

INDEPENDENT ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA: REASONS BEHIND INDEPENDENT
ISLAMIC LEADERS' RESISTANCE TOWARDS THE STATE CONTROL OF
RELIGION IN KYRGYZSTAN

A THESIS

Presented to the MA Programme
of the OSCE Academy
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Politics and Security Programme (Central Asia)

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September 2014

ABSTRACT

Despite the vast amount of research conducted by scholars from different disciplines on Islam in Central Asia, reasons behind the emergence of independent Islamic leaders have remained a largely untapped source for studying the reasons of tension between state and religion in secular countries. Scholars have focused on radical and political manifestations of Islam. This thesis provides a different perspective on Islam in Central Asia by exploring factors for official *imams* to pledge loyalty to the state and reasons for independent *imams* to contest state control and the definition of Islam in Kyrgyzstan. It reveals how and why Islamic religious leaders either cooperate with the state or resist the control it exerts over Muslim population. The case studies of two imams from Kara Suu are explored in the study. The analysis of their stories focuses on their education, life experiences, features of the town they lived and worked in, the political and economic situation in the country, retaining of material assets, and their personalities. The study's results show that independent *imams*' resistance is conditioned by political and economic liberalization. Their decisions are also reinforced by educational and life experiences, the environment they operate in, and personality. The results illustrate that material reward is the most significant explanatory factor for *imams* to cooperate with the state. My interdisciplinary study contributes to the existing debate by exploring the interplay between political and economic liberalization and the emergence of mild form of political Islam.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are a number of people that I would like to offer my sincere gratitude for helping bring this study into existence. My most immediate debt is to my supervisor Mr. Alisher Khamidov for being patient, giving encouragement to produce a decent work, and providing valuable advice.

Special thanks to Ms. Susanne Wiedemann, my long-time tutor, for her support of all my ideas and aspirations. I also want to thank Prof. Emil Dzhuraev, Prof. Alexander Wolters, and Prof. Payam Foroughi for their help and willingness to contribute to my study. I greatly appreciate their valuable and enthusiastic help with my research.

I would like to express an immense gratitude to the Administration of the OSCE Academy for the research grant, which allowed conducting important fieldwork in Osh and Kara Suu.

My heartfelt gratitude is to all members of the As-Sarakhsi mosque in Kara Suu, who displayed enormous hospitality during my visit. Their enthusiasm, eagerness to participate in my interviews, and knowledge helped me to gain clear insights into Rafiq Qori's life.

Last, but not least, I wish to offer a special thank to my family members for their understanding, support, empathy, and encouragement. I dedicate my work to my sister Asel, who is going through a very difficult period in her life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Research Design.....	6
Concepts.....	8
Structure of the Thesis.....	9
CHAPTER 2.....	11
Literature Review.....	11
Theoretical Framework.....	18
CHAPTER 3.....	21
History of Islam’s Control in Central Asia.....	21
Division of the <i>Ulama</i> : Hanafi versus Fundamentalists.....	24
CHAPTER 4.....	28
Alauddin Mansour’s Biography.....	28
Rafiq Qori’s Biography.....	29
Alauddin Mansour’s Topics of Lectures.....	31
Rafiq Qori’s Topics of Lectures.....	32
Public Opinion about Alauddin Mansour.....	35
Public Opinion about Rafiq Qori.....	36
CHAPTER 5.....	41
Manifestation of Rafiq Qori’s Independence.....	41
Analysis of the Reasons for Independence and Contestation.....	44
Political and Economic Liberalization.....	44
Education.....	46
External Influence.....	48
Radicalizing Effect of the Two Brothers-in-Law.....	50

Personality as an Explanatory Agency Factor.....	51
Conclusion.....	52
 CHAPTER 6.....	 54
Manifestation of Alauddin Mansour’s Loyalty.....	54
Analysis of the Reasons for Cooperation.....	56
Education.....	57
Level of Religious Knowledge.....	58
Belonging to the Hanafi <i>Madhab</i>	59
Ethnic Belonging and Long-Term Benefits.....	60
Material Gains from the Cooperation.....	61
Conclusion.....	62
 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS.....	 63
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 65

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It was a warm day in Kara Suu, as I sat down with my interviewee Kasymzhan at the As-Sarakhsi mosque. It is on the border with Uzbekistan. The river *Sherkhan Say* separates the mosque from the neighboring country, and a cold breeze accompanied our conversation. Kasymzhan was responsible for the recitation of Quran at Friday and Eid prayers, when Muhammad Rafiq Kamalov, widely known as Rafiq Qori, was the *imam* of the mosque before he was killed in 2006. I decided to ask him recite the Quran - he is a *hafith*¹ after all - and recited some of the verses I knew, to establish trust and connection. His answer to my question about the reasons for *imams*' loyalty to the state and their contestation of the state's control and definition of Islam, despite pressure and intimidation, was fairly simple. Kasymzhan decided to answer my question with a *hadith*² he knew well. He explained to me:

“The answer lies in the *hadith*. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “When the end of the world will be close, you, Muslims, will appear as food for other people. They will want to grab and eat you. You will be looked upon as food.” Then, the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him: “Why will we become like food on the plate? Will there be too few of us? Will there be few Muslims and many infidels? Will the crowd of infidels do these to the small group of Muslims?” The Prophet (peace be upon him) answered: “No. There will be a lot of you; many more than there are now. However, Allah will place *vahn*³ in your hearts.” The companions asked him: “What is *vahn*, the Messenger of Allah?” He answered: “*Vahn* is the fear of death and love for the material wealth in this world.” A person who fears death [excessively] and attaches himself/herself to material wealth of this world will have *vahn* placed in his/her heart. The person will not tell what he/she knows [because of fear]. The person will keep committing sins, even if he/she is aware of the sinful status of his/her deeds because the person loves earthly matters

¹ A person who has memorized Quran fully and specializes on its proper recitation.

² A traditional account of things said or done by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

³ A word in Arabic language, which designates human weakness and inability to bring changes into one's life.

more, loves to have fun in this world, wants to hold high posts in the government and fears death. I think these are the reasons.”⁴

Clearly, Kasymzhan’s answer is relevant to the study of both official *imams* who are loyal to the state and independent *imams* who are critical of the way the state regulates religion and contest the control it exerts over Muslims. Independent and official Islam are two main topics of my study. Kasymzhan’s story is an attempt to find answers to modern challenges brought by the secular regimes in the written legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), left more than fourteen hundred years ago. His answer provides a glimpse into how some ordinary Muslims explain the fact that religious leaders pledge loyalty to the state and decide to align with it, while others contest state control and the definition of Islam through the criticism of the government policies towards religion and the decision to be independent from the government regulatory bodies.

Scholars from various disciplines have studied Islam in Central Asia. The existing literature on Islam is vast and rich in findings. The majority of the studies conducted have been dedicated to the topic of interplay between politics and Islam in the Central Asian countries. State policies towards Islam, populations’ responses to them, and the emergence of radical Islamic groups are the focal points of the majority of research. Despite the vast existing scholarly literature on the relationship between Islam and politics in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia overall, it has become a common practice to give essentialist definition of Islam. There are two main categories scholars describe while referring to Islam in the region: official - state backed - Islam with an apolitical nature and radical Islam, representatives of which call for the overthrow of the current secular regimes and the establishment of an Islamic state. This division serves as a starting point for almost every research. However, the reality on the ground illustrates that the division among Muslims in Kyrgyzstan is more complex than described in the works of scholars. It is misleading to accept the definitional dichotomy present in the literature. The truth is that it is not all black and white - there are shades of grey. “There is no one Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia.”⁵ Neither there are two. There are Muslims who associate neither with the state-sanctioned

⁴ From the interview with Kasymzhan, resident of Kara Suu.

⁵ Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Current History*, October 2005, 336-342, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/final_mcglin_current_history.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014).

Islam nor with radical Islamic groups. Their attitude towards the way the state controls Islam in the country is critical. However, they do not support the call for the radical political transformation, such as the establishment of an Islamic state or caliphate advocated by such organizations as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (the Party of Islamic Liberation).

This category of Muslims is described best with the word “independent”, and they represent independent Islam. In contrast to radical Islamists, who “seek to replace secular governance with rule based on *sharia*, or Islamic law”⁶, and to adherents of official Islam, who “seek common ground with the political elite”⁷ and the current order, independent Muslims neither hold radical views nor take a complicit stance over the state’s control of Islam. Thus, independent Islam represents the type of Islam that is in between the two extremes, it does not take a quietist stance over politics, nor it advocates a complete change of order. It is a mild form of radical Islam. What independent Islam shares with radical one is the fact that it is political in a sense that it is critical of the state definition and control of Islam. Politicization is a common umbrella under which representatives of radical and independent Islam find themselves. Independent clerics respond differently to the state policies regulating religion than their counterparts - state-loyal official *imams*. Official *imams* pledge loyalty to the state and cooperate with the state authorities; independent *imams* contest control of Islam by the state through criticism and distance themselves from the government. The explanatory factors for the difference in responses between official and independent *imams* are an untapped source for studying reasons for tension between religion and state in a secular state.

It is relevant to study independent Islam under the common arch of political Islam. Independent *imams*’ criticism of the state and their contest of the control over religion is the hallmark of their engagement into politics. Their popularity is an asset for public mobilization, including for political purposes. Thus, it is relevant to look at how scholars across various disciplines have explained the emergence and popularity of political - often dubbed also as radical - Islam. The mainstream explanation for the emergence of political Islam has been the autocratic nature of the regimes. Political scientists Emmanuel

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Karagiannis, Eric McGlinchey, Vitaly Naumkin, and Alisher Ilkhamov have identified Central Asian secular regimes' heavy-handed autocratic policies as the foremost reason for the emergence of radical Islamic groups.⁸ They argue that in the condition of limited channels for the contestation of power, constant repression of Muslims in the name of the fight against terrorism, and socio-economic problems, radical Islamist ideology has found a fertile setting and substantial membership base. Historian Adeeb Khalid and journalist Ahmed Rashid hold a similar opinion about the emergence of Islamic groups that challenge the current order. Rashid states that "the growing popularity of militant Islam in Central Asia is primarily due to the repressiveness of the Central Asian regimes."⁹ Similarly, Khalid argues that the IMU is driven by the hatred towards Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov, and that "the Hizb ut-Tahrir is primary a vehicle for dissatisfaction with the current political and moral order in the region."¹⁰

However, there are alternative and complementary explanations for the emergence of radical Islam as well as independent Islam in the region. In his study of independent religious leaders in Uzbekistan McGlinchey states that societal demand for *imams* not to associate with the Karimov regime is the main reason for religious leaders not to align with the government in Uzbekistan.¹¹ His article, "Islamic Religious Leaders in Uzbekistan," is the most relevant study to my thesis. Martha Brill Olcott argues that radical Islam in Central Asia was rooted into the division of *ulama*¹² in the 1970s and was accentuated only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the article, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," she states "that evolution of radical Islam in the years prior to and immediately

⁸ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010); Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Eric McGlinchey, "The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25, № 3, (2005): 554-566, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/cssame_mcglinc_final.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014); Alisher Ilkhamov, "Uzbek Islamism: Imported Ideology or Grassroot Movement?" *Middle East Report* 221 (2001): 40-46.

⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2003), 228.

¹⁰ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007), 163.

¹¹ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹² Multiple form of the Arabic word 'aalim', which translates as scholar.

following the collapse of Soviet rule have their roots in earlier decades.”¹³ The literature on the explanation for the rise of radical Islam in Central Asia is abundant. Yet the literature on independent Islam is close to non-existent. It is limited to a few articles that fail to present a bigger picture on why do religious leaders opt to contest state control of Islam.

My thesis explores the cooperation between the state and religion in Kyrgyzstan. It is centered on the topic of state control and the definition of Islam and religious leaders’ various responses to it. The main research question of the study is: “Why do some *imams* - religious leaders - pledge loyalty to the state whereas others contest its control and definition of Islam?” In my thesis, I explore stories of two *imams* from the same town of Kara Suu, who studied from the same people, who belong to the same generation and to one ethnic group, and yet they hold completely different attitudes towards the state. Rafiq Qori chose to be independent from the state - he did not cooperate - and was critical of the government’s policy towards religion, before he was killed in 2006, during the joint military operation conducted by the special forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁴ Alauddin Mansour, who embodies an official *imam*, still holds his job as the imam at the Al-Bukhari mosque in Kara Suu. So there are two case studies. The foremost goal of my research is the exploration of independent and official Islam, which have been studied significantly less than the radical manifestation of Islam.

My study is significant for numerous reasons. First of all, it proposes more realistic and multi-faceted definitional approach to the study of Islam. Its exploration of independent Islam is a significant contribution to the literature dominated by the simplistic division, which conflates various interpretations of Islam. Thus, it will partially fill the gap created by the heavy focus on radical Islam. Secondly, it is a study built on for the major part on empirical data acquired through extensive fieldwork. Independent Islam has not been studied a lot before - let alone employing case study research design - and remains largely an untapped source for studying the interplay between the religious elite and the state in secular countries. Last, but not least reason is the inter-disciplinary research design of the study. It explores political, social, psychological, historical, and economic reasons

¹³ Martha Brill Olcott, “The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, 68, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁴ Gulnoza Saidazimova, “Kyrgyzstan: Prominent Imam Killed in Security Raid,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 7, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070381.html> (accessed May 3, 2014).

behind religious leaders' decisions either to be compliant with the state control of Islam or to contest it.

The objective of the thesis is to enrich findings of independent Islam and of political Islam overall. It does not defy previous findings in the field; instead, my study contributes to the existing debate. I aim to explore how and why religious leaders respond differently to the patronage-based political system from the top and societal demands from below. The study seeks to answer the broad question of why contestation from the side of religious leaders takes place with the specific examples of two different *imams*. My thesis is a comparative study of two different individuals who - albeit coming from the same milieu of politicized clerics through their education - held contrasting paradigms of the state-religion cooperation model. Ultimately, it aims to explore whether and how the government policies in Kyrgyzstan, personal experience, educational background, and other structural factors affect religious leaders' choice to either pledge loyalty or be independent from the state.

There is no single explanation neither to the question why religious leaders decide to cooperate with the state, or to the question why they contest state control and the definition of Islam. A complex set of reasons are behind both official and independent *imams'* choices. For official *imams*, the set consists of ideological, political, and personal benefit reasons. For independent *imams*, there are structural and agency factors. Economically and politically liberal environment, their education, repressive regimes, and influence of the environment comprise the structural set of reasons. Agency factor - personality is also important in exploring independent religious leaders.

Research Design

My thesis is based on the two case studies. The selection of the case study method with an analytical approach provides a different look at the study of Islam because the majority of sources lack sufficient empirical component. The majority of scholarly articles are built on secondary data and macro-level factors, such as politics and economy. So far, micro-level analysis seems to have been unpopular among scholars. While giving decent explanations to the question of why some Muslims decide to go "against" the state, macro-level factors still fail to provide concrete examples in support of the argument. Thus, they overlook the importance of primary data, which is integral for micro-level analysis. Contrary to the

conventional methodology, my research is reliant mostly on the primary data collected during the fieldwork.

