Islam beyond Democracy and State in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

Much has been made of the importance of democracy to securing individual rights and the general advancement of a just society. The role of democracy in post-Soviet governance and the strength of the state, however, have been called into question on many counts. Both state and democratic structures have been supported by elites who have used the claims of democracy and state to combat, or at least constrain, gover- nance rooted in Islam. The ideals of democracy and the state, however, are experi- enced differently by those who are secularists and those for whom religion is a lived category. In this piece, I concern myself with how Muslims experience democracy and the state in Kyrgyzstan and thus how many remain unseduced by the unfulfilled prom- ises of political rhetoricians.

Keywords

Kyrgyzstan – Central Asia – Well-being – Islamization – Political Islam – Morality – Democracy – Just society

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> Fudalah b. ‘Ubayd reported that the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave these instructions:
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> There are three people you need not ask about [as they are unquestionably bad]: a man who deserts the community, disobeys his leader, and dies a rebel; a slave, whether male or female, who runs away from

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> his or her owner; and a woman who, while her husband who has pro- vided her with all she needs in life is away, displays herself to others. There are three others you need not ask about: a man who competes with Allah for His cloak, His cloak being majesty and His wrap being glory; a man who doubts the works of Allah; and the one who despairs the mercy of Allah.
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> — Muhammad al-Bukhari[1]

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I

On March 24, 2005, the Kyrgyz government was overthrown by a group of protestors who had been supported by local businessmen, opposition leaders, and inter-nationally funded pro-democracy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The protests began, ostensibly, in response both to the flawed parliamentary elections of February 27 and to the increasing corruption and nepotism of the ruling Akayev family. The immediate fallout was looting in the capital and both uncertainty and apprehension over the immediate future. Some commented on the revolt as a sign of "people power," claiming that the Kyrgyz had risen up for change in response to the non-democratic parliamentary elections and that this represented a real opportunity for democracy's expansion into the imagination and everyday expectations of Kyrgyz who saw an outcome to their voice being projected.

II

On May 13, with apprehensions of the Kyrgyz putsch in the background, Uzbek Interior Ministry and National Security Service troops shot and killed hundreds of citizens protesting in Babur Square in Andijan, Uzbekistan. Various accounts exist as to what took place and why, but the official narrative of the Uzbek government included a prison break, the Islamic Movement ofUzbekistan, and Hizb ut-Tahrir. A widely circulated narrative, and one more

1 M. Bukhari, *Moral Teachings of Islam: Prophetic Traditions from al-Adab al-mufrad by Imamal-Bukhari*. Translated by A.A. Hamid. (Walnut Creek, ca: AltaMira Press, 2003), 75–76.

broadly believed to be true by my interlocutors, was that the protests were peaceful, and Uzbek forces indiscriminately fired on a largely unarmed gathering of women, children, and men.

Central to the government justification for its actions was that the 23 local businessmen held as prisoners were members of Akromiya, an organization banned and labeled as a terrorist threat to the state. This, however, was not the understanding shared by people with whom I spoke, including protestors during the trails of the imprisoned businessmen. Many saw these businessmen as good, religiously motivated individuals seeking to assist their community in ways the government was not.

III

On June 12, my research assistants and I visited a village in southern Kyrgyzstan to administer a survey on religious practice. I was talking with a friend and one of his acquaintances—a local "*biznessman*" who I was told owned much of the center part of the town and had mafia connections—when I received a phone call informing me that two of my college-aged assistants were being held by local police, accused of being Wahabbis and "distributing Islamist literature." Hurriedly I went to the police station to confront the police who handed me a copy of the survey as evidence of the "Islamist literature" deemed threatening to the state. The police officer had not read the survey, which would have made very clear it was not "Islamist literature," but defended his actions by referencing the threat of Islamic terrorists, "like those in Andijan," and the need for the state to come down very hard on any opposition. He referenced terrorists as keen to take advantage of the new government.

