ACTA VIA SERICA
Vol. 4, No. 1, JUNE 2019: 147–169

BOOK REVIEWS

Laruelle, Marlène, ed. *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics, and Identities*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018. 327 pp. (ISBN-13: 9789004357242 [E-book] and 9789004306806 [Hardcover])

> What can I do, Muslims?
> My place is placeless, my trace is traceless,
> No body, no soul, I am from the soul of souls.
> I have chased out duality, lived the two worlds as one.
> One I seek, one I know, one I see, one I call.
> (Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī [Maulana], Persian poet, Islamic scholar and theologian)

The tensions between Islam and the West have a long history going back to the Crusades. The terrorist attacks that marked the post-9/11 era have polarized and simplified this narrative where the War on Terror is mostly interpreted as "War on Muslims" since Muslims are seen as a threat to secularization and globalization centralized in the West, particularly the United States (Renner 2017, 39-53). Post 9/11 events have marked religiosity, read as Islam, a synonym for radicalization. Interpretation, stereotypes and representation of Muslims equal the justification of and solution to the War on Terror. New Islamist movements from the 1990s to the 2010s in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf countries have triggered the same narrative in the Central Asia. West and the Central Asian governments seem unanimous in their (mis)conception of Islam though the "re-Islamization" of Central Asia in post-Soviet Russia as mostly rooted in the revival of tradition, national heritage and culture rather than any political agenda. The celebration of Sufism stands in sharp contrast with the strict monitoring of religious practices in Central Asia. Needless to say, not all Islamic activities in this region are apolitical. Muslim-nationalist ideology in Tajikistan (Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan [IRPT]) fought for dominance over USSR-supported parties. The invocation of Islamic laws, Shari'a, by a part of the Kyrgyz and Tajik populations revealed their demand for social justice and political honesty.

Geopolitically speaking, defining Central Asia is a great challenge. Being a Muslim in this region makes the definition even harder. Central Asia, narrowly explained within national boundaries, refers to the five post-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Considering historical heritage and avoiding strict borderlines, Central Asia embraces eastern Russia, Afghanistan, northern Iran, northwestern Pakistan, northern India, northwestern China, southern Caucasus, northern Turkey, Tibet, and Inner and Outer Mongolia (Yemelianova 2018, 10-11; Erturk 1999, 1-10).

Informed of the complexities and intricacies of Muslimness in the literature produced by a new generation of Soviet researchers, Laruelle fashions *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics, and Identities* with a wide range of investigations by scholars who are mostly familiar with the native language and are able to capture different implementations of Muslimness in the broad spectrum of Islamic practices. The book shows how a part of the Central Asian societies is in favor of Soviet-style secularization of public spaces and the marginalization of Islam since rather than associating Islam with a set of cultural and social practices, they labeled it as a post- Soviet 'fad' or 'spree'. Another faction prefers an indigenized version of Islam that individuals adapt and appropriate according to the national culture and tradition of the region. That is how the cultural products of Muslims in Central Asia have been partly influenced by what Central Asian Muslims define as the epitome of successful and affluent Muslim modernity.

Being Muslim in Central Asia is carefully divided into four parts and twelve chapters, structured to explain the nuances of Muslimness in public and private realms. The first section, "What Does It Mean to Be a Muslim in Today's Central Asia?" focuses on how Muslim "Self" and "Other" are shaped, relying on comparative, historical or statistical surveys. The second part, "Islam, Politics, and the State," highlights the public and administrative face of Islam covering a wide range of topics from the Islamic revival and the definition of "Original" Islam to banking and investment. Thirdly, "Islam in Evolving Societies and Identities," draws attention to discursive practices such as how Central Asian Muslim immigrants integrate into other Muslim communities, cosmopolitanism and Muslim's redefinition of financial success and entrepreneurship, and the role of social media and popular television networks in a society where both Muslims and non- Muslims are assimilated. The forth section, "Female Attire as a Public Debate," bridges the gap between public and private space. It chronicles how the hijab has found its way into political debates, activism, changes in the society, fashion and religio-national identities.

The first part opens with "How 'Muslim' are Central Asian Muslims?" Through this question, Yemelianova problematizes the definition of Central Asia geopolitically and claims that only a rigorous historical and comparative approach can shed light on the complexities of this region since English-language Central Asian studies are not only inadequate but also rely on secondary sources in English/Russian and are thus responsible for stereotypical

representations. The Cold War and post-Cold War discourse, the decline of sponsorship for interdisciplinary studies, and political barriers have all contributed to the recycling of literature that was problematic in the first place. In addition, the turmoil in the region has made Islamic practices a security issue for the post-Soviet Russian regimes who have been preoccupied by this question: what if our country takes Taliban jihadists and the Arab Spring as a model? The road taken by Central Asian Muslims has not followed *Ummah*, fellow Muslims in the West and the Middle East; it may sometimes meet *Ummah*'s thought, but it is different and autonomous.