I used primary data acquired during my fieldwork in Osh, Kara Suu, and the capital Bishkek conducted in May 2014, to answer my research question. Extensive interviews were conducted over the course of two weeks. A comprehensive answer to my research question required detailed information on the lives, education, and works of Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour. I first travelled to the city of Osh. In Osh, I interviewed the Osh oblast *kazy* Niyazaly and the Osh city *kazy* Ubaidulla, to learn the status quo of cooperation between religion and the state in Kyrgyzstan. Their opinion is important for my study because it reflects the opinion held by the state-backed traditional Hanafi Islam clerics. My second destination point was Kara Suu. My trip to Kara Suu was fruitful in terms of data collected. There, I managed to interview family members of Rafiq Qori - namely his brother Sadykzhan Kamalov and his cousin Shamsuddin - and numerous friends and visitors of the As-Sarakhsi mosque who knew him well. The word of my enquiry about Rafiq Qori seems to have reached Alauddin Mansour before my visit to him. Because of the long-standing hatred between the two *imams*, Alauddin Mansour refused to talk to me, explaining it with the statement that he had neither the wish nor time to talk to a person who wrote about Rafiq Qori. However, I still managed to collect data about him from the residents of Kara Suu I met at mosques and in taxis. It was in Bishkek where I found people who knew enough about Alauddin Mansour. The former mufti of Kyrgyzstan Chubak aji Zhalilov revealed what he knew about Alauddin Mansour. So did a former employee of the *muftiat* and the *imam* of the Uchkun mosque in Bishkek - Moldo Sabyr. The interview with the latter was of special usefulness, as he belongs to the same generation of clerics and, consequently, was aware of various events in Alauddin Mansour's life.

I avoided distribution of consent forms to my interviewees because of my dire previous experience of conducting interviews for my senior thesis. Consent forms in the form of documents simply created suspicion and distrust among respondents, and they eventually refused to talk, citing the consent form as the reason during my fieldwork in Osh in December 2012. Despite the avoidance of consent forms, all my interviewees were verbally informed about the nature and goals of my research in the language

understandable to them. They knew that their participation in the study is voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time without having to explain the reasons. None of the respondents requested anonymity; they agreed to make their names discreet in the study.

All research designs face limitations. There are several drawbacks to my methodology as well. The shortage of time significantly decreased the scope of my study. The thesis is an attempt to answer a broad multi-faceted question with two case studies. The employed methodology offers the advantage of being more detailed and concrete; however, the number of case studies and the nature of my respondents require rather caution when generalizing my findings to the broader category of religious leaders, be they official or independent. Despite these limitations, my study contributes to the existing debate and the literature on Islam and provides detailed personal accounts capable of shedding light onto how and why religious leaders in Kyrgyzstan obey or contest the state's control of Islam.

Concepts

There are four concepts that are important for my study. They require attachment of clear not ambivalent meanings. These are official, neutral, independent, and radical Islam. Acceptance of one these by imams designates acceptance of its ideology and outlook on the question of interplay between politics and Islam.

The concept of neutral Islam is described best with the version of faith preached by Muhammadjon Rustamov, widely known as Hindustani Damla, who was the establisher of underground schools in Soviet Dushanbe.¹⁵ Despite running an underground school that ran parallel to the Soviet-sanctioned religious education institutions, Hindustani Damla held a compliant attitude to the state. He “defended local customs and traditions against attacks from all directions, and he took a resolutely quietist stance on questions of politics.”¹⁶ According to him, the success of Muslims lies in “reliance on God (*tavakkul*) and patience (*sabr*) rather than in political or military struggle.”¹⁷ Thus, my definition of neutral Islam is

¹⁵ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Ibid. 114.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the one which is apolitical in nature and whose moderate followers are compliant with government policies, but are not necessarily fond of it. Official Islam is similar to neutral Islam in terms of its call to rely on God and be patient to counter challenges brought by the secular regimes. However, in contrast to neutral *imams*, clerics who represent official Islam pledge loyalty to the state and manifest it through service.

The concept of radical Islam often stands for the extreme fundamentalist interpretation of faith. It is political in a sense that it seeks to dismantle secular regimes with rule based on sharia law.¹⁸ The IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir are two organizations that represent radical Islam in the Central Asian region. For my research, I will define radical Islam as any form or interpretation of Islam that advocates to overthrow the current secular governments and the establishment of an Islamic state. Independent Islam bares similarities with radical Islam. Independent clerics and ordinary independent Muslims call for the change - in the form of social, economic, and political improvement in the country. They do so through contestation of the state control of Islam and criticism over the methods and strategy the authorities use to restrain the Muslim population. Thus, independent Islam is a sub-category of political Islam, which is described by criticism of the state policies directed at controlling Islam without the call to get rid of the secular regimes. Independent imams pick on and condemn what they find as the state's faults and shortcomings in the formulation and implementation of religious policy.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters, with introduction, description of the research design, and definition of concepts being the first chapter. The second chapter is dedicated to literature review and theoretical framework for the study. I conducted the literature review under the broader question of what causes tension between state and religion in secular countries. Authors and their works are grouped into three, and their works with main arguments are presented accordingly. One group of scholars asserts that political Islam emerged in Central Asia as the result of repressive regimes. The second group argues that the emergence of radical Islam is tied to the class of civilizations brought by the era of

¹⁸ Eric McGlinchey, "Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Current History*, October 2005, 336-342, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglin/final_mcglin_current_history.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014).

globalization and interdependence. The last group of scholars - whose statement is often adopted by the governments - argues that the Muslims are subject to influence from terrorists and radicals from outside Central Asia. The arguments of all three groups find support and reflect reality to certain extent. However, more complete and realistic picture appears only when these arguments are utilized together.

The third chapter discusses the history of the control of Islam from the time of rule by Timur up to nowadays. Also, it presents the history and description of the division between *ulama* in the region in the 1970s and 1980s. Both the history of the control of Islam and the description of the division between *ulama* are integral to the understanding of further chapters, which deal with findings and their analysis.

The three consecutive chapters - the fourth, fifth, and sixth - comprise the empirical part of my thesis. The fourth chapter consists of biographies of the two imams, their audiences, the topics they talked about at Friday and Eid prayers, and the public opinion about them. The biographies tell the personal tales, including family, education, and in one case even death. The audience and topics for lectures section explores variances in people who attended the imams' mosques in terms of their age and the level of politicization. The fifth chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Rafiq Qori's contestation of the state control of Islam. First, I explore the manifestation of his contestation, and then analyze my finding from the fieldwork and existing literature in an attempt to answer my research question. The sixth chapter is dedicated to Alauddin Mansour. Similarly, I first explore how his loyalty has been manifested. Subsequently, the reasons for his cooperation and loyalty are laid out.

The last seventh chapter is the conclusion. I reiterate the main arguments yielded from the analysis in the previous two chapters. My findings contribute to the literature presented in the second chapter. They advance Martha Brill Olcott's argument on the religious radicalism having its roots in earlier decades. They fill in and contradict the arguments of the first group of scholars that state that authoritarianism is the cause behind the emergence of political Islam. My findings show that political and economic liberalization paves the way for political Islam as well. Lastly, my results reinforce McGlinchey's argument that independent imams are social entrepreneurs who respond to societal demands in their respective communities. The concluding chapter describes

implications of my research for people working in a similar the field and studying independent and political Islam. Last, but not least, I address questions my study did not answer and indicate direction for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Independent Islam has not been the focus of research for the majority of scholars. The broader category it belongs to - political Islam - has been subject of more intense research from scholars across various disciplines, including historians and international relations scholars. Hence my study belongs to the larger study category of political Islam. It is useful to review literature that provides - at least attempts to - answers to the questions: “What causes tension between religion and state in secular states?” and “Why do Muslims turn to Islamic fundamentalism/radicalism?” My literature review looks for the works dedicated to Central Asia, in order to present more comprehensive picture of the study of political Islam. The literature on political and radical Islam is vast and rich. There is no agreement between scholars about the reasons behind the emergence, popularity, and spread of radical Islam in Central Asia, as well as in other parts of the world. Scholars still disagree whether authoritarian regimes in combination with a degrading socio-economic order, the incompatibility of the Western promoted values with Islam, or the external influence by radicals from outside serve as the reasons for the upheaval of radical Islamist ideology. Despite the vast literature on political and radical Islam, there lacks a research - like mine - that explored effects of political and economic liberalization, religious educational background, and other micro-level factors on radicalization among Muslims.

One of the early explanations for the rise of radical Islam was the globalization of Western culture that allegedly causes an Islamist backlash. This thesis was proposed first by historian Bernard Lewis and popularized later by political scientist Samuel Huntington. In his 1990 article, “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, Lewis states that the reason for the emergence of radical Islam are not political, and it transcends “the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them.”¹⁹ He argues that the appearance of Islamic fundamentalism “is no less than a clash of civilizations - the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.”²⁰ According to Lewis, “the struggle of the

¹⁹ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/> (accessed May 3, 2014).

²⁰ Ibid.

fundamentalists is against two enemies [promoted by the West], secularism and modernism.”²¹ The first Muslim response to Western globalization was one of admiration and emulation, but these two eventually turned into hostility and rejection.²² The reason for the change, according to Lewis, was the political, economic, and cultural expansion of the US and European countries because “for the vast number of Middle Easterners, Western-style economic methods brought poverty, Western-style political institutions brought tyranny, even Western-style warfare brought defeat.”²³ Though controversial and disputed for its conflation of Muslims into single group of fundamentalists, Lewis’s argument remains popular among policy makers and some scholars.

Samuel Huntington popularized Lewis’s arguments in his 1993 article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” where he further develops the arguments for the clash of civilizations as the root of conflict between state and Islam. Huntington argues that “world politics have entered a new phase”²⁴ and that the fundamental source of conflict will shift from political and economic to cultural.”²⁵ He states: “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”²⁶ According to Huntington, the clashes between the representatives of the eight civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, Latin-American, and African, will clash, and all conflicts in the future - including those involving Islam - are to be explained with the help of differences along the lines of these civilizations. Put simply, differences among civilizations people belong make it troublesome to coexist in the state of peace. This argument relates to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. Huntington explains this phenomenon with the encroachment of Western civilizations into the lands inhabited primarily by Muslims. His work has not gone unnoticed in terms of criticism. Similarly to Lewis, Huntington’s argument ignores that there are number of “more tolerant, more open”²⁷ traditions of Islam, which is far greater than the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. There are multiple strains within Islamic thought. Lewis’s and Huntington’s argument is nothing but a call to “ignore the diversity

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22-49.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, 47-60.

and the richness that have characterized the history of Muslims.”²⁸ Most importantly, the clash of civilizations argument overlooks the fact that Muslims in Central Asia as well as in the Middle East do not oppose democracy as such. It is what the local regimes make of democracy that defines populations response to the West promoted democracy.

Contrary to Lewis and Huntington, political economy scholar Ismael Hussein-Zadeh in his article, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” argues that the disillusionment of population in Muslim countries with the political and economic reforms’ failure and hollowness is the first primary reason for Muslims’ turn to radical ideology of fundamentalists.²⁹ The second reason is the imperialistic policy of the US.³⁰ Hussein-Zadeh states that “it was only after more than a century and a half of imperialistic pursuits and a series of humiliating policies in the [Middle East] region that the popular masses of the Muslim world turned to religion and conservative religious leaders as sources of defiance, mobilization, and self-respect.”³¹ According to Hussein-Zadeh, the response from the initial contacts with the Western economic and political model two hundred years ago up to the last third of the twentieth century was positive. Having lived under facade democracies that hampered on their human rights and failed to bring promised economic prosperity and having witnessed imperialistic policies of the US, Muslims became receptive to radical ideology preached by fundamentalist groups. His observations “refute the claim that Islam and/or the Muslim world are inherently incompatible with modernization.”³² His argument is relevant to Central Asia, albeit the region not being the subject of the US imperialistic policies. The governments in the region have been implementing the iron-fist rule with little hope for change. Scholars cite authoritarianism and its consequences in Central Asia as the main cause for the emergence of radical Islam.

The majority of scholars specializing on Islam in Central Asia argue that the regional regimes’ heavy-handed authoritarian policies in combination with dire socio-economic conditions have caused the emergence of political Islam. Political scientist Eric

²⁸ Abdou Filali-Ansary, “What Is Liberal Islam? The Sources of Enlightened Muslim Thought,” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2): 19–33.

²⁹ Ismael Hussein-Zadeh, “The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27 (2005): 1-20.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

McGlinchey in the article, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” argues that the absence of legal channels for the contestation of power has radicalized ordinary Muslims and led them to arms of radical organizations, such as the IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir.³³ McGlinchey argues that radical Islam is a response to autocratic rule. According to him, “the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.”³⁴ McGlinchey argues that the level of contestation allowed within legal institutions is the reason why political Islam has been on the rise in Uzbekistan and kept a low profile in Kyrgyzstan. His arguments gained support among scholars and has been further developed.

Similarly, investigative journalist Ahmed Rashid in his book *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* argues that authoritarian rule is the foremost reason behind the emergence of Islamic militants in the region. Rashid states that “the growing popularity of militant Islam in Central Asia is primarily due to the repressiveness of the Central Asian regimes.”³⁵ His argument that local governments “refuse to broaden their political base, institute even the mildest of democratic reforms, or allow any kind of political opposition”³⁶ goes in hand with McGlinchey’s argument, as well as other prominent scholars.

Political scientist Vitaly Naumkin in the book *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* develops the argument proposed by McGlinchey. Naumkin evaluates the negative consequences of the policies implemented by the regimes. He argues that “poverty, unemployment, relative deprivation, social inequality, the collapse of the welfare system, corruption, and harsh authoritarianism have created fertile ground for recruiting new members to the ranks of Islamic radicals who offer simple solutions to everyday problems.”³⁷ However, the two most important factors from these are the feeling of inequality and inferiority. According to Naumkin, political Islam finds popular support

³³ Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 25, № 3, (2005): 554-566, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/cssame_mcglin_final.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2003), 228.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 262.

in Central Asia because of its call for equality and justice and most importantly the promise to install them.³⁸ His argument is echoed in the works of other scholars.

Political scientist Emmanuel Karagiannis in his book *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* presents one the most complete set of explanations for the rise of political Islam in Central Asia. Karagiannis argues that there are multiple reasons for the emergence of political Islam.³⁹ He employs four social movement theories in the book. The structural-functional theory explains the group's emergence as a response to social and economic strains, such as dire economic conditions and social hardships. The resource mobilization theory asserts that the Hizb ut-Tahrir did not come into existence just because there are social strains. According to it, availability of human, organizational, financial, legitimacy, identity, and institutional resources is crucial in explaining the rise of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. The political process theory suggests that the Hizb ut-Tahrir emerged because of political opportunities created by the absence of alternative political channels to address grievances. This point is shared and elaborated by Eric McGlinchey. According to the framing theory, Hizb ut-Tahrir has risen with the help of "successful frames that resonate with the local culture and the current political and economic realities".⁴⁰ The author's contribution to the study of Hizb ut-Tahrir – as a manifestation of political Islam – is not only his attempt to employ social movement theories. Karagiannis solves the "free rider" problem – why people join the organization while they could have enjoyed benefits of living in a utopian caliphate without participating in the process of creating it. He argues that Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideology is important in explaining its popularity in Central Asia, the region with an ideological vacuum since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Historian Adeb Khalid in his book *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* cites current dire economic, political, and social order as the reason for the emergence of political Islam and the popularity of the IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir. Khalid argues that the IMU is driven by the hatred towards Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov, and that "the Hizb ut-Tahrir is a primary vehicle for dissatisfaction with the current

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 102.

political and moral order in the region.”⁴¹ Besides his explanation for the emergence of political Islam, Khalid’s work contains other useful and relevant findings. The most important of them is Khalid’s statement about the diversity of Islamic traditions. He notes: “Islam has not one, nor two, but many faces in Central Asia and in the world at large.”⁴² This argument is supportive of my statement that the division among Muslims is much more diverse than presented in literature and media. Although being rich and informative in its findings, Khalid’s book does not go deep into the study of independent Islam. Moreover, his definition of independent Muslims is different from mine.

