to understand Islam, she would have to convert because "Islam is like a house, and you, you just walk around it looking through the windows. But you have to go inside to fully understand it." His critique is an important one, and it is a good sign of a complete and transparent ethnography that she chose to include it. Her additional inclusion of the romantic invitations she received also exposes the realities Western women experience during field research, while she also astutely notes that her gender gave her access that men may not have had.

One instance of problematic language in the book is the use of the Christian term "born-again" to describe Tajiks who left behind their "secular life" to live according to *sharia* (canonical) laws. This term is deployed to avoid other problematic terms like "fanatic," "radical," and "fundamentalist," yet it too is suspect due to its Christian historical and cultural context.

The book could have benefitted from an examination of how Islam changed informants in ways that are separate from identity or outward appearances and identity markers. For instance, perhaps Islam turned them away from destructive behaviors like drinking (as a few of the author's interlocutors do, in fact, state) or initiated a change in their moral values in accordance with *adab* (proper conduct) and *akhlaq* (morality). However, nuanced attention to this theme may require a more extensive background in Islam. The book suggests that secularization is problematic when it infringes on the religious rights of citizens. While such bias is to be expected from a Western scholar, the argument could be given further nuance by an exploration of how state control of religious expression, framed as the preservation of cultural heritage and the prevention of radicalization and terrorism, largely worked to prevent violence in the region and the erasure of local culture in favor of Wahhabization and Saudi culture.

Central Asian Studies is a field still in its infancy. Those of us who have researched Islam in the region have not had a wealth of sources to draw upon, and each new inquiry breaks new ground. *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* certainly does that, especially thanks to the author's privileged access to actors and collectives that are currently off- limits and even banned. While reading the book, however, I began to wonder whether we all privilege the post-Soviet moment at the expense of Tajikistan's civil-war history. Of course, it is not a question of either/or, but my hope is that, in the near future, young scholars will embark on the arduous work of unearthing Tajik civil-war narratives, embodiments, and devotions before those who lived through the war are gone. In the interim, this book succeeds in expanding the field through its bold ethnographic approach, undertaken at a time when such fieldwork was more possible than it is today.

Ethnographic Research into Causes of Religiosity and Fundamentalism in Tajikistan

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Karl Marx wrote that "religion [is] the opium of the people," bringing them "*illusory* [not] *real* happiness."3 Soviet communism, in turn, theorized that

3 K. Marx, *Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1843)*, trans. J. O'Malley (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1970).

societies would eventually tackle economic injustices and, *inter alia*, uphold atheism. Decades of Soviet rule, however, failed to do away with religious fervor. With the implosion of the USSR, a surge of interest in Islam and other religions came to the fore. States in the southernmost periphery of the former Soviet space were particularly affected by the bug of "religious revival" (Thibault 2018: 13). Hélène Thibault's book, *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, shows how "70 years of Soviet 'management of religion' continue to influence the understanding of religion and its position in society in contemporary Tajikistan" (28).

She points to four "aspects of policy" that demonstrate the "continuation of Soviet practices in … religious management": the "repression of religious opposition" (coercion), "assimilation of Islamic forces" (cooption), presence of "religious administrative structures" (administration), and imposition of "regular and Constitutional laws" (legislation) (99). Thibault engages in "hyper- local" (183) empiricism as a means of determining the causes of religious revival in post-Soviet Tajikistan and labels her method "neo-institutionalist ethnography" (180), an approach which takes into consideration both the agency of individuals and overarching institutions.

The most engaging part of Thibault's book is her interactions with her subjects, which serve as windows into the minds of believers—particularly of Islamists. She writes that she "eschew[s] the terms 'radical' and 'fundamentalist' because they convey a misleading sense of vague menace" and instead prefers to use the terms "conservative Muslims" and "strict believers" (144). Many of her subjects, however, fit the fundamentalist label, interpreting scriptures dogmatically and demonstrating intolerant worldviews. Iskandar, for example, told Thibault that her "unbeliever's heart was black," and that she "would burn in hell if [she] did not accept Islam as the true religion" (141), thus confirming the language and convictions of fundamentalism. At the same time, the fundamentalist believer is often on his or her best behavior with Western researchers, the sympathy of whom they seek to win. Thibault narrates an amusing scene where a *mullah* (Islamic priest), who would not normally shake a woman's hand, did so with her. When he was asked jokingly by a female Tajik ac- companying Thibault why he had not shaken her hand, too, the *mullah* replied: "But it's different. She is a foreigner!" (25).