Junisbai, Junisbai, and Zhussupov have scrutinized two rounds of national public opinion surveys within five years (2007-2012) to elucidate views toward Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Criticizing the qualitative and secondary-source based nature of previous studies, they concentrate on patterns of religious identity, devotion to religious practices, and adherence to Islamic laws. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are compared and contrasted in terms of favoring Islamic practices and *Shari'a*. They conclude that religious revival is tightly woven into the fabric of Muslim populations, though they fail to mention the number of participants and the target population in their research.

The first part closes with another survey-based analysis about the interrelation of Uzbekness and Muslimness. In "Uzbekness and Islam," Ro'i and Wainer concentrate on the role of Islam Karimov, the first and the most powerful president of the independent Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, who reigned for 25 years (1991-2016). They try to discover how Karimov's both suppressive and supportive policies toward Muslims were internalized in Uzbekistan. Conducted in 2015 with 203 participants, the survey reveals that in terms of Islamic practices, identity and attitudes, most Uzbekistanis assert Karimov's message. Suppressive policies toward Muslims are privileged because it is believed that suppression leads to stability compared with the chaos Uzbeks witnessed in neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Though Uzbekis perceive themselves as Muslim believers in folklore, customs and traditions, they are proud of their Soviet socio-cultural heritage and distance themselves from orthodox and extremist Islam.

The second section starts with Epkenhans' "Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan" (IRPT), chronicling its rise to power, interactions with society, activism, conflict, ultimate defamation and marginalization. The Soviet press misunderstood and partly misrepresented IRPT's views by associating them with the Wahhabi label, though IRPT was primarily silent about its religious agenda and highly favored Sufism, a point of divergence with Wahhabis. The threat of chaos and civil war legitimized governmental homogenization of different voices in Muslim political parties to create a unanimous voice and a safe version of democracy in Tajikistan. Similarly, in "Power, 'Original' Islam, and the Reactivation of a Religious Utopia in Kara-Suu," Biard discusses the identity crisis and the inclination toward politicization of Islam during the time of political disillusionment and economic hardship in

Kyrgyzstan. Focusing on advocates of re-Islamization headquartered in the Fergana Valley, Kara-Suu, because of its geopolitical importance and diversity, Biard reveals how religious debates can increase power in secular realms not only by besmirching the opponents with labels like "Wahhabi," "extremist," or "Islamic terrorists," but also by challenging the current secular order. In this polarity of good vs. bad Muslim, the motivations are diverse and multi-layered. Interestingly, this revival of an Islamic utopia built on "social justice," "economic transparency" and "free trade" poses as an alternative to the existing order, be it political or financial (112).

The second part closes with "Islamic Finance and the State in Central Asia," where the capabilities and confines of Islamic economics in Central Asia are discussed. Wolters tries to answer why out of five states in Central Asia, only one bank in one country, National Bank in Kyrgyzstan, has entered global finance. The advancement of Islamic finance in Central Asia is tightly interwoven to political crises in this region. The attention to local context and postcolonial views are two discourses that tailor Islamic financial transactions, both individually and nationally.

Part three opens with Schwab's "Visual Culture and Islam in Kazakhstan," focusing on the leading Islamic media company, Asyl Arna, an Islamic television network. Setting a role-model for the middleclass by offering guidelines for devotion, piety and economic achievement, Asyl Arna delivers different messages of Islam in miscellaneous posts and programs varying from those conveyed by the company's founder and *mufti* of Kazakhstan to pictures metaphorically associating the Quran with a washing machine that removes stains and dirt from the heart or as an oxygen mask for the nourishment of the soul. However, this utopian depiction of the harmony of gender in marriage, family values, collaboration, contentment and friendship can be equally stressful if a Muslim cannot find a respectable middle-class job or if Kazakhstan experiences economic decline.

In "Playing Cosmopolitan: Muslim Self-fashioning, Migration and (Be)Longing," Stephan-Emmrich recounts the nuances of transnational Islam and Islamic practices among financially successful Tajik migrants in Dubai. How they mirror, re-create, shape and are shaped by their guest and host society is interestingly delineated in their preference to be called "businessmen" rather than "migrants." The Persian language and Sufi-Islamic literature, art and philosophy connect Tajiks with Afghan and Iranian business in Deira, Dubai. This bond with other Central Asian migrants, in a broader sense, strengthens the multifaceted relationship between economy and religion in the Islamic world. In the same vein, Turaeva's "Informal Economies in the Post-Soviet Space" investigates the role of post-USSR Islam in the formation of entrepreneurship in Central Asia. Criticizing the paucity of literature regarding "informal" economic activities, Turaeva shows how the dynamicity of Islamic norms – in gender, trust and debt – is practiced by migrant workers, who privilege Muslimness and mosque communities over their racial and ethnic identity. After scrutinizing

the informal economy in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, she chronicles the ways Islam has presented a substitute for the existing economic order. Though informal regulatory principles are mostly rooted in patriarchy (i.e. only men's word equals trust), women are more successful because they engage in a branch of business that does not necessitate such principles.