Political scientist Alisher Ilkhamov in his article, “Uzbek Islamism: Imported Ideology or Grassroots Movement?,” goes further in explaining the emergence of religious radicalism. In addition to the authoritarian rule, he cites the influence from Saudi Arabia as a part of the explanation for the emergence of radical Islam. His work is relevant to my research because the two imams spent their formative years in the underground schools in Soviet Uzbekistan. According to Ilkhamov, radical Islam emerged as a consequence to the emergence of religious fundamentalism in the late Soviet period.⁴³ One of his main arguments is that religious radicalism in Uzbekistan - as well as in other parts of Central Asia, since Uzbekistan was the center of Islamic learning in Soviet Central Asia - is partly imported and partly homegrown. He states: “Both viewpoints – that the IMU is imported and it is homegrown – are true to a certain degree.”⁴⁴ Ilkhamov cites brutal state repression and intolerance to any practice of religion outside of the state-sanctioned Islam as the reason for the popularity of radical ideology. He argues that representational imbalance between regional clans radicalized Muslims in the Ferghana Valley. “Since 1959, the Samarkand-Jizzak and Tashkent clans have dominated high government posts while the Ferghana clan was relegated to secondary positions, for instance, the purely decorative post of speaker of parliament.”⁴⁵ Traditional apolitical *ulama* did not have the answer to the

⁴¹ Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007), 163.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Alisher Ilkhamov, “Uzbek Islamism: Imported Ideology or Grassroots Movement?” *Middle East Report* 221 (2001): 40-46.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 46.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 48.

rising questions such as high unemployment, increasing poverty and the decreasing farming opportunities. Political Islam did, and that is how it emerged.

Political scientist Martha Brill Olcott takes up Ilkhamov's point in her article, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia", where she meticulously explores domestic roots of religious radicalism in the region. Olcott argues that radical Islam is inherent to Central Asia, and that although it appeared only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was rooted in earlier decades into the division between *ulama* in Central Asia.⁴⁶ She states that the history of Islam in Central Asia "demonstrates that evolution of radical Islam in the years just prior to and immediately following the collapse of Soviet rule have their roots in earlier decades".⁴⁷ Olcott's work is a detailed account of "doctrinal disputes within Islam that have been characteristics of the practice and teaching of faith for over five hundred years".⁴⁸ The article contains descriptions of all active *ulama* in the region, which will be useful as I will explore religious educational background of the two imams.

In the most relevant work to my study, Eric McGlinchey in his article, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," explores independent *imams* in Uzbekistan. McGlinchey argues that independent *imams* respond not to patronage-based system from above but to societal demands on the ground.⁴⁹ According to McGlinchey, independent imams are social entrepreneurs, which respond to demands laid out by the communities they serve. He states that "independent Islamic leaders in Uzbekistan are supported by Uzbek society, and it is to society's demands - and not those of President Karimov or the state - that Uzbekistan imams (local religious leaders) respond."⁵⁰ McGlinchey's argument is similar to the fundamental demand and supply theory used in economics. However, the explanation behind independent Islamic leaders' decision is more complex than portrayed in McGlinchey's work.

Although being rich and informative, the existing literature on political Islam does not fully answer the research question I ask in my study. Neither the clash of civilizations

⁴⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁴⁷ Ibid. 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁵⁰ Ibid. 124.

nor the West's imperialistic argument apply to my study. Despite the Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia, the rhythms of everyday life remain secular in a way that is inconceivable even in other secular Muslim countries.⁵¹ Central Asia was never object of so-called US imperialistic policies - at least not as in the Middle East. The majority of Central Asians seems themselves belonging more to secular culture, rather than Islam. The political explanation for the emergence of radical Islam proposed by McGlinchey, Karagiannis, Naumkin, Ilkhamov and others are heavily focused on the case of Uzbekistan, where authoritarianism is more acute than in Kyrgyzstan. Known as the darling of the West, Kyrgyzstan under President Askar Akayev turned into a space for political and economic liberalization unheard of anywhere in Central Asia till nowadays. Since my study is limited to the rule of Akayev, which lasted until March 2005, simply because of the death of Rafiq Qori in August 2006 and Alauddin Mansour's most active cooperation phase during Akayev's presidency, authoritarianism arguments do not have sufficient weight as an explanatory factor in my study. The repressive regime described in the works of scholars started with Kurmanbek Bakiyev's arrival to power following Akayev's ousting. Therefore, it was rather the environment of relative political and economic freedom in which Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour carried out their activities. McGlinchey's study of independent imams in Uzbekistan is conducted in a very different political and economic setting. Independent imams in his study did not contest the state control and definition of Islam; they were simply not praiseworthy of the Karimov regime. As seen from the literature review, scholars have not studied the emergence and popularity of political and independent Islam in the setting characterized by political and economic liberalization. The existing literature does not provide a comprehensive answer to the question on the effects of political and economic liberalization on Islamic leaders' as well as overall Muslims' response to the control the state exerts over them.

Theoretical Framework

My study of independent and official religious leaders' behavior in response to the state policies in Kyrgyzstan fits into two large debates on what causes certain type of political

⁵¹ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

behavior in general and particularly in Kyrgyzstan. First of all, findings of the thesis belong to the structure versus agency debate on what causes individuals to act in certain way, including political behavior. I explore whether structural reasons such as political, economic, and social setting or actors themselves influence their own decisions. For my study, I have adopted the critical realist approach. Critical realists assert that “while actors are the only efficient causes or sources of activity in the political world, social structures are material causes that influence political affairs by conditioning the course of action that actors chose to pursue.”⁵² The second theory I employ has been suggested by political scientist Scott Radnitz in relation to the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. In his book *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* Radnitz argues that Akayev’s liberal political and economic reforms gave birth to the new class of autonomous economic actors, which contested the state power because of the political freedom provided.⁵³

As noted by Paul Lewis, “it is impossible to engage in any sort of ordered sort of thinking about the political world without making a commitment to some social ontology, because any attempt to conceptualize political phenomena inevitably involves the adoption of some picture of the nature of social being.”⁵⁴ The terms agency and structure require definitions between moving into the topic of interplay between them. Agency is the capacity to act upon situations and it is a property of actors, which are entities able to formulate and implement decisions.⁵⁵ Social structure dictates the boundaries for actors to operate within. They “both facilitate and constrain the behavior of actors, influencing their decisions about what course of action to pursue.”⁵⁶ The debate on agency versus structure goes on. However, to explain the behavior of the two *imams*, I have adopted the view that “adequate explanations of political events require an examination of both social structure

⁵² Paul Lewis, “Agency, Structure, and Causality in Political Science: A Comment on Sibeon,” *Politics* 22 (2002), 17-23, <http://web.iaincirebon.ac.id/ebook/moon/PoliticalScience/1467-9256%252E00154.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁵³ Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Paul Lewis, “Agency, Structure, and Causality in Political Science: A Comment on Sibeon,” *Politics* 22 (2002), 17, <http://web.iaincirebon.ac.id/ebook/moon/PoliticalScience/1467-9256%252E00154.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and agency.”⁵⁷ The results of my fieldwork and review of literature illustrate that both agency and structural factors influence religious leaders’ decisions. I argue that religious leaders do not act as complete by autonomous actors in the society - there are structural reasons for them to act the way they do. I similarly argue that religious leaders are not merely puppets of social structures; presence of structures does not guarantee certain behavior.

For structural explanation I use theories proposed by Scott Radnitz and Eric McGlinchey. Ideas proposed by these scholars provide the answer to the question of structural factors. In his book that explores reasons behind the Tulip Revolution, Radnitz argues that President Askar Akayev’s democratic reforms eventually undermined his rule.⁵⁸ He states that economic liberalization undertaken by the Akayev administration resulted in the emergence of autonomous economic actors - rich entrepreneurs who made fortune from trade and other businesses as the result of the government’s loosening of control over economy. These actors were not dependent on the state as much as they were in Uzbekistan for their source of income. They made use of the space created as the result of Akayev’s political liberalization, to contest the state power and control. I argue that Akayev’s political and economic liberalization are the structural factors behind the emergence of independent *imams* in response to the demand created by independent Muslims. McGlinchey’s argument comes in handy in explaining the structural factors. Economic autonomy and space for contestation do not radicalize imams in and of itself. It is the societal demands to which independent religious leaders respond and, consequently, contest state control and the definition of Islam.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

History of Islam's Control in Central Asia

The history of state control over religion in Central Asia dates back to the fourteenth century. Neither the current secular regimes in Central Asia nor the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union were the first entities to attempt to control Islam. Originally, Islam came to most of the territory of Central Asia at the time of the Arab conquest at the dawn of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries.⁵⁹ However, many of the attitudes toward the relationship between religion and state date back to the time of Timur, who ruled in the period between 1370 until 1405.⁶⁰ One of the tools through which Timur sought to legitimize his rule was Islam and used religion as an important part of the ideological glue that held his vast empire together. For these purposes, institutionalization of Islam was necessary. Through the institutionalization of Islam came its control. After calling himself the Sultan *zul Allah* - the shadow of Allah on earth - Timur created the institution of *Sheikh ul-Islam* or the head cleric.⁶¹ *Sheikh ul-Islam* was appointed by the ruler, while himself was responsible for appointing the *Qadi-kalan*, the imams of the main mosques and *madrassa*, and even the heads of Sufi *tariqas*.⁶² The institution of *Sheikh ul-Islam* proved to be useful in controlling religion and was in place until the Russian conquest of Central Asia.

Under the Russian Empire, Central Asia, which consisted of Turkestan, the Emirate of Bukhara, and the Khanate of Khiva, and its Muslims were subjugated to no less control than they were before. The foremost difference was the fact that now Muslims found themselves under a non-Muslim ruler, and the institution similar to *Sheikh ul-Islam* would be implemented to serve the needs of a non-Muslim state. "The establishment of the Islamic Spiritual Administration, first by the Russians and then by the Soviets, was in part an effort to redefine the institution of *Sheikh ul-Islam*."⁶³ The Russian conquest created a dilemma for local clerics. The tension was about convincing *ulama* that their acceptance of a rule by a non-Muslim was in line with their religious obligation. Eventually, the majority

⁵⁹ Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007)

⁶⁰ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.* 6.

of the Hanafi clerics - known as conservatives and traditionalists - accepted the Russian rule as legitimate, since the non-intervention policies implemented by the Russian Empire left a large room for *sharia* law.⁶⁴ Mosques, and *madrassas* were open, and Muslims were allowed to run Islamic courts for regulating family and social life. The head of the Central Asian Muslims was in Tashkent, represented by *Qadi-kalan* and *Sheikh ul-Islam*, although the Emirate of Bukhara had a separate *Sheikh ul-Islam*, which was independent from his colleague in the Uzbek capital.⁶⁵ Utterly redefined context for the existence of Islam as well as for the Russian Empire was hidden in the events, which unfolded on 23 February, 1917 in Petrograd.⁶⁶

The October Revolution brought the new regime that was highly intrusive. The Soviet impact on Islam, both intended and unintended, was significant. The Soviet authorities viewed religion as a major obstacle for the spread of communist ideology and the radical transformation of society, which they intended to undertake.⁶⁷ The result was a ferocious and destructive assault on Islam in Central Asia. Religion was not to be controlled in the Soviet Union; it was a sign of backwardness and superstition that had to be eliminated. Until the Soviet administration reconsidered its position towards Islam in Central Asia in 1943, it put a lot of resources into eradication of what it considered a dark remnant of the past. *Sharia* court system was abolished in 1927, mosques and *madrassas* were either destroyed or transformed into “socially useful” buildings, and *waqf*⁶⁸ property was confiscated.⁶⁹ By 1932, thousands of *ulama* had been arrested and sent off to forced labor camps. Many of them died or were killed, survivors kept silent. The Stalinist purges took lives of numerous scholars and religious activists. Islam went underground. In 1943, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁸ An inalienable religious endowment in Islamic law, typically denoting building or plot of land for Muslim religious or charitable purposes.

⁶⁹ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

was established.⁷⁰ The grip on religion loosened. Later, in 1948, the Mir-i Arab *madrassa* in Bukhara was given to SADUM, and the first higher education institution - the Imam Al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent was opened in 1971.⁷¹ With the change of leadership came the change in attitude towards religion. Consequently, Islam in Central Asia became object of control, rather than that of attack. SADUM office was located in Tashkent with local *kazyats* in each of the five republics. This order was in place until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union did not bring much change into the relationship of the state and religion. The new regimes have tried the dual strategy of attempting to co-opt Islam while controlling it. Central Asia inherited not just the Soviet economy and Soviet institutions but also the Soviet legal system, policing structures, and many social and official attitudes about power, politics, and the relationship between state and society.⁷² The structure of the current Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan headed by *mufti* resembles that of SADUM, as it was openly confessed by the *kazy* of Osh city - Ubaidulla Sarybayev. In contrast to the Soviet Union, in Kyrgyzstan, the *mufti* is elected by the members of the Council of *Ulama*. The *muftiat* consists of nine *kazyats*. Seven of them are oblast *kazyats* and the two remaining ones are city *kazyats*. One is the Bishkek city *kazyat* and the second is the Osh city *kazyat*. There are *imam-khatibs* under *kazyats*, regional *imam-khatibs* look over village *imam-khatibs*. This is how the system goes, which is the order inherited from the Soviet SADUM.⁷³

The government of Kyrgyzstan does not practice tight control over religion, and Muslims in Kyrgyzstan enjoy greater religious freedom than their fellows in neighboring countries. However, the tools to control are in place. The Committee on Religious Affairs under the President has been established for the sole purpose of regulating religion. In addition, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations has been passed, in order to increase the control of religion by the state. It provides a legal cover for the

⁷⁰ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

⁷³ From the interview with Ubaidulla Sarybayev, the *kazy* of Osh city.

state's persecution of all religious activity it does not control.⁷⁴ The state control of Islam is a deep-rooted practice in Central Asia with its beginning in the fourteenth century. The way Muslims were treated by the state depended on the historical, social, and political context. Nevertheless, there was never a question of whether it was necessary to subjugate Islam - the question was over the method of control.

Division of the Ulama: Hanafi versus Fundamentalists

The history behind the division of the *ulama* in the nineteenth century is important for my analysis. Clear lines need to be drawn between those who represent the Hanafi school - called conservatives and traditionalists, and Salafis who are also called Wahhabis and fundamentalists. The majority of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan, and in Central Asia overall, adhere to the Hanafi school of law. It were the Hanafi theologians who played major role in shaping the religious life of the majority of ordinary Muslims or clerics in Central Asia.⁷⁵ However, the landscape was not homogenous and the region's "religious establishment was subject to attacks by 'fundamentalist', who objected to the religious leadership for its lack of purity, and deviation from the 'true' path of Islam."⁷⁶

The difference between the Hanafi and Salafi clerics lies in several things. First of all, it is the adherence to *madhab*⁷⁷. Some of Salafi scholars rejected all four *madhabs* and called to use the teachings from the time of four caliphs and early Muslim society. The second major difference lied in the interpretation of sources in relation to state and religion relationship. As early as the eleventh century, the Hanafi-Maturidi clerics "in Central Asia accepted the idea that Muslims could be ruled by someone who was either a non-believer or an infidel, so long as he did not close the mosques and madrassa, allowed Muslims to observe their rituals, and allowed Muslims to be ruled by Sharia law."⁷⁸ For Salafi clerics, a rule by a non-Muslim was unacceptable and not in accordance with their religious duty. The third difference stemmed from the fact that Wahhabism, which was the sect Salafis

⁷⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007)

⁷⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁷⁶ Ibid. 7.