After obtaining the release of the assistants, I returned with my friend and the *biznessman* to the center of town. Shortly thereafter, a new-looking black Mercedes Benz approached and stopped nearby. The driver, who appeared to also serve as a bodyguard, exited the car and began to walk toward us. The other passengers followed. As they drew near, the *biznessman* turned to me to warn that he was alarmed by the passengers in the car. A bystander nearby suggested that these men were "dangerous with connections to al-Qaeda." The passengers were well-groomed with long beards, and they wore shalwar kameez which distinguished them from others in the village. They had heard about the survey and were interested in it. As I spoke with them, one explained that they were members of Tablighi Jamat. He was from the village but had left to study Islam first in Pakistan, then in India, and had returned as a missionary to share his understanding of Islam. I made plans to meet with him two days later.

IV

On June 13, I had a meeting in a different village with some members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. As we were talking, one member received a phone call that there were two rival gangs shooting at each other in Osh, where I had intentions to return later that evening. The rivalry, I was told, had to do with a power struggle to control one of the local markets. By the time I returned, the police had closed off the area of the shooting, and one of the gangs had taken up residence around a hotel owned by their boss. Much like the earlier incident, the precedent set seemed to be one that thuggery is the most effective way to bring about change.

That evening I was obliged to attend the birthday celebration for a friend's mother. Because I had a meeting early the next day with the missionary from Tablighi Jamat, I wanted to return home somewhat early. My taxi broke down two blocks from my apartment so I had to walk the rest of the way. Two young men wearing shirts similar to the gang that were protecting the hotel followed me into the hallway and robbed me at knifepoint.

V

On June 14, I went to the police station to report the mugging with my friend at whose mother's birthday party I had been the night before. After giving my report, the police officer asked me to leave the room so he could speak in private with my friend, a young university student. He told her that if she slept with him, he would help find those who mugged me. Insulted, she left and angrily told me of the proposition. By that time, I was already very late for my meeting with the Tablighi Jamat missionary and assuming he would hear that I had been at the police station in Osh, I feared that he would misunderstand my delay. When I arrived, I explained to him about the mugging and how my friend had been propositioned by the police officer. Sympathetic and angry, he apologized for what I had gone through and explained that it was because of such experiences that Islamic leaders should be in charge. As he put it, "The girl is someone's daughter and people should be able to walk the streets and not get mugged." Returning to the caliphate, he felt, would be an improvement for people.

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The above ethnographic vignettes contextualize opposition to the Kyrgyz state. They reveal the limits of normative political theory about democracy and the nation-state by contrasting the actual state with on-the-ground experience of the state. They show a relationship among religion, politics,

organized crime, and business that is marked less by distinctiveness than by connectedness.2 They span a window of time during my research visit in 2005 that covers a dramatic series of events—from the Kyrgyz uprising, the Andijan killings, police misconduct, and mafia mischief to interactions with religious organizations and encounters with activists calling for Islamic renewal—that convey the salient characteristics of everyday engagement with governance and religion in Kyrgyzstan. In the case of my interlocutors—some who get varyingly labeled as "Islamists," "Wahhabis,"3 and "terrorists"—the starting point for voicing opposition to the state and feeling dissatisfied with democracy is not one of political theory—theory is always reflective but read as if it is prescriptive—but rather one of experience. After experiencing an unreliable, often predatory, and amoral state, some Muslims have sought to live their lives somewhat removed from state institutions in which they have little to no confidence. It is in this context that some of my interlocutors understand Islam as being "beyond democracy and the state." For them, the democratic models and development of state institutions imply only more of the same, and thus they are not solutions in which they should invest their time.

Many of my interlocutors are conceptually comfortable with democracy. Some point to traditional forms of social and political administration, such as *kurultais*, as an indigenous blueprint for democracy. But even if traditional forms of governance were not oriented toward democracy but rather toward leadership originating from clan and kinship connections or Soviet-styled governance, the governance that has emerged in the post-Soviet period seems antithetical to good governance. The interplay of transition between more traditional governing structures4 to Soviet-era programs of shaping social order5

2 To further contextualize this, the person who received the phone call about the gang shootings on June 13 was a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, had a close relative high-placed in the government, and was friends with one of the gang leaders involved in the attack. Like many, his connections to the community were not exclusive.

Likewise, a number of mosques throughout the country have been donated by local businessmen with connections to organized crime. Some see this as a way to give back to the community whereas others see it as an attempt to clean their souls of wrongdoing; for some observers it is hypocrisy, for others it is business.