The final part starts with Nasritdinov and Esenamanova's "The War of Billboards: Hijab, Secularism, and Public Space" in the Kyrgyz Republic. It recounts the competing discourses on billboards in urban Bishkek where religiosity, secularism, nationalism and Western fashion all struggle to gain power; women's bodies are their showcase. Westernization and Islamic extremism are marginalized in favor of nationalism and secularism. In the government, both secular and religious groups negotiate over their share of power. While Soviet modernity bans the hijab in public spheres, national secularism promotes freedom and choice in women's attire and that is why a group of Kyrgyzstani parliamentarians have requested the minister of education guarantee the right to wear the hijab in schools. At the same time, secular nationalists label the hijab as an "imposed" Arab or Pakistani dress-code and prefer *elechek* (Kyrgyz headdress) over any foreign influence, be it Western or Arab (239). On the other hand, Muslims find the hijab in line with Kyrgyz heritage by referring to women's *elechek* and men's *chapans* (coats). Not only as the sight of power rivalry but also as active members, women in the hijab dynamically took part in Islamic Fashion Week, blood donation, bike riding, and demonstration to show their discontent with the hijab ban in schools.

In "Hijab in a Changing Tajik Society," Nozimova explains how the hijab is not only a controversial religious practice but also a new form of women's identity in contemporary society. Women's dress is both a personal and public regulatory force, though the definition of the hijab in the Quran is not very specific in covering the neck, hair and chin. Unveiling, one of the most palpable representations of modernization in the 20th century, be it Soviet, Tajik, Iranian, Turkish, or Egyptian, has been mostly altered into women's seclusion rather than promoting their appearance in the workforce or academia. Now, the hijab, by disregarding class and the financial status of women, can serve as a unifying factor especially when it is complimented with a strategic marriage that functions as a supplementary social value. This chapter carefully chronicles the politicization of female costume, narratives about woman who practice the hijab and their re-valuation of the hijab.

The book closes with chapter twelve, "Switching to *Satr*: An Ethnography of the Particular in Women's Choices in Head Coverings in Tajikistan." Miles' ethnographic fieldwork research covers a wide range of social network posts (e.g. Facebook), sermons, YouTube videos, interviews and events from 2013 to 2015 about the decision of Tajik woman whether they prefer *satr*, the Tajik word for the hijab. She has closely observed the intimate environments of rituals targeted at woman like *arūstalвon* (welcoming of a bride) and *gahvoraвandon* (welcoming new mother to social life), a fertile ground where religious knowledge is conveyed and religious practices are performed. Though *satr*, because of

subverting the socio-political norms, is associated with extremism and civil war by officials, Tajik women practice it to deliver a message that goes beyond the hijab revealing the dynamics of power exchange.

Being Muslim in Central Asia is an elegant collection of different representations of Islam in articles, graphs and figures covering a wide range from advertisements, posts in social networks, banners, pop singers, athletes, fashion shows, and bazaars, to demonstrations, activist women, religious figures and Friday prayers. Though the countries in Central Asia, in a broad sense, are briefly referred to (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, India and China), a single article in this collection dedicated to Turkmenistan is missing. Two articles analyze Kyrgyzstan ("Power and 'Original' Islam" and "War of Billboards"); one examines Uzbekistan ("Uzbekness and Islam") and one Kazakhstan ("Visual Culture"). The voice of Tajikistan is overpowering in all four parts of the book. When it comes to woman's dress code, two articles out of three are dedicated to this country. Though great effort was devoted to an all-inclusive and comparative view of Central Asia, only three articles securitize this region comprehensively: two articles on Islamic commerce ("Informal Economies" and "Islamic Finance") and one on history ("Two Countries, Five Years"). Previous studies are referred to, criticized and analyzed, but a famous precursor, Jo-Ann Gross's collection of articles in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change* (1992) has been neither (dis)approved nor mentioned. Of course, in another project and another book, these issues can be solved once we understand why they were not included in Laruelle's genuine collection gathered with love and devotion. To put it in Rumi's words, a famous Sufi poet and an inseparable part of Central Asian heritage who marked the beginning of this review, I conclude: "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

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