⁷⁷ A *madhab* is the school of thought and law in Sunni Islam, there are four *madhabs*.

⁷⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, 5, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

adhered to, has adopted an extensive view on *shirk* (blasphemy) and *bid'a* (innovation).⁷⁹ Some of the everyday Hanafi practices approved by the *madhabs* were viewed as innovation and deviation from Islam by Salafi clerics. Last, but not least, Hanafi clerics have restrained themselves from politics and took a quietist stance on politics, whereas Salafi scholars strived for political power.

The largest schism between the clerics in Central Asia took place during the 1970s. Hanafi clerics were headed by Hindustani Damla and his prominent disciples, and the leadership of Salafi scholars consisted of Hakimjan Qori, Rahmatullah Qori Alloma, and Abduvali Qori Mirzoyev. However, the seeds of the division were planted during the 1920s, when the tangible amount of Salafi scholars organized themselves into the movement called *Ahl-i Hadith* and were led by Shami Domullah (Sa'id Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-'Asali at-Tarablusi), who was originally from Libya and had come to Uzbekistan through Eastern Turkestan.⁸⁰ This Tashkent-based movement was the result of the underground schools set up by fundamentalist clerics "that pressed for the 'purification' of local practices of Hanafi Islam, both through reemphasizing neglected texts, or by rejecting the Hanafi School of Law in its entirety."⁸¹ Shami Domullah's teachings were built around the topic of cleansing religion from traditions and innovations. For that, he called to base religious practices on Quran and the most reliable *hadiths*. In the 1930s, the group of Shami Domullah's disciples split off from the *Ahl-i Hadith* to set up their own movement *Ahl al-Quran*, since they saw their teacher as too accepting the Soviet rule. *Ahl-i Hadith* remained more influential of the two and Shami Domullah's teachings made their way to the Ferghana Valley through his disciples: Shaikh Rahim Qori Shaikh Kamalov of Kokand and Yunus Qori who was also from the Ferghana Valley.⁸² The cleric who served as the main teacher both to Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour - Hakimjon Qori was a student of Shaikh Kamalov and Yunis Qori. Later, Hakimjon Qori, as well as Rahmatullah Qori Alloma and Abduvali Qori, shortly studied from Hindustani Damla, which would eventually become his greatest public enemy.

⁷⁹ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

⁸⁰ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 13.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Hindustani Damla was the most well-read scholar in the region who received his education in Afghanistan and India and set up religious underground schools in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.⁸³ He was the representative of the unofficial/parallel Islam, which was completely apolitical. According to Hindustani Damla, the Soviet rule was a test for believers in which success lay in reliance on God and patience, rather than in political and military struggle.⁸⁴ Hakimjon Qori was among the first generation of Hindustani Damla's students. He broke away with his teacher over questions of the relationship of Islam and politics and left the school in Dushanbe, to establish his own underground school in Margilan, Uzbekistan.⁸⁵ After returning to Margilan, Hakimjon Qori had formative influence on the next generation of Salafi clerics. In addition to the two imams involved in case studies for my thesis, Hakimjon Qori was the leader and teacher of Rahmatullah Qori Alloma and Abduvali Qori.⁸⁶ Later, the group of Hakimjon Qori's disciples led Rahmatullah Qori Alloma, Alauddin Mansour and Abduvali Qori, broke away with him, "claiming that he was not being sufficiently political in his orientation and that he was not willing to urge direct engagement with the authorities in defense of the faith."⁸⁷ Thus, the group emerged as neo-fundamentalist, in contrast to Hakimjon Qori who was a classic fundamentalist. These young Salafi clerics were influenced by the works of Hassan al-Banna from Egypt and Sayyid Abu'l Ala Maududi.⁸⁸ Abduvali Qori held a similar view as al-Banna and Maududi that the goals of politics was the utter transformation of the individual and of society along principles extracted from the authentic sources of Islam. Abduvali Qori exceeded his teacher in the degree of politicization and was ready to use all means possible to achieve his goal. "For Hakimjon Qori, the point of contention was not the need to cleanse Islam, but the injunction to do by any necessary means."⁸⁹ Hakimjon Qori went on to live more than hundred years; his students who broke away with him died

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

⁸⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 24.

⁸⁸ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁸⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, 25, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

or disappeared. Rahmatullah Qori Alloma died in 1981, and Abduvali Qori disappeared in 1996 on his flight to Moscow from Tashkent.⁹⁰

It is impossible to understand the evolution of Islam, be it radical, independent, or official in contemporary Central Asia, without understanding the way it developed in the 1970s. The limited formal educational institutions were not at the core of influence. Underground religious schools in Dushanbe, Andijan, and Margilan represented various interpretations of Islam. These study circles heavily influenced religious thinking in the Central Asian region, and particularly in the Ferghana Valley.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

Alauddin Mansour's Biography

Alauddin Mansour was born in January 1952.⁹¹ He was born into an ordinary Uzbek family in Kara Suu, which is a small town in the south of Kyrgyzstan. The town is approximately half an hour driving distance from Osh city. Apparently, he was born into a Muslim family. It was decided that he would study Islam, and his education has led him to Uzbekistan. His education started in the 1960s, as it is the tradition to give children to teachers in an early age for a faster and better learning experience. During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan was the only country where religious education was available in Central Asia - either official religious schools or underground schools that were established in response to the limited number of religious educational institutions. All the places and people from whom Alauddin Mansour had studied are not known; however, his most important teacher was Hakimjon Qori in Margilan.⁹² Alauddin Mansour studied *fiqh*, *hadith*, Arabic language and grammar, and other subjects from Hakimjon Qori, who was the man to whom the majority of Alauddin Mansour's generation were indebted for their education.⁹³

Alauddin Mansour is widely known as a well-read scholar. His most popular work is the translation of the Quran into Uzbek in 1992.⁹⁴ Million copies of his translation were printed in Uzbek. Subsequently, his translation was further translated into Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen languages. His translation of Quran made him widely known among ordinary people. Besides being known for his translation of the Quran, Alauddin Mansour is also one of two most respected Uzbek scholars in the South alongside Shah Muhammad. He has a large number of disciples from Osh and Jalalabad oblasts, who took classes on *tafseer*, *fiqh*, *hadeeth*, Arabic language and grammar, and other related religious subjects.⁹⁵ Alauddin Mansour is the director of the Center for the Study of the Holy Quran in Kara

⁹¹ Erlan Satybekov, "Raskolniki [Dissenters]," *Vechernii Bishkek*, 2001, <http://members.vb.kg/2001/09/28/09.htm> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁹² From the interviews with Chubak ajy Zhalilov and Moldo Sabyr, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan and former *muftiat* employee, respectively.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Wikipedia, "Alauddin Mansour," February 2014, http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Мансур,_Алауддин (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁹⁵ From the interview with Chubak ajy Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

Suu.⁹⁶ Also, he is the imam of the Imam Al-Bukhari mosque in Kara Suu, which he visits every Friday to give lectures and to lead prayers. He has appeared on TV channels on numerous occasions. From 1996 to 1997, Alauddin Mansour hosted a Friday show called “At Alauddin Mansour’s” on the OshTV channel.⁹⁷ However, the OshTV channel is not the only channel he appeared on. According to the residents of Kara Suu, his appearances on TV were on regular basis, and he appeared on various Uzbek TV channels as well as on the *Meizan* and *Keremet* channels.⁹⁸ Alauddin Mansour is married and has two sons: Ziyauddin Mansour and Zakhridin Mansour.⁹⁹

Rafiq Qori’s Biography

Rafiq Qori is the name by which Muhammad Rafiq Kamalov is known among public. He was born in Kara Suu in 1953.¹⁰⁰ Rafiq Qori was born into the family of ordinary Uzbek family. His father, Kamoliddin Maksym was the head of a warehouse, and his mother, Zahra Khan must have been a housewife or a kolhoz/factory worker. Rafiq Qori was born into a large family; the family had ten children: six boys and four girls. Rafiq Qori was the second oldest child in the family after his brother Sadykzhan Kamalov.¹⁰¹

His religious education started early, his first teacher being his grandfather from the maternal side - Habibullah Qori, whom Sadykzhan Kamalov has called one of the most famous and respected scholars in the Ferghana Valley. Rafiq Qori must have studied basic tenets of Islam from his grandfather. His genuine religious education started later. It must have been in his early teenage years when Rafiq Qori started taking Quran lessons. His first teacher was Mubin Qori in Andijan, whose daughter - Maksudakhan - he later married.¹⁰² Rafiq Qori was a *hafith*. After taking classes from Mubin Qori, Rafiq Qori went to study under Hakimjon Qori in Margilan. There he continued learning the Quran, but also started taking classes on subjects as Arabic language and grammar and *fiqh*. Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Rafiq Qori took classes on *fiqh* from Hindustani Damla - one of the

⁹⁶ Wikipedia, “Alauddin Mansour,” February 2014, http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Мансур,_Алауддин (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁹⁷ Erlan Satybekov, “Raskolniki [Dissenters],” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 2001, <http://members.vb.kg/2001/09/28/09.htm> (accessed May 3, 2014).

⁹⁸ From the interviews with Abdikarim, Muhiddin, and Akramjon, residents of Kara Suu.

⁹⁹ Wikipedia, “Alauddin Mansour,” February 2014, http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Мансур,_Алауддин (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ From the interview with Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori’s brother.

¹⁰¹ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori’s cousin.

¹⁰² From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori’s friend.

most respected and renowned scholars in Central Asia.¹⁰³ Hindustani Damla was Rafiq Qori's last major teacher. Although he later allegedly took classes from Muhammadi Qori - his brother-in-law - for a year, it is not known whether he visited Muhammadi Qori to take classes or simply to have meetings.

In February of 1983, Rafiq Qori was appointed the *imam-khatib* of the As-Sarakhsi mosque in Kara Suu - the post he held until his death in August of 2006.¹⁰⁴ According to the members of the mosque, Rafiq Qori made significant contributions for the reconstruction and enlargement of the mosque. Although he worked simultaneously at a cotton factory in the beginning of his work at the mosque, he quit his job at the factory later and concentrated all his energy on the mosque's affairs. Rafiq Qori wrote several books. His notable works include the five-volume *Iymon Risololari* (The Tractates of Faith) and the two-volume *Din Nasihatdir* (Religion is an Advice), which are the collections of his lectures given at Friday prayers, written either by himself or after his death by his son Rashodkhan Kamalov.

On 6 August, 2006 Rafiq Qori was killed in his own car during the joint special operation conducted by the special forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁵ Following his death the authorities described Rafiq Qori as a member of a terrorist organization. In the official statement made by the National Security Service of Kyrgyzstan, Rafiq Qori was described as a "terrorist" and a member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).¹⁰⁶ To make things appear more convincing the National Security Service listed the amount of weapons and banned extremist literature found in Rafiq Qori's car after his liquidation. The stories told by people close to Rafiq Qori provide a different explanation for his death. According to Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori fell victim to the Bakiyev clan. In the interview he revealed to me that Almazbek Atambayev even apologized for what has been done to Rafiq Qori's family under the Bakiyev regime. The popular version of Rafiq Qori's death story is that he died as a martyr, attempting to convey "truth" from the Quran and

¹⁰³ From the interviews with Akramzhan and Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousins.

¹⁰⁴ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹⁰⁵ From the interview with Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori's brother.

¹⁰⁶ Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: Prominent Imam Killed in Security Raid," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 August 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070381.html> (accessed May 3, 2014).

hadith to people of Kara Suu. His funeral was attended by more than 10,000 men, including the that time *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan Murataly aiy Zhumanov.

Rafiq Qori was married to Maksudakhan, the daughter of his teacher Mubin Qori, and had four children: two boys and two girls. His older son Rashodkhan Kamalov is now the *imam-khatib* of the mosque where Rafiq Qori used to serve. He has taken the post shortly after his father's death.

Alauddin Mansour's Topics of Lectures and Audience at the Al-Bukhari Mosque

Alauddin Mansour is reserved on the topics he gives lectures on. Mainly, he busies himself with the traditional set of topics such as performance of five daily prayers, giving *zakat*, fasting during *Ramadan*, and pilgrimage. Other topics include certain verses from the Quran and *hadith* and their interpretation and meaning. Alauddin Mansour belongs to the category of imams whose scholarly work - reading books, writing new books, giving lessons to students - comes first. He is not the type of imam like Rafiq Qori who used to come to the mosque every day and talk to people, lead daily prayers, and be involved in everyday business of the mosque. He comes to his mosque on rare occasions, usually on Friday and Eid days to give lectures and lead prayers.¹⁰⁷ When asked about Alauddin Mansour, the first thing that the residents of Kara Suu said about him was that he was a well-read scholar. For example, Abdikarim said: "Alauddin Mansour is not an imam. He is a scholar. We consider him as a representative of the traditional Islam."¹⁰⁸ Perhaps, Ahmadzhan's words about what the majority of imams talk about imply to Alauddin Mansour as well. He said: "They [other imams] talk about daily prayers, the rules and ways of performing them. They talk about *ihsan* and how to achieve it, about weddings and its' rules, about death and the funeral ceremony."¹⁰⁹ Put shortly, Alauddin Mansour does not preach about socio-economic problems people have or any other unorthodox topics. This is where the difference between him and Rafiq Qori lied.

Alauddin Mansour has banned members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir from entering his mosque. He asks the Hizb ut-Tahrir members to leave the mosque before the prayers and even threatens not to start Friday prayers, unless all the Hizb ut-Tahrir members leave the

¹⁰⁷ From the interview with a taxi driver, resident of Kara Suu whom I met during my fieldwork.

¹⁰⁸ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁰⁹ From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori's friend.

mosque.¹¹⁰ In contrast to the younger and more politicized audience at Rafiq Qori's mosque, older generation and apolitical Muslims comprise the majority of Muslims at Alauddin Mansour's mosque. It is difficult to estimate the number of people who come to Alauddin Mansour's mosque for Friday and Eid prayers, but it is certainly less than the number of people at Rafiq Qori's mosque during his lifetime. However, Alauddin Mansour has appeared much more on TV than Rafiq Qori. He first appeared on the OshTV channel where he hosted his own show. Actually, Alauddin Mansour was one of the first imams to appear on TV and whose Friday lectures were broadcast on television.¹¹¹ Alauddin Mansour mostly appeared on Uzbek channels. Rafiq Qori appeared on TV on rare occasions. According to his friends, there was no interest from TV stations in filming Rafiq Qori or his Friday lectures because of political reasons.

Rafiq Qori's Topic of Lectures and Audience at the As-Sarakhsi Mosque

During his lifetime Rafiq Qori enjoyed the highest number of visitors to his mosque in Kara Suu. In addition to having his mosque packed on Friday and Eid prayers, there was a diversity among people who came to the mosque in terms of ethnicity, age, and belonging to other *madhabs* and banned groups. The number of Muslims who came to pray on Fridays ranged from five thousand to seven thousand people, whereas during the Eid prayers, the mosque hosted from ten thousand to twelve thousand Muslims.¹¹² Dilyor, the person who was responsible for videotaping Rafiq Qori's lectures, recalled the past and said: "Back in the days when the roads from Uzbekistan were open, these three floors [of the mosque], the territory of the mosque, and even the surrounding area of the mosque till the next street intersection were full during Friday and Eid prayers. Seven or eight thousand people [for Friday prayers], [and] up to twelve thousand people came [for Eid prayers]. The traffic was blocked during Friday prayers in 2006."¹¹³ The installment of microphone and audio system attracted large number of Muslims to the As-Sarakhsi mosque. However, it was not only the technological innovation that drew large number of Muslims. Until the

¹¹⁰ From the interview with Muhiddin, resident of Kara Suu.