3 J. Rasanayagam, "'I Am Not a Wahhabi': State Power and Muslim Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan," in C. Hann (ed.), *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006), 99–124.

4 L. Krader, *Peoples of Central Asia*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1971); D. Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); D. Gullette, *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State, and "Tribalism"* (Leiden: Global Orient, 2010).

5 G. Massell, "Law as an Instrument of Revolutionary Change in a Traditional Millieu: The Case of Soviet Central Asia," *Law and Society Review*, 2, no. 2 (1968): 179–228.

was dynamic, as has been the evolution to Kyrgyzstan's current system of governance. The early years of independence were marked by rhetoric touting Kyrgyzstan as an "island of democracy" and the growth of Islam as a legitimate aspect of the identity of the new state, a characteristic that distinguished it from non-Central Asian countries that emerged out of the Soviet Union.6 Subsequently, we see a tension emerge around (mis)understandings of the ends of both democracy and Islam—and ample academic discussions as to whether the two are compatible.7 At least for my Kyrgyz interlocutors, the question of whether the two are compatible is not the right question. Many forms of governance—including democracy, communism, and even theocracy—may be effective in providing services to a population. The everyday of many Kyrgyz is not impacted by debates on the structural compatibility of Islam and democracy. For most, there is no sense of agency in such discussions. Within their religious lives, however, there is a sense that futures can be mor- ally influenced at a local, and thus tangible, level.

A Religious Interpretation of the Experience of Democracy

The Kyrgyz live in an ever-adapting, ever-changing environment. This, of course, is conceptually no different than the situation for any other group of people, but Kyrgyz Muslims have always negotiated their everyday lives in a dynamic context of political, historical, social, and religious influences.8 Others have discussed the evolving relationship of Islam and governance in Central Asia,9 which has been marked by attempts to institutionalize and subsequently

6 O. Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

7 A. Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, trans. M, Sadri and A. Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); R. Rose, "How Muslims View Democracy: Evidence from Central Asia," *Journal of Democracy*, 13, no. 4 (2002): 102–111; A. Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); F. Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); J. Esposito and J. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); N. Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

8 D. Montgomery, "The Transmission of Religious and Cultural Knowledge and Potentiality in Practice: An Anthropology of Social Navigation in the Kyrgyz Republic" (PhD diss. Religious Studies, Boston University, 2007).

9 S. Levi and R. Sela, *Islamic Central Asia: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); M. Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs, and Modernity: Reshaping Community in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. E. Walker (Berkeley, ca: International and Area

control Islam through the creation of the Muslim Spiritual Directorates (SADUM) and the regulation of Islamic education,10 both of which had a profound impact on everyday religious practice. What resulted was an understanding of Islam different than what existed prior to the Russian and Soviet eras, and an adaptive attitude toward the incorporation of religious and cultural forms that saw the increasing privatization of religion, i.e., the public restrictions on displays of Islam led to some practices being referred to as manifestations of culture and others being more personal than communal.11 Thus, while religion certainly did not stop being important during the Soviet period,12 people's relationship to Islam was transformed.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union ushered in a time of great opportunity for change, particularly regarding the acceptance of Islam as playing a more public role in Kyrgyz life. The opportunities for change were, as Marx reminds us, not entirely open but constrained by the historical context of what came before.13 Thus, it is worth remembering that despite early efforts of the new Kyrgyz government to elevate Islam as part of the public identity of the new Kyrgyz state, the majority of politicians that came to power in 1991 (most of whom had merely transferred positions from communist leadership to a democratic parliament) were not viewed as being particularly pious or publicly Muslim. Islam became an important part of the narrative of the state, but the Kyrgyz state was to remain a secular state, and the new government merely adopted the Soviet conventions for regulating and controlling religion— religious education and religious practice—through the creation of the Muftiate (Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan) and the State Agency for Religious Affairs (formerly the State Commission on Religious

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Studies, University of California, 1997); A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

10 S. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport, ct: Praeger, 2001); A. Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

11 B. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, Surrey, uk: Curzon Press, 2001); M. Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007).