As for the rise in religiosity in Tajikistan, Thibault sees the culprits as post-communist repression coupled with economic hardship. She writes that the breakup of the Soviet Union and the transition from communism to capitalism led to "disorientation," "insecurity," and "chaos" in people's lives and that "strong faith and … religious behaviour" acted as a coping strategy (162). Aside from the political factor (of dictatorship and lack of political pluralism) and the economic factor (of stagnation and income inequality), however, one

could also add a cultural factor (of ingrained patriarchy and subservience to authority) and geopolitical factor (of proximity to conservative Islamic societies and states).

A critical facet of rising religiosity in Tajikistan is the patriarchal social processes that lead to what Connell labels "hegemonic masculinity"4 and what, in the Tajik scenario, Harris explored through the lens of "(gendered) power relations."5 Thibault's description of a group of male subjects arguing that, ac- cording to Islam, "women only possessed 50 per cent of the intellectual capacities of men" (177) speaks to this perception. So does the story of another interlocutor, Mera, who divorced her former husband because he was cheating on her. Under the influence of Iskandar and her newly-found religiosity, however, Mera agreed to a bigamous marriage with Iskandar. Thibault describes another scene of a fundamentalist couple who dressed their three-year-old daughter in Islamic garments so that she would "get used to it" (146). She also tells of how, in a *de facto* focus group made up of female members of the (now banned) Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), the dominant (if not majority) voices favored the practice of polygyny. One woman in the same group concluded: "Ifyou love God, you will accept it" (176).

From the above encounter with IRPT members, one must question the party's supposedly "moderate" and "unambiguous" secular leanings (80). Despite its democratic rhetoric, the IRPT has always been an illiberal party with ethnonationalist, misogynist, and fundamentalist tendencies. Still, it is telling that, prior to the IRPT's banning by Tajikistan's Supreme Court in 2015, Rahnamo, a prominent researcher with the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of Tajikistan, said that "without the IRPT, [Tajikistan] would face a massive manifestation of radicalism" (91). Surely, however, despite the party's significant flaws, its elimination from Tajikistan's political scene and the imprisonment of its leadership council (after kangaroo trials) were violations of Tajikistan's domestic laws and internationally recognized human rights norms. Thibault is thus correct that IRPT's banning "might actually backfire" (98).

On geopolitics as a factor in rising fundamentalism, Tajikistan is in proximity to three Islamic republics, the cultural-ideological influences of two of which—Iran and Afghanistan—affected the outbreak of Tajikistan's brutal civ- il war (1992–1997), wherein fundamentalist ideology dominated the so-called

4 R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

5 C. Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan* (New York: Pluto Press, 2004).

Islamist–democratic alliance. Despite Thibault's claims that "ISIS has no presence in Central Asia …" (94) or that "it is difficult to imagine a fundamentalist [Taliban] spillover into Tajikistan" (187), the facts are that, even prior to the June 2018 tourist killings in Tajikistan by a local Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terror cell, hundreds of Tajikistani citizens had already joined the ranks of ISIS (nearly all radicalized while working in Russia). Furthermore, Colonel Halimov, Tajikistan's former head of the special police force, also defected to ISIS in 2015. In addition, data compiled by the Hague-based International Center for Counter-Terrorism for a one-year period indicates that Tajikistanis topped the list of ISIS foreign suicide bombers.6 In the past few years, the Tajik government also detained a number of individuals who flew the ISIS flag or intended to become ISIS fighters. More recently, convicted ISIS members and sympathizers were among the culprits involved in two deadly prison riots in Tajikistan. Unknown numbers of Tajikistani militants also remain in Afghanistan, and a potential peace accord between Kabul and the Taliban could enticetheir return.

On a technical note, it would have been proper if Thibault's transliteration of Tajik words as written in English were from the Tajik language, not Russian. At the same time, some Tajik words used are best written in English, such as *violyat* (province) and *hukumat* (government). Instead of the awkward sounding "Gorno-Badakhshan viloyat" (6), it would be better to use 'mountainous Badakhshan province.'