¹¹¹ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹¹² From the interview with Dilyor, Rafiq Qori's cameraman.

¹¹³ Ibid.

collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rapid increase of mosques, Rafiq Qori's mosque was the only mosque in Kara Suu where Friday prayers were conducted.¹¹⁴

Rafiq Qori preached on various topics, some of which were similar to what other imams talked about. What made him stand out from the crowd was his focus on the existent socio-economic problems in the community. Be they political, social, or economic challenges people faced, Rafiq Qori attempted to provide solutions.¹¹⁵ Kasymzhan, the person responsible for reciting the Quran at Rafiq Qori's mosque, said following the words about the topics Rafiq Qori talked about: "During his lectures he brought up the problems people have nowadays. Whatever problems people were dealing with, be it religious, political, whatever difficulty they had, Rafiq Qori brought it up and provided solutions. He could give answers and solutions to problems from the religious point of view."¹¹⁶ The story told by Abdikarim, Rafiq Qori's friend and driver, best describes Rafiq Qori's attention to the dynamics in the community. Abdikarim told: "He talked about everything on the streets that was prohibited and wrong, according to *shariah*. For example, if a brothel was opened in the city, he talked about it. He lectured on the problems that were out there on the streets, to problems people faced in everyday life."¹¹⁷ Another story told me by Shamsuddin revealed how Rafiq Qori condemned adultery and child pregnancy, after he learned how high school girls became pregnant. His choice of topics was intended to encourage Muslims to live according to Islam in the fullest possible way. His friend Ahmadzhan revealed: "Rafiq Qori used to tell that once you are a Muslim and say the *shahada*¹¹⁸, there is no way back. You should stick to Islam once and forever. He said that there is no way you can lead the lives of a Muslim and that of a disbeliever simultaneously."¹¹⁹

Economic problems were also on the list of topics, as Rafiq Qori called Muslims not to borrow money from the banks, since it is a great sin in Islam either to loan or borrow money on interest rate. Shamsuddin said the following: "Rafiq Qori said it [borrowing

¹¹⁴ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹¹⁵ From the interview with Kasymzhan, resident of Kara Suu.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹¹⁸ The phrase pronounced to testify the oneness of Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's prophet, in order to accept Islam as a religion.

¹¹⁹ From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori's friend.

money from banks] was *haram*. He described it as a great sin, and that the least sin for it was equal to having a sexual intercourse with your mother for thirty times. He was very serious. Instead, he called not to drive a Mercedes car, but to drive a bike, to busy ourselves with farming and ranching, but not to borrow money on interest rate.”¹²⁰ Rafiq Qori designed his lectures and prepared for Friday prayers to address current issues the community was facing, in addition to telling about Islam in general. He wanted to show people that religion was much more than daily prayers and fasting. His aim was to change the look and opinion ordinary Muslims hold about their religion and to help them see that Islam was a comprehensive tool for dealing with life’s ups and downs.

Rafiq Qori had a diverse audience at the As-Sarakhsi mosque. It was home to the representatives of the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir, alleged Wahhabis and simply representatives of other *madhabs*. More importantly, Rafiq Qori’s mosque was visited by a lot of young Muslims. Adults and elders came to the mosque as well; in fact, elders substituted the majority of those who came during the Soviet era. With the revival of Islam after the collapse of the Soviet, more youth and young adults started coming to the mosque.¹²¹ It is fair to state that Rafiq Qori’s mosque had the largest number of youth, since his popularity among youth and young adults was unparalleled - at least in Kara Suu. Rafiq Qori was often invited to weddings, where he told about the way family is ought to be built and the way children are to be raised.¹²² He spoke about what mattered to younger generation. In his books called *The Tractates of Faith*, which are basically the collection of his Friday lectures, family relations and children upbringing occupy a significant part.

Young adults were not the only group found in large numbers at Rafiq Qori’s mosque. His refusal to label members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists and drive them out of the mosque resulted in large number of the Hizb ut-Tahrir members at the As-Sarakhsi mosque. According to Dilyor, who himself is a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Rafiq Qori stated that he had no right to drive them out of the mosque. He said that “if a person declares to be a Muslim and bears witness that there is no God but Allah, then, he/she shall be our friend.”¹²³ When pressured by the law enforcement agencies to drive out the Hizb

¹²⁰ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori’s cousin.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² From the interview with Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori’s brother.

¹²³ From the interview with Dilyor, Rafiq Qori’s cameraman.

ut-Tahrir members, he stated: “My duty [as an imam] is to bring drunkards and adulterers to the mosque. I will not drive out people who pronounce *shahada* from the mosque.”¹²⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir members from Uzbekistan often visited the mosque, since it is located at the border with Uzbekistan. Wahhabis also found place in Rafiq Qori’s mosque. Persecuted and stigmatized for the different way of praying as well as for having different belief system from the Hanafi Muslims, Wahhabis met hostility at many places, but not at the As-Sarakhsi mosque. At Rafiq Qori’s mosque, the visitors were political as well as apolitical and young as well as old. It was diverse not only in terms of age or ethnicity, but also in terms of belief system.

Public Opinion about Alauddin Mansour

Alauddin Mansour enjoys somewhat mixed public opinion. The former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan Chubak aji Zhalilov was full of praise for Alauddin Mansour’s level of knowledge and what he called a “deep” understanding of religious knowledge. In fact, he was one of the scholars in Kyrgyzstan whom the former mufti awarded the certificate of one of the greatest scholars in the country. However, even among scholars Alauddin Mansour’s reputation is still shady and doubts are cast over his belonging to the Wahhabi sect.¹²⁵ Moldo Sabyr, former *muftiat* employee and the *imam-khatib* of the Uchkun mosque in Bishkek, has not accepted Alauddin Mansour as a Hanafi. According to him, Alauddin Mansour was one of the leaders of the Wahhabi sect and actively spread its ideology to the Central Asian region.¹²⁶

Alauddin Mansour is not easily accessible to ordinary people as was Rafiq Qori during his lifetime. As mentioned earlier, he comes to the mosque mostly on Friday and Eid prayers. Consequently, what the majority of people know about Alauddin Mansour is that he is a great scholar of immense intellectual depth. This is what I mostly heard from people when I asked about him. However, those who have been at his lectures label him as an official imam, who is under the government’s control. When asked about him, Abdikarim said: “Alauddin Mansour is not simply a *saray* [official] *imam*, but one who comes from the very top of the *saray*. He was a trusted person of Akayev [during the 2000

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

¹²⁶ From the interview with Moldo Sabyr, former *muftiat* employee.

election campaign].”¹²⁷ Indeed, Alauddin Mansour’s decision to campaign for Askar Akayev in the 2000 presidential elections damaged his reputation in public and has since stayed as the darkest spot. His negative attitude towards the members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir has not increased his popularity either. The majority of local Muslims, regardless of their affiliation with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, “consider Alauddin Mansur to be following directives of the Mufti of Uzbekistan when he does not allow Hizb-ut-Tahrir members to pray in his mosque.”¹²⁸ Some locals even believed that he works for the secret services of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Public Opinion about Rafiq Qori

Rafiq Qori was respected and liked by the majority of people in the community - at least in Kara Suu. Regardless of social class or age, people in the town seem to have liked him and paid respect. As put by Abdikarim, Rafiq Qori “was not a person who belonged to one particular layer of the society; people from all layers of the society respected him.”¹²⁹ The highest number of visitors during the Friday and Eid prayers were proof to the fact that Rafiq Qori was one the most popular imams in the southern Kyrgyzstan. His popularity was not limited to Kara Suu; Rafiq Qori was widely known in other parts of the Osh and Jalalabad oblasts. Shortly before his death in August 2006, he showed to Shamsuddin a notebook where he had invitations for weddings written down for August and September in Osh and Jalalabad.

Perhaps the story in which his popularity is reflected best is the story of an old woman who died in Osh and asked his sons to call Rafiq Qori to conduct her funeral prayer. Abdikarim was with Rafiq Qori on that day and said: “There were the top ten most authoritative people from the *muftiat*. They did not perform the funeral prayer and waited for Rafiq Qori. He was the people’s *imam*. Can you imagine that an old woman from Osh asked her sons to invite Rafiq Qori to perform her funeral prayer!? She did not even come

¹²⁷ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹²⁸ International Crisis Group, “Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security,” 1 March, 2001, 16, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/Central%20Asia%20Islamist%20Mobilisation%20and%20Regional%20Security.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹²⁹ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

to Friday prayers, she must have heard about him from people.”¹³⁰ Rafiq Qori’s popularity seems to have been unrivaled. His popularity was manifested not only in the number of people present at his mosque but also by the number of people who came to his funeral. Approximately between twelve and fourteen thousand people attended the funeral ceremony. Drug addicts’, drunkards’, and prostitutes’ participation in the funeral - revealed to me by those who participated themselves at the funeral - was sort of a testament to his popularity.¹³¹

Rafiq Qori’s popularity lied in several things. He was able to maintain close connections to ordinary people, was consistent in what he said, and told - what majority of people indicated - only the “truth” from the Quran and *hadiths*. The first and foremost reason highlighted by the majority of interviewed family members and friends was that Rafiq Qori told the “truth” from the Quran and authentic *hadiths*. His friends Ahmadzhan, Abdikarim, Dilyor, and Kasymzhan have all identified him telling the “truth” from the Quran and the *hadiths* as the main reason for popularity. Ahmadjan said: “Rafiq Qori was famous because he conveyed the messages of the Holy Quran and the *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) without any distortion. He conveyed Islam to people without adding his personal desires, he did not seek any personal benefit, [and] he was not afraid of anyone, including the government, the president, or the police.”¹³² One might challenge the concept of truth and denote the role of interpretation on presenting own understanding as the truth, but it is impossible to argue against the fact that Rafiq Qori was consistent on his ideas and understanding. He did not change his position because of fear or to accommodate the government. Abdikarim called Rafiq Qori as the real imam, meaning that he could neither be corrupted nor intimidated.

However, it was not only his telling of “truth” consistency that earned him ordinary people’s affection and respect. Rafiq Qori was a humble person who was ready to accept his mistakes - he was not arrogant.¹³³ For Kyrgyzstan and for the rest of Central Asia, it is common for imams to be a bit arrogant; they get carried away in terms of feeling important because of the respect they usually receive from ordinary people. I know how arrogant

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ From the interviews with Ahmadzhan, Abdikarim, and Dilyor, residents of Kara Suu.

¹³² From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori’s friend.

¹³³ From the interview with Kasymzhan, resident of Kara Suu.

imams might be from my own experience. It is not a big deal for the imam of the mosque where I go to, to insult someone in public in the mosque. However, my experience with imams' arrogance took place in the little room where young students from the Islamic University of Kyrgyzstan lived. I was a frequent guest at that place because I took classes from them and was often invited to share their meal. Once we were having lunch, it was a very modest table: there was only bread and raspberry jam on the *dastorkon*¹³⁴. The imam who led the Friday prayer at the mosque (who is also one of the most well-read scholars in Kyrgyzstan) knocked on the door and came in. Everybody got up and went to greet him as a sign of respect as he stood by the door. When we invited him to the *dastorkon*, he said: "What do you have to eat? Oh, you do not have anything." He did not share our meal. He smiled while he said what he said, and it might have been that he joked, but to me it was pure arrogance.

Rafiq Qori's humility was emphasized as the reason for his popularity. As highlighted by a lot of his close people, he always accepted his mistakes. His cameraman Dilyor revealed a story about how Rafiq Qori once told people at the mosque that a policeman taught him *shariah* law. The story took place at the police station where Rafiq Qori was occasionally taken. There, one of the policemen asked him about the punishment for theft in Islam. When Rafiq Qori answered that it is cutting hands, the policeman told him that he was wrong. He said: "No, the militia checks first in Islam. They check, if he/she committed the crime because of poverty or if it is his/her job. If it was because of poverty and the thief had told of his problems to the head of neighborhood, head of village, or head of region, then the hand of neighborhood, village, and region heads will be cut off." The policeman has studied this topic thoroughly. Then he resumed: "If it is his/her job, there is minor and major theft in Islam. Hands are not cut off for minor theft. Only in case of a major theft. If the thief is caught on Saturday, he is kept in prison till the next Friday and is punished in front of public, after Friday prayer."¹³⁵ Rafiq Qori has not studied this topic and upon his return from the police station, on the next Friday, in front of all people, he said: "I have been imam of the mosque for 26 years now and did not know it, but a

¹³⁴ A rectangular piece of cloth used to put food on while eating on the floor.

¹³⁵ From the interview with Dilyor, resident of Kara Suu.

policeman bothered to learn this."¹³⁶ Rafiq Qori became popular because he treated people equally - at least that is what I heard from the people who knew him well. He managed to stay humble when it came down to everyday relations with people.

Rafiq Qori's popularity was also due to his call for complete adherence to Islam. He called to implement Islamic teachings into everyday life. However, it was not only his call, but the fact that it resulted in the elimination of deeply rooted customs and traditions, which were unpleasant and economically damaging for the majority of people, but have nevertheless become a norm in the community. In Kara Suu and other places in the south of Kyrgyzstan, giving soap, money, or tea to people who came for a funeral was a widespread tradition.¹³⁷ People have come to associate such type of traditions with Islam. Rafiq Qori was a reformist in the sense that he wanted to purify religion from traditions and urged people to disengage from them.¹³⁸ He called such traditions un-Islamic and was firm on eradicating them. He used to tell people at funerals: "A person has passed away. There are children left behind who are now orphans. And we are taking what belongs to them [by accepting money for coming to a funeral]. We have to give instead. Allah has commanded not to steal from orphans in the Holy Quran. Therefore, stop giving out tea and soap at funerals."¹³⁹ His cousin Shamsuddin told me that Rafiq Qori's fight against traditions brought him affection and respect. The fame was brought by his reformist call to purify religion from traditions.

Rafiq Qori managed to stay close to people by visiting them on weddings and funerals. According to Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori earned his non-official title of people's *imam* by not being indifferent to people and their problems. "He was close to ordinary folks, irrespective whether in matter of grief or happiness."¹⁴⁰ The way Rafiq Qori treated individuals in everyday situations has helped him win many hearts. A visitor of the Al-Sarakhsi mosque Mukhiddin told a story about how he, his son, and Rafiq Qori travelled to Bishkek. Here is the story:

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹³⁸ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Revivalism and State Failure in Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 56 (2009): 16-28, http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinch/McGlinchey_Islamic_Revivalism.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹³⁹ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹⁴⁰ From the interview with Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori's brother.

“Rafiq Qori was a pure person. We went to Bishkek together once. He said that he was thirsty and asked to get something to drink. I stopped by a store, and it was the time when *TAN* first appeared on the markets. I bought a bottle of *TAN* and gave the first cup to him. He told me to give the first cup to my son, who was six years old. I told him that the oldest person drinks first and that my son would drink after him. He answered that little kids are pure, and that they should drink first. You see! A pure person respects other pure people. It was his path. It is possible to learn so much about a person from his/her small act. After this incident, my affection for him increased.”¹⁴¹

The general public knew Rafiq Qori as an open person who cared for their problems and associated with him. Residents of Kara Suu seem to still hold warm memories of him. He was their imam - their leader.

¹⁴¹ From the interview with Mukhiddin, resident of Kara Suu.