12 Stalin's loosening of restrictions on Islam during World War II, in order to gain support from the Central Asians for the war demonstrates this, as do Gorbachev's later reforms through *glasnost* and *perestroika*. See Y. Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Khalid, *Islam after Communism*.

13 K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Whitefish, mt: Kessinger, 2004).

Affairs). As such, governmental structures and attitudes did not evolve or change in the same way that the role of religion in the public sphere did.

Kyrgyzstan has seen a flourishing of economic, political, and religious opportunities since the end of the Soviet Union. This does not mean that lives have become easier overall, only that the transition in how life was negotiated changed in ways that allowed some to capitalize and others to feel as if they lost out in the transition. This is a sentiment commonly reflected in some people's romanticization of Soviet times and other's discussions of progress. The transition to self-governance has been an uneven affair and it would be inaccurate to portray it as being entirely negative. But the progress has not matched the hopes, promises, and potential one could have imagined for the country in 1991. Many people are working now in jobs that do not match their Soviet-era training—e.g., engineers driving taxis or educators selling in the markets— and the availability of skilled jobs is perceived to have declined. Large-scale, unregulated migrations to the cities are changing the dynamics of trade, put- ting new strains on urban and social life, and labor migration has some citizens dividing their lives between the place where they grew up and the place where they found work, feeling at home in neither.14 Politics has been marked by inconsistent rhetoric on democracy and policies of development; if anything, the two uprisings (2005 and 2010) have been the manifestation of dissatisfaction with governance at various levels. In many contexts, the state has let people down.15

This is not to suggest that life in Kyrgyzstan is or has been experienced solely as hopeless or in absolute decline, but rather that hope is not always, or consistently, associated with the state or its functionaries.16 The experience of democracy has been a negative one for many who have had to become accustomed to the absence of reliable social services and been forced to find other means of support. Among the community in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan for which the above vignettes were intimately relevant, the state continues to

14 M. Reeves, "Introduction: Contested Trajectories and a Dynamic Approach to Place," *Central Asian Survey*, 30, no. 3/4 (2011): 307–330; M. Reeves, "Black Work, Green Money: Remittances, Ritual, and Domestic Economies in Southern Kyrgyzstan," *Slavic Review*, 71, no. 1 (2012): 108–134.

15 See E. McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism*, 56, no. 3 (2009): 16–28; A. Khamidov, "The Lessons of the 'Nookat Events': Central Government, Local Officials and Religious Protests in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey*, 32, no. 2 (2013): 148–160.

16 D. Montgomery (ed.), "Negotiating Well-being in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey,* 32, no. 4 (2013), special issue.

exist but not in a meaningful way. Or at least not in the productive, moral way they wish that it did.

When functionaries of the state, such as the policemen described above, appear as predatory, a moral framing of Islam can be offered as a more tangible solution to the problems of everyday life than current governance. In such circumstances, popular, or at least local, disengagement with the state is not difficult to appreciate. As will be discussed later, this captures the motive in moving toward religion more than discussions of poverty or radicalism. Here, it is worth looking at democracy from the perspective of someone for whom religion is a lived category that guides life, where one may be struggling with the challenges of everyday life but equally concerned with—and believing in—a transcendent reality beyond the everyday sufferings of life, a world one enters in death, *inshallah*. It is somewhat uncommon to allow religious conceptions such as the rewards of heaven or the punishments of hell to be part of a public political understanding, but it influences, at least for some, the religious interpretation of the experience of democracy.

Stories of Islam and Daily Life

Stories of Islam are told and imagined as relevant to people's lives as much today as they were in the seventh century. Parents tell their children about moral behavior. Friends talk about Islam on the streets and in restaurants, in public and in private. Imams preach. There is an everyday environment in which at least some part of the message of Islam is conveyed. This was part of the context in which Central Asia was understood as being Muslim even during the Soviet era. It does not mean, however that the message of Islam is understood or embraced by all in the same way. Of course, it is not. Everyday conversations about Islam should not be taken to imply theological sophistication; frequency does not always lead to depth. But for many of my interlocutors, the contribution of Islam is general and applicable through stories easy to understand. Many of those who identify as being religious take the stories of Islam seriously. To them, the example of Muhammad is not history so much as a tangible example of how one governs in the will of God's providence.