Religious Revival in Tajikistan: The Soviet Legacy RevisitedThrough Ethnography

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First of all, I wish to thank the reviewers for taking the time to read *Transforming Tajikistan: State Building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* thoroughly and formulating these relevant comments and critiques. Payam Foroughi deserves a word of gratitude for having the idea to organize this virtual book

6 F. Bezhan, "Tajikistan's Deadly Export," Radio Free Europe, 12 March 2017, http://bit.ly/2Y0VHLC.

roundtable. The fieldwork discussed here was conducted in 2010 and 2011 and then used to write a dissertation, which I defended in 2014. The book was published in 2018. The political environment has changed a lot during those years, and I am grateful to have had the chance to accomplish this academic journey. Research was conducted at a time when the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) was still a legal and functioning Islamic opposition party—the only one in Central Asia. The book is thus a tale of a bygone era.

Simply put, the aim of my research was to make sense of the so-called religious revival in Tajikistan. Why do people become more religious? Why is Islam becoming so central in the lives of many Tajikistanis? These questions bear a profound relevance; the belief in God is a powerful thing that greatly influences one's behavior. My adult self is agnostic, but, like most French Canadians of my generation, I was raised in a moderate Catholic family. However, my childhood was marked by religious tensions when a member of our family became a Jehovah's Witness after fighting depression for years. Part of my interest in spiritual journeys certainly comes from this peculiar life experience. This is, in fact, the basis of my argument; I am interested in the empowering effects of religion and how it can be used to cope with difficult life situations. It becomes especially interesting in a society that, until recently, was bombard- ed with anti-religious messages and imposed strict limits on religious practice. Inspired by political ethnography, which attempts to "glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality,"7 my intention was to demonstrate that the Soviet legacy continues to play a great role in the way people perceive the role of religion in the society. On the one hand, I expose how this is still visible at the state level in four spheres: 1) the repression of religious opposition, 2) the assimilation of Islamic forces, 3) the creation of religious administrative structures, and 4) the adoption of laws that define the parameters of religious life. I argue that a large portion of the population agrees with those measures and that secularism remains an important political value. That was the easy part. The hard part was to demonstrate that religious people are also influenced by the Soviet legacy, which also has to do with control and the definition of proper behavior. In the USSR, people's lives were more or less determined by the system, and social security was guaranteed. But after independence, people found themselves without guiding mechanisms. If Sovietism was a totalizing ideology, Islamic codes of conduct are equally totalizing and provide clear recommendations on how to live a good life as well aseveryday rules.

7 E. Schatz, "Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Power," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. E. Schatz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 5.

As I mention in the book's introduction, the feeling of disorientation is not solely a post-Soviet phenomenon. However, in the former USSR, the col- lapse of an entire socioeconomic and political system aggravated this sense of uncertainty. In Tajikistan, this feeling was intensified by the civil war. Finally, tightening authoritarianism, severe corruption, and economic inequalities ex- acerbated feelings of injustice. Religion offered ways of being in the world understood as just and virtuous. Through faith, believers could distinguish themselves from the corrupt individuals they despised. Finally, my aim was to add nuance to the common idea in the media and in some academic literature that Islamization equals radicalization. As Foroughi and O'Dell underlined, I want- ed to avoid conveying the idea that strict believers represent a threat. I reckon that the choice of words to describe "strict believers" sometimes as "conservative Muslims" and "born-again Muslims" is contentious. Perhaps I was not consistent enough throughout the book, but it is also a sign that it is difficult to settle on a term to designate people who strictly follow religious precepts; even within this category, there are a lot of nuances.

Yet, prospects of radicalization should not be entirely dismissed. Abdullaev mentions that in pre-Soviet Central Asia, "real authority has always belonged to various informal leaders: *sheikhs* and *ishans*, hereditary heads of Sufi brotherhoods" and that the Soviet power destroyed those traditional poles of authority. Similarly, the current government placed the clergy under the strict control of the state and tried to make religious discourses uniform with prewritten sermons distributed to *imams* every Friday. In a paper I wrote with Edward Lemon,[8] we theorized that the Tajik authorities' efforts to subjugate religious practices is comparable to biopower *à la* Foucault and, further, generate new ideals of secular citizenship. This project has not gone smoothly, and my research shows how strict Muslims feel oppressed and increasingly frustrated with state policies that marginalize them.