CHAPTER 5

Manifestation of Independence and Contestation of the State Control of Islam

Rafiq Qori was the brightest example of an independent imam in Kyrgyzstan. He chose to criticize the state and contest its control and definition of Islam. However, his case is not black and white, as it might seem. Rafiq Qori did cooperate with the local authorities and managed to keep relatively good relations with the local law enforcement agency representatives.¹⁴² There is no single simple explanation to his decision to be independent from the state. It consists of a complex set of reasons. However, before exploring them, it is important to look at how his independence and contestation of control was manifested.

Rafiq Qori was not on the side of the government when it came down to supporting politicians in power. He fell over with Alauddin Mansour, after the latter agreed to support Akayev in the campaign for the presidential election of 2000. Rafiq Qori told people that Alauddin Mansour's act was prohibited in Islam.¹⁴³ It is not known what the relationship between them prior to this event was. However, it was one of hatred afterwards. I have been told that Alauddin Mansour started the construction of his mosque, saying that he will not pray standing besides Rafiq Qori in the same mosque. It did not change even eight years after Rafiq Qori's death. Alauddin Mansour refused to talk to me about himself, after he learned my other case study was about Rafiq Qori. According to Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori was not a *saray* imam who "looked up to the state for orders."¹⁴⁴ Rafiq Qori's friend Abdikarim has called him a real imam and told that he was not corrupt like other imams. These descriptions highlight the fact Rafiq Qori tried to distance himself from the government as much as possible. He did not want to be associated neither with the regime of Askar Akayev nor that of Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Rafiq Qori's attitude towards the state and his criticism has led to strained relations even with his own brother Sadykzhan Kamalov, who was successfully co-opted by serving as the *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan in the late 1980s and being a member of Kyrgyzstan first independent parliament in the early 1990s. Sadykzhan Kamalov was critical of his brother's speeches at Friday prayers. He questioned the reasonability of Rafiq Qori's actions. During the interview, while talking about the Hizb ut-Tahrir being wrong and its members choosing death for a wrong cause, he said:

¹⁴² From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹⁴³ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁴⁴ From the interview with Sadykzhan Kamalov, Rafiq Qori's brother.

“Why did not Allah support Nabhani [the founder of the Hizb ut-Tahrir] and the Hizb ut-Tahrir? Why did God not save those who died? For example, my brother Rafiq Qori and others.”¹⁴⁵

Rafiq Qori openly criticized the government for its control over Islam and consistently spoke about the incompatibility of democracy and Islam. For him the problem was not the government itself, but the fact that it was democratic. Freedom found in democracy meant people were free to do things that were considered as sins, according to Islam. Opening of brothels, casinos, and alcohol sale was unacceptable to Rafiq Qori. His opinion of democracy was totally negative, especially after he learned that it supported homosexuals. At one of the Friday prayers, he said: “Is this the direction we are headed into!? Will we see our sons marry each other!? Will we be content with such things!?”¹⁴⁶ His criticism of democracy was followed with his labeling the state as *hunasa*¹⁴⁷, which means feminine (in the meaning of it being weak), not fully functioning, not a genuine state, being something in between. For Rafiq Qori, the government of Kyrgyzstan failed to implement both *sharia* and secular law. It was the word he often used to describe the government and used to say: “What a *hunasa* state is this?”¹⁴⁸

Another point of his criticism was the government control of religion. Rafiq Qori brought up the article on the separation of religion from the state and questioned the legality of the government’s interference into Muslims’ affairs. During one of his lectures he said: “They want to control the religion, but when we want to say something, they answer that religion and state are separate!”¹⁴⁹ Apparently, Rafiq Qori was angry over government control, as he saw it as being intrusive and evading the supreme law of the constitution. However, his independence and contestation were not limited to criticism alone.

According to Rafiq Qori, fundamentalists - also called Wahhabis and Salafis - members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and members of Akromiya were all ordinary Muslims and

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori’s friend.

¹⁴⁷ An Arabic word for hermaphrodite.

¹⁴⁸ “Rafiq Qori Janozasi Part 2 [Rafiq Qori’s Funeral Part 2],” YouTube video, 14:30, posted by “abubakir86,” December 23, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKqsddOqTWC>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

were not of any threat to public and order.¹⁵⁰ The foremost point of contention was the status of the Hizb ut-Tahrir members. His mosque was a safe haven for Hizb ut-Tahrir members both from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, where brutal repression against all forms of unofficial Islam still goes on. Rafiq Qori admitted it openly, and in the interview to the Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty he said: "It is true that at our mosque, compared with other mosques, many Hizb ut-Tahrir members come to pray. That information is correct. It is also true that in Kyrgyzstan; [Hizb ut-Tahrir] first appeared in Kara-Suu."¹⁵¹ More importantly, his opinion was contrary to the official about Hizb ut-Tahrir's definition. He did not support the view that Hizb ut-Tahrir members were terrorists, enemies of the government, or enemies of the people. For Rafiq Qori, Hizb ut-Tahrir was a "particular group" who wanted Islam and was eager to serve it. Hizb ut-Tahrir members were not the only group who received protection at the As-Sarakhsi mosque. Rafiq Qori refused to drive out Salafis from the mosque.¹⁵² For him, Muslims labeled as criminals and source of instability in the country were all "friends"¹⁵³, as he called them.

It has become a long tradition in contemporary Central Asia that the government decides the start and end of the holy month of *Ramadan*, despite observing the moon being the proper way for defining the length of the month. Rafiq Qori was not content that Muslims in Kyrgyzstan were separated from the wider Muslim community in their celebration of Eid - two holidays celebrated at the end and seventy days after *Ramadan*. He urged the government not to set the date for Eid, but to follow the lunar calendar and join other Muslims in performing of Eid prayers. However, his petition was never fulfilled, and he angrily accepted the fact that the government abused its power. His friend Ahmadzhan has told that Rafiq Qori did not accept the government as legitimate power; however, this is disputable, as I was told that he did recognize the government, although consistently reiterated that they were forced to obey the state. His words are following: "We [Muslims] are forced to [obey the state] from the side of the state. We are under pressure and we are not happy."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan, Imam Extends Welcome to Hizb ut-Tahrir," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 12, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1068353.html> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹⁵³ From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori's friend.

¹⁵⁴ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

Rafiq Qori's behavior and words leave an impression that he did not adhere to the Hanafi *madhab*. His friends and relatives told me that he was a Hanafi. However, his attitude towards the government, his choice of topics for lectures, and his reformist stance over the separation of religion from traditions speak otherwise. Rafiq Qori was at least not a conventional Hanafi cleric. The conventional Hanafi attitude can be found in the interview with the Osh oblast *kazy* Niyazaly. Having been asked about the cooperation between religious leaders and the state, he said: "Imams have to obey the state. After all they live in one country and have to cooperate with the state authorities. The government is not against religion now. It is doing a lot in terms of helping religion to grow and develop. Cooperation with the state is useful."¹⁵⁵ He continued: "If they [religious leaders] do not cooperate, it will be wrong both according to secular law and sharia law."¹⁵⁶ Rafiq Qori's opinion on the cooperation with the state was nowhere near this description. Whether or not he belonged to the Hanafi *madhab*, Rafiq Qori represented independent Islam, and his case deserves thorough exploration.

Analysis of the Reasons for Independence and Contestation

Rafiq Qori's decision to be independent from the state and to contest its control and definition of Islam stems from the set of various factors. There is no single answer to the question why he was critical of the government. The reasons can be divided into structural and agency. Rafiq Qori's independence and contestation came from President Askar Akayev's economic and political liberalization, which enabled the emergence of autonomous economic actors and allowed contestation of power. Rafiq Qori's education, the death and disappearance of his relatives, the fact that he lived in one of the most politicized places in Central Asia, which is considered to be the capital of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia,¹⁵⁷ had a significant influence on him. However, the above-mentioned structural factors fall short of providing comprehensive answer. The agency reasons complement shortcomings of structural factors. Rafiq Qori's personality played a key role in his decision to contest the state control of Islam.

¹⁵⁵ From the interview with Niyazaly, the *kazy* for the Osh oblast.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Political and Economic Liberalization

Rafiq Qori's independence and contestation of the state control and definition of Islam took place because of the government's political and economic reforms implemented during Askar Akayev's presidency. Rafiq Qori was killed in 2006 - little more than a year after Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power. Bakiyev's less tolerant regime managed to put up with the troublesome independent *imam* only for a year. It is crucial to study Rafiq Qori's case in the context of the economic and political liberalization of the Akayev era. The government under Akayev provided opportunity and space for contestation of power. Scott Radnitz argues that it were liberal political and economic reforms that eventually and indirectly led to the Tulip Revolution in March 2005, which ousted Askar Akayev.¹⁵⁸ Economic liberalization created a group of autonomous economic actors, who did not depend on the state for their source of income.¹⁵⁹ Political liberalization provided space for these autonomous economic actors to challenge the state and contest power. Rich businessman and politicians used their finances to mobilize people in villages to gain support.

In a similar vein, political and economic liberalization provided setting and space for Rafiq Qori to contest the state control and definition of Islam. He, too, belonged to the group of autonomous economic actors - Rafiq Qori benefited from privatization and trade opportunities. His son Rashodkhan Kamalov now owns a three-storey building of Soviet shopping mall, private hospital, a two-storey hotel, several restaurants, warehouses, and retail stores in Kara Suu.¹⁶⁰ Rashodkhan Kamalov must have inherited his wealth from his father - at least some part of it. During my fieldwork in Kara Suu, a new *madrassa* for girls and a kindergarten were being built by him on the plot of land opposite to the As-Sarakhsi mosque. Having accumulated wealth through privatization and trade, Rafiq Qori turned into an autonomous economic actor - he was no longer dependent on the state for his source of income. He was not paid any salary for his work at the mosque. Prior and during

¹⁵⁸ Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Asel Tynchtykbekova, "Imam Mecheti "As-Sarakhsiya" Goroda Kara Suu Oshskoi Oblasti Nameren Sozdat Halifat v Yujnuh Regionah Kyrgyzstana [Imam of the As-Sarakhsi mosque in Kara Suu Intends to Establish a Caliphate in the Southern Regions of Kyrgyzstan]," *TsentrAziya*, 17 July, 2014 <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1405618200> (accessed May 3, 2014).

the first years of his work as an imam, he worked at the local textile factory, where he made *durras*¹⁶¹. Eventually, he quit that job for the work at the mosque and his businesses. Rafiq Qori never held a job at the *muftiat*, especially in the most lucrative department that deals with the pilgrimage to Mecca. Work at the muftiat would probably lead to his co-optation and open the door for cooperation. If economic liberalization turned Rafiq Qori into an autonomous economic actor, political liberalization created space for his contestation of the state control of Islam. In Kyrgyzstan during Akayev's regime, political contestation, including from imams, was tolerated. Despite occasional intimidation and pressure, Rafiq Qori was left alone for the most of the time. His contestation and independence did not entail serious consequences such as death in the environment of relative freedom brought by political liberalization.

This argument gains even more validity when compared with the state of Islam and independent Islamic leaders in Uzbekistan. The Karimov regime implemented neither economic nor political liberalization reforms. The number of autonomous economic actors is limited to a few. The country's wealth is distributed mostly among "a largely closed elite whose loyalty to the regime of President Islam Karimov is cemented by their integration in the state patronage network and the associated opportunities for self-enrichment."¹⁶² Put simply, there is neither space for the contestation of power nor autonomous economic actors in Uzbekistan. Consequently, there are no independent imams like Rafiq Qori. The definition of an independent imam in Uzbekistan is limited to an imam who does not take the side of the government and who does not praise Islam Karimov on a regular basis.¹⁶³ The government of Uzbekistan does not tolerate criticism and contestation of power, including from the side of religious leaders, in contrast to the government of Kyrgyzstan during the Akayev era.

Education

¹⁶¹ Traditional peasant scarves.

¹⁶² Andrea Schmidt and Alexander Wolters, "Political Protest in Central Asia: Potentials and Dynamics," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, 16, April 2012, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2012_RP07_smz_wolters.pdf (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁶³ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

The effect of education, including teachers and people he studied with, on Rafiq Qori is undeniable. The question stands not over the effect itself, but over its degree. In contrast to Alauddin Mansour, he was not a superbly read scholar.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Rafiq Qori had extensive religious knowledge. His first teacher Mubin Qori probably did not have much influence on his religious thinking, since Rafiq Qori only memorized the Quran under his tutelage. It was not until Rafiq Qori went to study from Hakimjon Qori that Rafiq Qori's opinion on Islam and politics were shaped. The importance of people who taught Rafiq Qori was noted by the former *mufti* Chubak aji Zhalilov. According to him, one of the reasons behind Rafiq Qori's negative attitude towards the state was the lack of deep understanding of religious knowledge and the direction in which he was led during his study years. He said: "If he had studied more or with a [different] direction, such things would not have taken place."¹⁶⁵ The presence or lack of deep understanding is contestable, although the level of religious knowledge between Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour is significantly different. Different interpretation of Islam, however, is not contestable. Religious knowledge held by Rafiq Qori was the reason he did not cooperate with the state, according also to Rafiq Qori himself. He spent the last ten years of his life reading and a pile of books was always on his desk.¹⁶⁶ When his cousin Shamsuddin asked him why he talked about topics that other imams were afraid to talk about publicly and thus risked his life, Rafiq Qori answered: "You have studied less, my brother. Since I have acquired more knowledge and know Allah better, I have the feeling that Allah is watching me and that angels are recording my every deed. Therefore, I chose this path. I cannot live quietly and enjoy life."¹⁶⁷ It is not known what authors and books he read. However, it is undisputable that his knowledge was at the root of his decision.

Hakimjon Qori - a classic fundamentalist - seems to have been Rafiq Qori's main teacher. The two maintained good relations and Hakimjon Qori was seen at Rafiq Qori's son's wedding, many years after Rafiq Qori returned to Kyrgyzstan. It was at Hakimjon Qori's underground school in Margilan where Rafiq Qori studied *fiqh*, which shapes every cleric's further interpretation of religious knowledge. Most importantly, it was under

¹⁶⁴ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Hakimjon Qori where his opinion on the relationship between Islam and politics was shaped. Hakimjon Qori never supported quietist stance on politics. He broke away with his teacher Hindustani Damla over the question of politics and Islam, considering his teacher too conformist and complicit with the Soviet rule.¹⁶⁸ Hakimjon Qori is reported saying: “Mullah Muhammadzhan¹⁶⁹ [Rustamov] is like a poplar in the field. He blows in the direction of the wind.”¹⁷⁰ Certainly, Hakimjon Qori influenced Rafiq Qori’s attitude towards the state. It would have been a surprise, if Central Asia’s most influential Wahhabi’s disciple held an opinion about the state control of Islam different from what Rafiq Qori did. However, the fact that Alauddin Mansour also studied from Hakimjon Qori limits the scope of explanation of the educational factor. It is necessary to explore other factors as well.

External Influence

The environment in Kara Suu played an important role in Rafiq Qori’s decision to be independent. His case gains clarity when explored from the perspective of geography and the population of Kara Suu. The town of Kara Suu is described as the capital of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia.¹⁷¹ As rightly noted by Chubak aji Zhalilov, it is hard to say that all Uzbek Muslims in Kara Suu belong to the Hanafi school of law. The majority of Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Kara Suu and in Kyrgyzstan overall are ethnic Uzbeks.¹⁷² According to Emmanuel Karagiannis, political strains, particularly the perceived mistreatment of the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan explain the rise of the organization among ethnic Uzbeks. Clearly, the Hizb ut-Tahrir is a vehicle for dissatisfaction with the current political and moral order in the region.¹⁷³ It represents dissent and discontent with the established order. Rafiq Qori’s negative attitude towards the state and its criticism were partially due to the fact that significant part of his audience were either members of Hizb ut-Tahrir or

¹⁶⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, “The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁶⁹ Hindustani Damla’s real name is Muhammadzhan Rustamov.