That is how people think of the relationship between religion's offerings and social life and the state. Religion provides an example, a message of how God wants this world to be, yet the instability, violence, arrests, riots, mafia control, abuse of power described in the vignette with which I began, all convey the picture of an environment not meeting its potential. This does not mean that

there is an incompatibility with democracy or the state, or even an incompatibility with a secular form of governance. It can be persuasively argued that a secular state is necessary for a Muslim to be able to truly submit to God, for in an environment where religion is not mandated but rather optional, devotion is a gift freely made.17 For many Central Asians, the idea of secularism is not problematic but rather, since the Soviet period, a way of understanding religion.18 The majority is comfortable with the roles of politicians and the roles of religious leaders being distinctly different.

In Kyrgyzstan people are familiar with the rhetoric of democracy and take various aspects of voting and protest as indication of what democracy is. They vote for their politicians and are as dissatisfied with their elected officials as people in more established democracies. That they could express their discontent through protest led some observers to generically ascribe such freedoms to democracy. For some, freedom and democracy even became synonymous, more shorthand for the post-Soviet transition and state than a strict political concept. Their understanding of democracy was not in a Tocquevilleian sense; rather, as the post-Soviet stages of corruption became couched in the language of democracy, my interlocutors conveyed their understanding of democracy not as a value so much as a label for the corruption and inequality of the post-Soviet independent state.19

It is in this context that they have *experienced* "democracy" and been nonplused by it. Some have felt it to be an excuse, a Western label used to justify the predatory nature of the state. Some have seen the cooperation and support Western governments and Western-funded NGOs give to the state as a sign of complicity. In returning to the Tablighi Jama'at missionary and the Hizb ut- Tahrir members mentioned in the vignette, both make sense of their experience in relation to the actions of state functionaries and the struggles they see their friends and family encountering. Their frame of reference vis-à-vis social

17 A. An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge, ma: Harvard University Press, 2008).

18 A. Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, no. 4 (2003): 573–598; D. Montgomery and J. Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link between Religiosity, Radicalism, and Rebellion in Central Asia" (paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Boston, ma, November 24, 2013).

19 Many of my interlocutors do not make a distinction between democracy and political economy. While they recognize a difference when pushed, colloquially the terms get used interchangeably because the transition to the market economy is seen as concomitant to the transition to democracy.

order comes less from political theory than from Islamic conceptions of justice. The individuals discussed in relation to the vignette are by no means purists in terms of theological teaching, but are more opportunistic, capitalizing on the shortcomings of a seemingly dysfunctional state—dysfunctional at least in respect to providing services to the population—to advance their understanding of Islam.

Central to their understanding of Islam, as alluded to earlier, is their belief (or at least rhetoric) that their actions in this world influence the rewards of an afterlife. God is present in their imagination and *jinn*—spiritual creatures with free will to be good, evil, or neutral—play an active role in human experience.20 As such, both sociological and cosmological forces play into their understanding of people's actions. It is this religious interpretation of the experience of democracy that leads them to advocate a morality beyond democracy and state.

Morality beyond Democracy and State

One can draw inspiration from any number of sources to extoll the virtues of the state. Equally, there are countless vantage points from which one can see the failures of the state. This oscillation between virtue and failure is perspectival, influenced largely by how one understands his or her living conditions relative to others. Such is the context in which understandings of governance get moralized.

In the decades after independence, people who worked in the Soviet Union and who expected to retire with pensions increasingly romanticize the security and care the Soviet system gave. When questioned about the freedoms the communist structure restricted, many of my interlocutors who were in their early 30s or older at the time of independence felt their standard of living was better then; that there was more certainty about their futures; that they would be taken care of into old age; and that they were somehow more appreciated. As one friend put it, "Freedom is good, in theory, but it does not feed my family. Before, we had everything." Such sentiments reflect the disaffection many feel about the current state of the state.21 Politicians are seen busying themselves

20 See B. Drieskens, *Living with Djinns: Understanding and Dealing with the Invisible in Cairo* (London: Saqi Books, 2009); J. Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 203–229.