O'Dell and Foroughi disagree with some of my conclusions about the potential for radicalization. Foroughi mentions that Tajikistan's proximity to the Islamic Republics Iran and Afghanistan could influence Tajik domestic forces. As I like to reiterate, Afghanistan has been in a state of war for decades. Twenty-nine years after Tajikistan's independence, the spillover still has not happened. There has been no mass defection of Tajiks to Taliban forces since 2001, and the Taliban is too weak to care about gaining ground on the other side of the border. The emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan,[9] which seems to attract Central Asians, might be a game changer. O'Dell highlights that I am

8 H. Thibault and E. Lemon, "Counter-extremism, power and authoritarian governance in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (2018): 137–159.

9 A. Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan* (Hurst Publishers: 2018).

critical of the "secularization" project in Central Asia (I'd rather use the term "assertive secularism"10) and argues that the control of religious expression "largely worked to prevent violence in the region and the erasure of local culture in favor of Wahhabization and Saudi culture," but I think that such a conclusion lacks strong evidence. First, there is little indication that Tajik culture was genuinely threatened by so-called Wahhabism. Second, assertive secular policies did not prevent Tajiks from radicalizing. Radicals are simply not very active in the territory of Tajikistan—but the rage is there. As Foroughi underlines, more than a thousand Tajiks have joined ISIS. When Colonel Gulmorod Halimov, Tajikistan's former head of the special police force, defected to ISIS in 2015, he specifically mentioned in his video that his defection was a protest against Rahmon's oppressive religious policies. For me, the control of religion is not only an ideological atavism; it is also a manifestation of the reinforcement of authoritarian practices in general. As I point out in the book, Islamists are not the only ones who have been targeted; nearly all opposition forces have been annihilated. I believe that social justice and economic prosperity would offer better means of preventing violence and radicalization. In that regard, I, unfortunately, do not foresee any near-future improvements.

I have visited Tajikistan twice as a tourist since my last fieldwork in 2011, first in 2017 and again in 2018. Each time, I noticed how daily life had become more oppressive from a political and social point of view, especially for women.11 During a visit to Khujand in 2017, I witnessed how teenagers were monitored by school personnel, who are asked to roam the streets in the evenings to see whether any students are out enjoying their time and to tell them to go home. This is in line with the law on parental responsibilities and the upbringing of children adopted in 2011. This violation of freedom of movement, which often targets the most vulnerable, is adding to the already oppressive political environment. In 2018, the Tajik Ministry of Culture published an official dress code to provide guidelines for girls and women on how to dress according to sup- posed national traditions. The dress code is not compulsory but puts pressure

10 A. T. Kuru, "Passive and assertive secularism: Historical conditions, ideological struggles, and state policies toward religion," *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (2007): 568–594.

11 As for gender issues, some of the leftover material from my fieldwork has been published in an article on polygyny in 2018, in which I argue that polygyny is an increasing phenomenon related to labor migration, poverty, and Islamization. Instead of considering polygyny simply as a reification of patriarchy, we should view it as a way for both men and women to negotiate—and sometimes even subvert—the traditional patriarchal rules that dictate the institution of marriage in Tajikistan. See H. Thibault, "Labour migration, sex, and polygyny: Negotiating Patriarchy in Tajikistan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 15 (2018): 2809–2826.

on women to behave properly and respect national values. It has a double objective: to discourage women from adopting both "Arabic-style" Islamic clothing and "European" clothes. Moreover, it sends women the message that modesty is key and that by being modest, women honor their culture. In Tajikistan, as is the case (to differing degrees) in all the Central Asian republics, a woman's morality is always questioned. In a 2017 interview, an Almaty doctor summarized it like this: "There's a saying: 'If a man is spoilt, it destroys a family. If a woman is spoilt, it destroys a nation.'"12

The resurgence of what Foroughi calls "ingrained patriarchy and subservience to authority" is due not only to the increasing prevalence of conservative religious views but also to secular paternalist values, which are themselves a reflection of state practices. Given the current popularity of gender studies, I believe that the way that both secular political authoritarianism and Islamic revivalism affect gender dynamics and reinforce gender-based violence could represent a new avenue for research.

12 A. Kumenov, "Kazakhstan: Morality Mavens Monitoring Women," Eurasianet, 25 January 2018, https://cutt.ly/dwebd1l.