¹⁷⁰ Martha Brill Olcott, “The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, 23, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁷¹ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2007).

fundamentalists, who equally do not support the idea of cooperation with the government as the Hizb ut-Tahrir. His behavior was a response to the population's desires and aspirations. Rafiq Qori stood as the leader of Muslims, whom the government labeled as terrorists. It would have been substantially unpopular, if Rafiq Qori did not express dissent and dissatisfaction with the regime they were under, given the fact that his audience supported him mainly because of his independent stance. Rafiq Qori's popularity lied in his criticism of the regime and the difficulties it was partially responsible for. The degree of loyalty to the regime by religious leaders depends on the society and its demands.¹⁷⁴ In the study of independent Islamic leaders in Uzbekistan, Eric McGlinchey notes that independent *imams* "are supported by Uzbek society, and it is to society's demands - and not those of President Islam Karimov or the state - that Uzbekistan's *imams* (local religious leaders) respond."¹⁷⁵ Rafiq Qori, too, responded to Kara Suu's society's demands when he chose to be independent.

The evidence exists that members of the mosque talked him out of the idea of leaving the mosque and becoming a farmer. Rafiq Qori's cousin Shamsuddin revealed the story about it. He said:

"In 2005, police invited him several times and told him to get rid of the Hizb ut-Tahrir members and Salafis and threatened to put him into prison and other stuff, in case he refused. After these events, he came back and considered his future. He thought of leaving the mosque and becoming a farmer. He believed that his life would go on and that Allah would provide him. [However] people here, even youth, talked him out of this idea. They told him how knowledgeable he was, how good of a *daawat*¹⁷⁶ he was doing, and how great of a service he was providing. With the help of these and other arguments people convinced him to stay. So he remained at the post of the imam."¹⁷⁷

This story reveals how much influence the mosque audience had on Rafiq Qori. He criticized the state not only because he felt like doing it, but because the public opinion

¹⁷⁴ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 124.

¹⁷⁶ Call to religion and missionary work in Islam.

¹⁷⁷ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori's cousin.

towards the government was nowhere near positive. Also, public support reinforced his independent stance and gave him an impulse for further work. Chubak aji Zhalilov highlighted the role of public too. He stated: “The second reason [for Rafiq Qori’s decision not to cooperate] was to follow people’s desires, to act in a way to match what people have in mind and what they wish to hear, to follow the crowd, so to say.”¹⁷⁸ The argument with external influence fails to provide a complete explanation; Alauddin Mansour cooperated with the state no less than imams in other - less politicized - places in Kyrgyzstan. If the effect of the environment was overwhelming, it would have been similar on other imams in Kara Suu, including Alauddin Mansour.

Radicalizing Effect of the Two Brothers-in-Law

The death and disappearance of Rafiq Qori’s family members and friends had a radicalizing effect on him. He lost several close people because of the government crackdown on Muslims, who practiced Islam outside of the state sanctioned Hanafi tradition. Seeing his friends and relatives die, disappear, and be put into prison reinforced the critical attitude he held about the state. It was one of the holding factors for Rafiq Qori not to cooperate with the state. He did not cooperate with the government whose ruthless repression caused significant amount of pain to him, his family, and friends. His cameraman Dilyor highlighted: “A lot of his close people became *shaheed*¹⁷⁹. His brother-in-law Abduvali Qori from Andijan disappeared [in 1996]. He had a teacher who was killed in prison.”¹⁸⁰ Among his notable losses were the death and disappearance of his two brothers-in-law. Abduvali Qori - one of the most well-known Salafis in Central Asia - married Rafiq Qori’s sister Sharipakhan. Abduvali Qori and Rafiq Qori maintained good relations until the disappearance of the former in 1996, when he was last seen at the airport in Tashkent on his way to Moscow.¹⁸¹ Although not frequently, Abduvali Qori visited Rafiq Qori in Kara Suu.¹⁸² The friendship between them seems to have existed from the times of their student years under Hakimjon Qori in Margilan.

¹⁷⁸ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁷⁹ An Arabic word for a martyr who died for the cause of Islam.

¹⁸⁰ From the interview with Dilyor, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁸¹ Martha Brill Olcott, “The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁸² From the interview with Ahmadzhan, Rafiq Qori’s friend.

His second loss was that of his other brother-in-law Muhammadi Qori, whose sister he married. Rafiq Qori's wife Maksudakhan was Muhammadi Qori's sister and Mubin Qori's - Rafiq Qori first teacher on Quran - daughter.¹⁸³ Muhammadi Qori was sentenced to prison sentence four times and died while serving the last one. He was jailed for allegedly keeping in possession heroine and pistol bullets. Rafiq Qori was infuriated when he heard the news about his brother-in-law's death. He told people about the death of Muhammadi Qori during one of the Friday prayer lectures and warned those who were present to be careful, as it might that they, too, might find themselves in prison on fabricated charges.¹⁸⁴ In addition to the loss of Abduvali Qori and Muhammadi Qori, Rafiq Qori saw numerous cases of imprisonment of the members of his mosque. Although, the government of Uzbekistan was responsible for the death and disappearance of his two brothers-in-law, Rafiq Qori projected his dissent and offence to the government in Kyrgyzstan. The death and imprisonment of Rafiq Qori's close people set him against the government - at least on the mental level. It seems that he could not get over the emotional pain and start cooperating with the state. However, his losses have limited explanatory factor because Rafiq Qori faced intimidation. He was under pressure to change his attitude and behavior, but chose not to do so.

Personality as an Explanatory Agency Factor

Last, but not least, part of the puzzle is Rafiq Qori's personality. The agency factor completes the set of explanations. It would have been a significant miss, if Rafiq Qori's personality was omitted as an explanatory factor in the analysis. His character traits played a role in his decision not to be loyal to the state. He deeply believed in the righteousness of what he was doing and firmly stuck to what he thought was right. Religious beliefs are capable of tramping coercion and the promise of material reward.¹⁸⁵ Rafiq Qori did not turn down in the face of intimidation and threats, which he consistently faced from the law enforcement agencies, starting from the very beginning of his work as the imam of the As-

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ "Rafiq Qori Janozasi Part 2 [Rafiq Qori's Funeral Part 2]," YouTube video, 14:30, posted by "abubakir86," December 23, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKqsddOqTWc>.

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¹⁸⁵ Eric McGlinchey, "Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan," *Asia Policy*, January 2006, 123-144, <http://mason.gmu.edu/~emcglinc/ap1-mcglinchey.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

Sarakhsi mosque. Having faced numerous opportunities to leave the mosque and lead a peaceful life while still retaining his popularity - at least part of it - Rafiq Qori never deviated from the path he has chosen. According to the mosque member Kasymzhan, Rafiq Qori always “stuck to what he thought was right and told the truth.”¹⁸⁶ Put shortly, his actions, words, and behavior derived from his belief.¹⁸⁷

Rafiq Qori displayed extraordinary amount of devotion to his work. It seems that he sincerely believed that it was his duty what he described as conveying religion to people; even it meant falling over with the state authorities. He left aside even the words of his father and other family members who suggested that he leaves the mosque. In May 2006, his house was searched on the alleged charges that he belonged to a terrorist organization because his name and phone number were allegedly found in one of terrorists’ notebooks.¹⁸⁸ After this incident, his father - who died in 2008 - said to him: “My son, the state will either imprison or kill you. Instead, leave the mosque and do farming.”¹⁸⁹ Rafiq Qori’s response was: “No, I will not turn away from the path I have chosen, and I will keep conveying religion to people for the sake of my afterlife.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, Rafiq Qori’s father was not worried about him being the imam. His son’s criticism of the state was the reason for worrying. When suggested similarly by his cousin, Rafiq Qori said: “I will be held accountable for my deeds when I appear in front of Allah on the Day of Judgment. I have cancelled all the fun and turned down invitations [to weddings]. I have chosen this path. Death and fate are decided by the will of Allah. If a long life is my fate, I shall live. If not, then God’s will take place.”¹⁹¹ Some have called his devotion as the strength of faith. Regardless of framing this, Rafiq Qori simply believed that cooperation with the state was contrary to his religious obligation. What is more important is that he believed in it strongly enough to defy the state control and definition of Islam.

Conclusion

¹⁸⁶ From the interview with Kasymzhan, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁸⁷ From the interview with Dilyor, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁸⁸ From the interview with Shamsuddin, Rafiq Qori’s cousin.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Rafiq Qori contested the state definition and control of Islam because of structural and agency factors. He did not speak against the state; his objects of criticism were the order and the regime. Also, he did not agree on the state's definition of Hizb ut-Tahrir members as terrorists and enemies of the state. For him, they were neither of any harm to people nor the state. Structural explanations behind Rafiq Qori's decision are political and economic liberalization, his educational experience as well as the environment in Kara Suu. The loss of relatives and friends exacerbated what was already a critical attitude towards the state. His personality holds key in explaining why religious leaders chose to be independent and contest the state control of Islam. Intimidation and pressure yielded little effect, since he deeply believed in the rightness of his actions and was ready to sacrifice his life for the cause he believed to be his duty.

CHAPTER 6

Manifestation of Alauddin Mansour's Loyalty and Cooperation

Alauddin Mansour has been both an official and neutral imam. He was more loyal to the Akayev regime than to the next three presidents. Nowadays, it is fair to place Alauddin Mansour closer to neutral clerics on the loyalty spectrum, although he continues to criticize Hizb ut-Tahrir on a regular basis. Neutral imams are different from official clerics. Nevertheless, neutral religious leaders also contribute to the government's rule by their quietest stance over politics. Not rocking the boat by calling on the Muslim population to be patient and to put reliance on God is usually the most significant manifestation neutral imams express. It is fair to say that imams who do not contest the state definition and control of Islam and cooperate with the state authorities represent official Islam. The term comes from the Soviet Union, when Islamic clerics were forced to adjust their *fatwa*¹⁹² to the doctrine of the atheistic ruling regime. However, the tradition of labeling imams loyal to a ruler dates back to the time of Timur's rule in the fourteenth century. Timur established the institution of the head cleric - *Sheikh ul-Islam* - whom he appointed himself and who was responsible for the appointment of other imams and *kazys*.¹⁹³ Thus, the term official imam is a successor of the term '*saray imam*', used to denote imams loyal to a ruler.

Alauddin Mansour is an *imam* who is loyal to the government of Kyrgyzstan. He belongs to the group of imams who do not contest the state control of Islam and call to the adherence to the state backed and the *muftiat* promoted apolitical traditional Hanafi Islam. His loyalty is manifested best through his consistency in terms of keeping quiet over political, economic, and social problems - at least not blaming the government for the dire order in the country. Alauddin Mansour takes a moderate stance over the majority of issues.¹⁹⁴ His choice of topics for Friday and Eid lectures is a testimony to his loyalty. He usually gives lectures on the traditional set of topics adopted by the *muftiat*. It includes topics such as the performance of five daily prayers, fasting in the month of *Ramadan*, and observance of other commandments. Also, Alauddin Mansour gives lectures on the

¹⁹² A legal decision issued by an Islamic religious cleric.

¹⁹³ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ From the interview with Chubak ajy Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

interpretation of the Quran and hadiths.¹⁹⁵ Clearly, the topics he talks about at the mosque are apolitical. However, in addition to his routine support of the government, Alauddin Mansour's loyalty has been expressed through his alignment with the state over the issue of the Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Alauddin Mansour is considered to be one of the loudest critics of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan. His critical and somehow mockery stance on the organization has transformed him into the government's ally in the fight against Hizb ut-Tahrir. He is so harsh on the members of the clandestine group that one of the members of Hizb ut-Tahrir has questioned his belonging to Islam altogether. He has published articles and gave speeches criticizing Hizb ut-Tahrir and blaming their members for bringing schism into the community of believers. In the article published in the newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek*, Alauddin Mansour said:

“The doctrine of Hizb ut-Tahrir is like a flu or tuberculosis, it is very contagious. People subjected to its influence are brainwashed. And as cancer and AIDS, there is no ailment available for this disease. If the lost return to the fold of traditional Islam, we will help them to clear themselves. It is never too late to return to the right path. What is the goal I pursue? I want to show the true face of Hizb ut-Tahrir to people, including members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and other lost Muslims.”¹⁹⁶

His stance on Hizb ut-Tahrir is similar to the one adopted by the *muftiat* and expressed by the Osh oblast *kazy*. Niyazaly said: “Hizb ut-Tahrir [ideology] is contrary to the principle of pure Islam that we have adopted. The reason why we think Hizb ut-Tahrir is wrong, and our attitude is negative is because Hizb ut-Tahrir will not bring any good to Islam, it will cause trouble for Muslims.”¹⁹⁷ The common idea of the two clerics is their agreement on the opinion that the Hizb ut-Tahrir is of no benefit for Islam whatsoever, and that Muslims will suffer from it.

Also, Alauddin Mansour expresses his loyalty and sympathy with the regime by not allowing the members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir to pray at his mosque. He threatens not to start

¹⁹⁵ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁹⁶ Erlan Satybekov, “Raskolniki [Dissenters],” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 2001, <http://members.vb.kg/2001/09/28/09.htm> (accessed May 3, 2014).

¹⁹⁷ From the interview with Niyazaly, the *kazy* of the Osh oblast.

the Friday prayers on time, unless all member of the Hizb ut-Tahrir leave the mosque.¹⁹⁸ In a small town like Kara Suu, the members are known. This move of Mansour damaged his reputation not only among the Hizb ut-Tahrir members, but also among ordinary Muslims. His cooperation with the state seems to have cost him a reputation and earned him the name of an official *imam*. However, there is more to his cooperation with the state than just criticism of Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Alauddin Mansour has openly supported the government by campaigning for a presidential candidate Askar Akayev. In the 2000 presidential elections, he was a trustee of the incumbent president Askar Akayev for the Osh oblast alongside cosmonaut Salizhan Sharipov and politician Alisher Sabirov. He “called a Kurultay (council) of the Uzbek diaspora in Osh to support Akayev, which was broadcast throughout the region.”¹⁹⁹ People who approached his “mosque during the campaign were given small calendars with photos of President Akayev standing beside famous Uzbek *imams*, and calls to support Akayev were heard in the mosque.”²⁰⁰ It was this act of Mansour, which earned him criticism from the side of Rafiq Qori, who said that it was prohibited in Islam for a cleric to support a candidate in a secular state.²⁰¹ Alauddin Mansour did not respond to the criticism, but the relationship between them severely worsened after the event. His alliance with Askar Akayev, who was far from being popular among the general public, seems to have cost him the reputation of a genuine religious leader. Instead, Alauddin Mansour was started being seen as a puppet figure of Akayev’s political machine.