21 See M. Reeves, J. Rasanayagam, and J. Beyer (eds), *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

with things that do not improve everyday life. Meanwhile, most of the people with whom I talk believe that there are fewer skilled jobs in what people trained for, less financial security, and less confidence that the state will actually improve the standard of living. Protests and political changes have been interpreted by many of my interlocutors not as moves toward reform based on ideology but rather as individual actors seeking to maximize individual gains. In talking about such self-serving individuals, there is both a sense of dismissal and disdain among my interlocutors who feel they are on their own.

They turn to this context when they need to moralize the conditions in which they are living and to claim that they cannot rely on the state. This means different things to different people. For some it means going about their work without making any assumptions that there is a state able to provide them with any social services. After the 2005 and 2010 uprisings, for example, many people simply returned to the jobs they had the day before. Though worried about the possibility the change of government would lead to unrest, few with whom I spoke actually felt it would matter who was in power. As a taxi driver in the south summarized this sentiment in 2005, "The government did not help yesterday, and I do not believe in them for tomorrow." He went on to talk about his obligation to his family and that it was they who were his social security, not the state.

For others, the inability to rely on the state has led them to turn inward, focusing locally on their communities where services are provided oftentimes in informal ways. This, for some, has been part of what it means to be religious; Islam makes helping those in need a moral obligation, enacted through the holidays of Orozo Ait (Eid al-Fitr) and Kurban Ait (Eid al-Adha), to share wealth and take care of friends and the needy. It is, of course, an exaggeration to suggest that the Kyrgyz state no longer provides services, for it does. There are police, schools, roads that occasionally get repaired, and meager pensions that occasionally get paid. But it is quite common for police to have to subsidize their incomes by accepting bribes or turning to other ways of extorting money from people. Likewise, because salaries are so low, grades are some- times purchased as teachers supplement their incomes. Minimal investment in the deteriorating infrastructure, such as roads, serves as a reminder of better days. Because the presence of the state pales with respect to memories of the past, the message of groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamat offers more optimism than what many see from the state.

That some have turned away from the state and are dissatisfied with the government they have experienced as democracy is not surprising. Yet it is a very small group that actually wants to replace the current government structure with a theocratic one. Most who have embraced Islam and who are

sympathetic to the moral standards of conduct it implies have merely disengaged from the state and become increasingly focused on the local. Nonetheless, there is a particular historical context through which this disengagement is understood as dangerous. This context relates to: Western post-Enlightenment political thought regarding religion; the inherited Soviet mentality; and a traditional structure of governance that becomes all part of the contemporary political setting.

The Dangers of Disengagement

The tension between the modern state and religion has evolved out of a long history that includes the European wars of religion that followed the Protestant Reformation and led to the Peace of Westphalia to the very foundation of the French Republic and the principles on which the modern nation-state emerged. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) gave a basis for national self-determination upon the idea of state sovereignty and recognition of the earlier Peace of Augsburg (1555) that gave a prince the right to determine the religion of the state over which he ruled.22 Religion was less an individual choice than a privilege determined and controlled by the monarchy. The French Revolution (1789–1799) led to the collapse of the absolute monarchy and the various privileges—religious, feudal, and aristocratic—that it had empowered.23 As the emerging nation-state struggled with developing its citizenry, the potential threat of religion to the power structures of the state was articulated by Clermont-Tonnerre's 1789 "Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions": "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals."24 Despite it being accepted that Christianity could reconstitute itself within the state, Clermont-Tonnerre points to the transnational fear that permeates much thought today (particularly around Muslims): that religious commitments beyond the state can be fundamentally threatening to the state supporting nationalism as the foundation for allegiance.

All of this may seem very distant from the context of Kyrgyzstan and Muslims disengaging from the state, but what it points to is an accepted understanding of Western democratic thought relative to religion, i.e., religion

22 D. Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, nj: Princeton University Press, 2001).

23 S. Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

24 S. Lappin, "Israel and the New Anti-Semitism," in R. Rosenbaum and C. Ozick (eds), *Those Who Forget the Past: The Question of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Random House, 2004), 508.

should not be allowed to the extent it publicly threatens to disrupt the nation. This is the basis on which the police in the vignette feel justified detaining young students distributing a questionnaire about religion and the Uzbek government in justifying the Andijan killings. Religion, to the extent that people place their hopes for a future with it as the basis for social order rather than that of the state, creates uneasiness for hegemonic powers.