Analysis of the Reasons for Cooperation

In Alauddin Mansour’s case, it is impossible to state that his belonging to the Hanafi *madhab* is the only reason for his decision to cooperate with the state. In fact, it is hard to include his adherence to the Hanafi school of law as a reason at all, since it is disputed whether he really belongs to the Hanafi *madhab* or not. Although rumors exist about his

¹⁹⁸ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

¹⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, “Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security,” 1 March, 2001, 16, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/Central%20Asia%20Islamist%20Mobilisation%20and%20Regional%20Security.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

belonging to the Salafi group of scholars from the late 1970s, Alauddin Mansour declares himself to be a Hanafi now. If it is the case, the Hanafi-Maturidi ideology is an important explanatory factor. However his Salafi past and awkwardly excessive loyalty, which he has expressed during the 2000 presidential election campaign and the heavy criticism of Hizb ut-Tahrir, hint at more complicated explanation than simple adherence to the Hanafi *madhab*. Alauddin Mansour's education is not a relevant factor in the analysis because people he studied from and with contested the state control of Islam. One of the factors for explaining Alauddin Mansour's loyalty seems to have been his ethnic belonging and the long-term benefits the Uzbek population could have enjoyed during Akayev's presidency. Presence or absence of material benefits from the cooperation is the key in explaining Alauddin Mansour's decision to pledge loyalty to the state. Regardless of how primitive it sounds, the foremost important factor seems to have been the business protection from the side of the government.

Education

Education seems to matter least in determining whether religious leaders cooperate with the state or not - at least in Alauddin Mansour's case. His example is illustrative of the fact that the places and people from whom *imams* have studied do not necessarily have a significant influence on their further thinking and decision to be loyal to the state. Alauddin Mansour has not studied from Hanafi scholars, who are known for their complicity with the government, regardless of order - be it democratic or totalitarian. Representatives of the Hanafi-Maturidi tradition have long agreed that cooperation with the government does not contradict their religious obligation, as long as freedom to practice Islam is ensured.²⁰² However, Alauddin Mansour never belonged to this group of clerics during his education years. His formative years were spent at an underground school in Margilan under the tutelage of Hakimjon Qori, which is known as the classic fundamentalist/Salafi cleric of his generation.²⁰³ Hakimjon Qori was the main critic of Hindustani Damla and other Hanafi scholars, whose call on Muslims to be patient and rely on God he found excessively complicit. His politicization had an effect on his young students, including Alauddin

²⁰² Martha Brill Olcott, "The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

²⁰³ From the interview with Moldo Sabyr, the former muftiat employee.

Mansour. Eventually, the group of Hakimjon Qori's students led by Abduvali Qori, Rahmatullah Qori, Abdulaziz, and Alauddin Mansour broke away with their teacher over the issue of politics and Islam.²⁰⁴ Influenced by the works of Hassan al-Banna, Maududi, and Sayyid Qutb, they came to odds with their teacher and clearly favored establishment of an Islamic state.²⁰⁵ This group of young clerics was not aware of brutal purges, through which their teacher had gone through. Therefore, their political ambitions seemed as excessive and most importantly untimely to Hakimjon Qori. Alauddin Mansour started off as a neo-fundamentalist and one of the leading Wahhabis in the region whose aspiration was the establishment of an Islamic state. However, he has ended up as a loyal *imam*. Although for some scholars education might serve as a relevant explanatory factor for loyalty, it is not in the case of Alauddin Mansour.

Level of Religious Knowledge

Alauddin Mansour's level of knowledge as well as his belonging to the Hanafi *madhab* is not of substantial importance in explaining his loyalty to the state. Knowledge wise Alauddin Mansour stands substantially higher than Rafiq Qori.²⁰⁶ It is difficult to compare the level of knowledge Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour have. The sharpest difference that comes to mind when comparing these two clerics is indeed their level of knowledge, and at the first glance it seems to be able to explain the difference in attitude. Alauddin Mansour's level of religious knowledge surpasses not only that of Rafiq Qori, but many others scholars in the region. As mentioned above, he is considered as one of the most well-read scholars in the country and is the first author to translate the Quran in Central Asia. His initial translation into Uzbek was later translated into Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Turkmen languages.²⁰⁷ In addition, he has numerous students who take classes from him. His religious knowledge seems to have played a role in his decision. According to Chubak aji Zhalilov, one of the reasons behind Alauddin Mansour's cooperation with the

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010).

²⁰⁶ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

²⁰⁷ Wikipedia, "Alauddin Mansour," February 2014, http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Мансур,_Алауддин (accessed May 3, 2014).

authorities is his “deep understanding of religious knowledge.”²⁰⁸ Apparently, it is hard to measure the depth of one’s understanding of religious knowledge. However, it is fair enough to assert that the amount of religious knowledge Alauddin Mansour attains has influenced his thinking and attitude to various issues, including cooperation with the state. If it was not for the sources from which he has received knowledge, it would have been perfectly fine to assert that his level of religious knowledge is an important factor in explaining his loyalty. The fact that he has studied with and from main antagonists of cooperation with non-Islamic rule casts a serious doubt over the argument about the level of religious knowledge.

Belonging to the Hanafi Madhab

Alauddin Mansour’s adherence to the Hanafi *madhab* does have some degree of explanatory power. The Hanafi school of law does recognize a non-Muslim rule as legitimate as long as the freedom of religion is provided by the ruler.²⁰⁹ In these circumstances, Hanafi-Maturidi clerics do not view obeying the ruler as contradictory to their religious duty and do not contest the state power. Instead, they consider cooperation with the state as an obligatory act. In a similar vein, Alauddin Mansour might have viewed obeying the state as a duty bestowed upon him by Islam. Chubak aji Zhalilov hinted that Alauddin Mansour chose to participate in Akayev’s election campaign because of the former president’s friendly policy towards religion.²¹⁰ Although Akayev’s policy towards Islam was not the most exemplary of democracy, Muslims in Kyrgyzstan enjoyed far more freedom than in neighboring Uzbekistan. Chubak aji Zhalilov called Alauddin Mansour’s decision wise and said that he would have done the same, simply because Akayev’s policy towards religion was right/proper.²¹¹ Alauddin Mansour might have had the sincere intention to aid Akayev who allowed more freedom for Muslims in Kyrgyzstan. If it was for this reason, it is easy to explain Alauddin Mansour’ loyalty with his adherence to the Hanafi *madhab*.

²⁰⁸ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

²⁰⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, “The Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 2007, <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/olcottroots.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2014).

²¹⁰ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

However, despite the fact that he has declared himself to be Hanafi, his belonging to the Hanafi *madhab* is highly contested. First of all, Alauddin Mansour's past hints at anything but not his belonging to the Hanafi *madhab*. Throughout his study process and up to the break-up of the Soviet Union, Alauddin Mansour has been on the side opposite to the Hanafi clerics. Alongside other prominent Salafi clerics, Alauddin Mansour criticized Hanafi clerics for allegedly being on the wrong path and distorting the true messages of Islam.²¹² For the Salafi group of clerics to whom Alauddin Mansour has belonged, the adherence to *madhab* itself is an act of idolatry. According to the former *muftiat* employee and prominent scholar Moldo Sabyr, Alauddin Mansour does not belong to the Hanafi *madhab*. Even if Alauddin Mansour is Hanafi, his idea of the Hanafi *mazhab* seems to be different. He has turned down numerous invitations to join the Council of *Ulama* under the *muftiat*, explaining his refusal with the statement that there are no scholars in the Council of *Ulama*, or that they are simply not up to the level to invite him.²¹³ Regardless of the adherence to the Hanafi school of law, in the case of Alauddin Mansour, the ideological factor is too hollow to explain his loyalty.

Ethnic Belonging and Long-term Benefits of Akayev's Presidency

The loyalty manifested through campaigning for Akayev in the 2000 presidential elections seems to have stemmed from the fact that Alauddin Mansour is an ethnic Uzbek. Askar Akayev was the most popular president among ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan. His friendly policies towards the minorities have ensured him votes in the elections. Akayev became the president on the back of the violent clashes between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 1990. He understood the need to reintegrate the country's largest ethnic minority group and designed domestic policy accordingly. "Akayev's domestic policies, casting Kyrgyzstan as a "common house," have helped restore a sense of order, and have reassured many Uzbeks that they are welcome in Kyrgyzstan."²¹⁴ For the majority of Uzbeks in the southern regions, Akayev was an embodiment of relative stability and better treatment. The opposition to the Akayev regime was full of politicians with nationalistic views. Clearly,

²¹² From the interview with Moldo Sabyr, the former *muftiat* employee.

²¹³ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

²¹⁴ Alisher Khamidov, "Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks: A Safe Vote for the Government," *Eurasianet.org*, 8 September, 2004, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090904.shtml> (accessed May 3, 2014).

the Uzbek population favored Akayev, from all the candidates he was the best candidate in terms of ensuring that the interests of Uzbeks are not trumped and their voices are heard in the parliament. Alauddin Mansour seems to have been influenced by Akayev's promise to continue his minority friendly policies when he decided to campaign for him. He was not the only imam of Uzbek ethnicity to express support for Akayev in 2000. However, he was the leader of the support movement. Former *mufti* Chubak aji Zhalilov also thinks that Alauddin Mansour was moved by ethnic sentiments when making decision to cooperate with the state. He said: "It [decision to campaign for Akayev] might have been that he thought Akayev's presidency would bring benefits to Uzbeks and himself as well. Maybe he thought, if he had helped Akayev, more Uzbeks would earn a seat in the parliament. During Akayev's presidency, there were seven or eight [ethnic] Uzbek members of the parliament."²¹⁵ Although not primary, Alauddin Mansour's ethnic belonging and expectation of long-term benefits to the Uzbek minority in exchange for cooperation was one of the reasons he decided to be loyal to the regime. The fact that Alauddin Mansour has been off the radar in terms of cooperation since the departure of Akayev in 2005 further suggests that it was his ethnic belonging and Akayev's domestic policy, which gave impulse to cooperation.

Material Gains from the Cooperation with the State

Last, but not least, the material incentive seems to be the driving force for Alauddin Mansour's cooperation. Personal gain is the factor which completes the set of reasons and brings clarity to the question of why religious leaders chose to pledge loyalty to the state. It is the main missing part of the puzzle. Although it is hard to make assertions with hundred per cent certainty, it is nevertheless possible to look into how Alauddin Mansour might have benefited from the cooperation. Also, evidence suggests that Alauddin Mansour was what residents of Kara Suu called "radical"²¹⁶ when he first started his work at the Al-Bukhari mosque. Eventually, his orientation changed, and he found himself alongside the state authorities. This realignment suggests that an important event took place in Alauddin Mansour's life, which forced him to reconsider his stance on the cooperation with the state.

²¹⁵ From the interview with Chubak aji Zhalilov, the former *mufti* of Kyrgyzstan.

²¹⁶ From the interviews with Abdikarim and Akramzhan, residents of Kara Suu.

It might have been the publication of his book - the translation of the Quran into Kyrgyz. According to Abdikarim, Alauddin Mansour agreed to campaign for Askar Akayev in exchange for the license for his book, which was promised to him by Akayev's political advisor Alisher Sabirov.²¹⁷ It is not known what sort of license Abdikarim told me about, but, most likely, it was the permission to print and assist in selling the book, which earned Alauddin Mansour substantial amount of money, or "millions" as Abdikarim called it. If the book license was the reason for the single act of cooperation, then, there must be another reason why Alauddin Mansour does not rock the boat on continuous basis. Similarly to Rafiq Qori, he does not have a post in the lucrative department of the *muftiat*. However, he owns a business in the Kara Suu market and trades with Dubai.²¹⁸ Alauddin Mansour, benefited from Akayev's economic liberalization, but did not make use of the space for power contestation created by political liberalization. He seems to have been successfully co-opted by the state through what seems a protection or patronage. Protection - at least not extortion - of the business Alauddin Mansour owns is an important factor to consider in explaining his permanent realignment with the state. The depth of the research conducted hints at the material gains as the foremost explanatory factor for cooperation with the state.

Conclusion

There is no single explanation to the question why religious leaders decide to cooperate with the state. Alauddin Mansour's example is illustrative of this statement. Imams pledge loyalty to the state and opt to work with it because of several reasons. The ideological factor is just one dimension of the complex explanatory set. The level of religious knowledge and the depth of its understanding are important factors too. Ambitions of the larger group imams belong to - in Alauddin Mansour's case it is ethnicity - might also play a significant role in their decision to become official imams. However, this takes place only if political leadership is willing to negotiate and provide long-term benefits to particular groups imams represent. Material gains in the form of business protection, issuance of or assistance in the issuance of licenses for books imams write, or any other kind of assistance

²¹⁷ From the interview with Abdikarim, resident of Kara Suu.

²¹⁸ From the interview with Rafshan Kochkarov, resident of Aravan.

in increasing wealth, seems to be the formative factor in their attitude and behavior towards the state authorities in terms of cooperation.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

Islamic religious leaders differ in their response to state control and the definition of Islam. Some choose to confess loyalty, while others opt to stay independent. The division into official and independent *imams* has long tradition. Nevertheless, it has received little attention from scholars conducting research on Islam in Kyrgyzstan, and Central Asia overall. Independent Islam has remained an untapped source for studying reasons for tension between the state and religion in secular countries. Effects of political and economic liberalization have not been explored in the context of the interplay between state and Islam. The majority of scholars have turned a blind eye on the presence of economic and political freedom as the reason for the emergence of mild forms of political Islam, such as independent Islam. I attempted to explore these by answering the question: “Why do some *imams* pledge loyalty to the state, while others contest its control and definition of Islam?”

My findings indicate that independent Islamic leaders contest the state control of Islam for a various set of structural and agency reasons. Politically and economically liberal environment serves as the precondition for the emergence of independent Islam. It paves the way for religious leaders to criticize the state for the control it exerts over Muslims in the country. Independent *imams*' educational background, life experiences, and the context in which they operate affect their decision. Last, but not least, personality expressed through the strength of convictions and the levels of devotion to work explain independent religious leaders' behavior.

As for official *imams*, there are several factors that explain their loyalty and cooperation. The ideological factor is one dimension of the complex explanatory set. The level of religious knowledge and the depth of its understanding are important factors. Ambitions of the larger group imams belong to - in Alauddin Mansour's case it is ethnicity - might also play a significant role in their decision to become official *imams*. This takes place only if the political leadership is willing to negotiate and provide long-term benefits to particular groups *imams* represent. The most significant explanatory power capable of providing an answer remains material reward from the cooperation. Material gains in

exchange for loyalty are the formative factors in official *imams*' attitude and behavior towards the state.

Findings of my study fill in the void in the literature, advance findings of some scholars, and contradict arguments of others. The emergence of independent Islam and independent Islamic leaders has remained at the periphery of research - scholars have devoted almost no attention to this topic. My thesis addresses the imbalance in the literature with the exploration of the two. It advances findings of scholars as McGlinchey and Olcott, who propose alternative explanations for the emergence of political Islam and its milder forms as independent Islam. My findings support McGlinchey's argument that independent *imams* are social entrepreneurs and contribute to the existing debate. I argue that independent Islamic leaders emerge not only in response to society's demands. A whole set of structural reasons exists, besides societal demand. In addition, independent *imams*' personality plays a substantial role. Also, my findings support Martha Olcott's argument that the current rise of political Islam is rooted in earlier decades of Soviet rule. The schism between the *ulama* in the 1970s had a long-lasting effect on the religious thinking in the region. My results show that political and economic freedom - not only authoritarian regimes - might cause radicalization of Muslims. Opportunities created by political and economic liberalization serves as a precondition for the rise of radical Muslims with milder views. Thus, my research's implications complicate and diversify the existing debate for people working in the same field. It hints at the idea that democratic governments run the risk of providing a fertile ground for the growth of radicalism.

Similar and yet different stories of Rafiq Qori and Alauddin Mansour encourage more research. They have made a similar journey, but ended up at different destinations. There seems to be no blue-print explanation for independent Islamic leaders' behavior. Each case deserves full-scale individual exploration and analysis. My findings encourage identification and exploration of more independent *imams*, in order to advance findings in the relatively under-researched topic.

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