This uneasiness points to a tension between state and religion and questions about their separation. In "On the Jewish Question," Marx responds to Bruno Bauer's claim that political equality can only come in a secular state that does not afford identities such as religion to be manifest. Marx disagrees, arguing that the secular state presupposes religion and reconceptualizes the relationship citizens have to religion. For Marx, the secular state offers a way for individuals to be understood as disaggregated from their religious identities.25 In other words, the secular state allows religion to be present but pushed to the side as ancillary to the agenda of the state.

There is much debate on secularism and the relation of the secular to the state,26 but the point that concerns me here is less the debate and more a note that the idea of the secular is a concept that comes out of a particular tradition, in a particular time, and in response to a particular context.27 All of these particulars are not inherently Central Asian, but rather dominant in Western understandings of what modern governance implies and reflect the secularist culture-building foundational to the Soviet project.28

Campaigns of violence around the world that involve a dimension of religion—even if often only a rhetorical dimension—lead nonreligious political elites to make secularist assumptions about the nature of governance and to advocate for the privatization and disaggregation of religion from the public mission of the state. The separation of religion and state becomes seen as the formative way of implementing governance, and in the states that emerged out of the Soviet Union this has been mostly supported because the leaders of

25 K. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (New York: Penguin, 1974), 211–241.

26 P. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, mi: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999); T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, ca: Stanford University Press, 2003); C. Calhoun, M. Juergensmeyer, and J. VanAntwerpen (eds), *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

27 A. Seligman, "Secularism, Liberalism and the Problem of Tolerance: The Case of the usa," *Theoria*, 55, no. 115 (2008): 17–31.

28 S. Luehrmann, *Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Khalid, "A Secular Islam."

the new states generally emerged out of leadership positions in the communist party, where religious activity often meant expulsion. Even when the new Central Asian states turned to Islam as part of an identity that distinguished them from the predecessor government and, in part, legitimated their claims of sovereignty, the understanding of religion was, pro forma, very much a continuation of the past: the people can have religion, but religion should not interfere with governance.

The purpose of governance, or at least one notable ideal, is a system supporting the maintenance of social order, which is also seen by many of my interlocutors as a moral order. One problem or challenge is that secularists do not see the state in the same way Islamists do. They assume that Islamists should see the state the same way as a secularist, that there is a certain "enlightenment" embodied in a secularist understanding of the separation of religion and the public, and the privatization of religion in relationship to the public. This, however, is only one of many ways of seeing individual and group relationships to social order; one that ignores the theological and eschatological values on which religion rests its morality.

Understanding Islam beyond democracy and the state is to understand and take seriously the thrust of Islam's moral claims and vision. And this aspect is seldom considered by those for whom religion is not a lived category. To those for whom religion is a lived category—a defining consideration of behavior and everyday life—the only way to make sense of obligations, be it to governance or even neighborliness, is morally. Thus, many of my interlocutors are unsympathetic to the foundations upon which religious values get separated from the state, even as the majority accepts a version of secularism inherited from the Soviets. Instead, they see events like the vignette above as representational of the moral laxity of state functionaries that they see as threatening the very nature of what it means to live a good and moral life. Those who feel disaffected by the state and turned deeper to Islam to offer a just vision of community and care are guided by moral convictions as much as anything else. And in some instances, they cease to recognize the legitimacy and relevance of the state to their lives.

Conclusion

Society is moralistic in precept and act, with law becoming the codification of morality. The problem my interlocutors face is when the enactment of the law is no longer experienced as moral. Liberal hegemonic visions of the state and governance tend to leave religion out, either viewing it as something people

will "get over" or as something that belongs to the private. In part, this is because many leaders and others contributing to state building, including international actors, do not appreciate the role of religion as a lived category because for them it is not a lived category. When seen as an integrated, moral, and experiential response to shortcomings of society, Islamic order (or religious order more generally) is a logical solution to the problem of social order, with its own lessons to teach democracy and the state. How people experience the state impacts their understandings of democracy and helps to explain why many find hope not in the state, but in the local and in the religious.