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Book Reviews

Islam and Politics in Central Asia by M. Haghayeghi. London: Macmillan, 1995, 264 pp.

This book is described as 'an attempt to put into comparative perspective the principal dynamics of Islamic revival in Central Asia ... this book will focus primarily on domestic factors which are considered here to be more critical in shaping the Islamic orientation of the Central Asian republics in the foreseeable future.' As such this is a useful work complementing the recent succession of books which focus in the main upon the new geopolitics of the region.

Haghayeghi's first two chapters explore the evolution of Islam in the region from the time of the Russian conquest until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He then turns his attention to the post-Soviet era, starting with a chapter on Islamic revival, which stresses the diversity of the region evident in the varying impact of religion on nomadic and settled populations through the ages. This has ensured that, as in other parts of the Muslim world, different Islamic trends can act as forces for conflict as much as sources of unity. To support this contention he explores some of the ways in which Islam makes its impact upon contemporary Central Asia, whether through official religious establishments still controlled to some degree by the state authorities, Sufi brotherhoods, political parties such as the Islamic Renaissance Party which played such a key role in the Tajik conflict, or what he describes as 'Wahhabi' movements found in the Ferghana valley region of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan – though the identity of these groups is contested by many observers.

The next two chapters examine the political evolution of these states, providing a host of useful information about the newly-emerging political parties based largely upon secondary written sources and interviews with leading figures in some of these organisations. The final chapter is entitled 'Islam and Ethnic Relations', and looks at some of the tensions in the region – within the Islamic community and between the indigenous nationality groups, and between them and those perceived to be 'outsiders', notably the Russian speakers.

Though there is much useful material to be found here, the book is not without its weaknesses, notably a tendency to make generalisations that are not fully explored. Thus in dealing with the role of tribalism in Central Asia (pp. 117–18) the author details the various clan divisions within each republic and asserts the importance of these to political life, but does not explore what this means in practice. Elsewhere, in a perceptive list of factors inhibiting or contributing to democratisation in the region, he argues that those republics which have inclined towards more pluralistic politics are those which have lacked a strong Islamic tradition. Here, of course, he inclines towards the arguments of Samuel Huntington and others who point to the influence of religious traditions as one of the factors underlying the likely success or failure of democratisation. Yet whilst the argument may be valid it needs to be explored in

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more depth, for other factors may be at work in these republics which predispose them towards liberal or authoritarian forms of rule. This is hinted at in the brief conclusion but perhaps needs further exploration. For all this, it is good to see a book that does focus on the domestic, or at least the political and religious aspects of the new politics of Central Asia.

JOHN ANDERSON

Empire's Edge: Travels in South-Eastern Europe, Turkey and Central Asia by Scott Malcomson. Boston USA and London: Faber and Faber, 1994, 256 pp. Paperback, £8.99.

This is not just another travel book. Malcomson has the great advantage of deep sympathy for and knowledge of Islam and the Turkish peoples, their culture and their language. His book is also a series of reflections on history and cultures, on the ebb and flow of interrelationships between peoples – in particular of those between ruling and subject peoples – and on those on the margins between one civilisation and another. Some, like most modern Turks and Romanians, suffer from inferiority complexes, largely as a result of the depredations of Kemal Atatürk and Nicolae Ceauşescu. They respond by identifying themselves with more powerful – that is, 'European' – civilisations. Malcomson questions some of the basic premises of European civilisation, including that of time.

> In former Communist countries, time is what you lost when you were still living in a Communist country.
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> In Turkey, you find still more varieties of time. For example, the time of the Sufi *tarikatlar*, the Muslim mystical orders, with their lineages of spiritual masters stretching back for centuries, back to Muhammad; the time of 'fundamentalists', who are not at all sure that modern times are the best of times; and the time of families, who mark time according to their parade of ancestors. Each of these think of time differently, and it isn't at all clear that any of them want to live according to Eurotime, or believe that time is money. They want to live with honor in their own lifetime. (p. 134)

Malcomson's initial chapter, on Romania, is a biting exposé of a variety of nationalist paranoias. Unfortunately he does not seem to have encountered people like Doina Cornea and Viorica Lascu whom I met in Cluj and who have retained a deep international Christian culture and integrity.

He examines the gap between reformist dictators and their subjects; the parallels between Atatürk and Stalin; the tensions between outward conformity and inward detachment. In Turkey, he contrasts the rediscovery by the younger generation of Islam in the face of the rootlessness of their parents.

He discovers that the Uzbeks have to a large extent been able to withstand absorption into the Soviet system. On his visit in 1992, incognito and on a forged passport, he found the Russians despised as '*mahallasiz*' – groundless. Uzbeks find it difficult to imagine a person without a '*mahalla*', the community based on the street, the district, the basic unit of life; and a very satisfactory, relaxed and convivial way of life it provides. He argues that it was through the mahalla rather than through religious practices that Uzbeks withstood communism. Each mahalla creates a refuge, a

world of its own, with its own rules, including land tenure. It accepts intermarriage but incomers are always regarded as outsiders. Uzbeks live with their parents, respect them and take their advice, honour their customs, including prayer, which is still an integral component in all contacts apart from strictly business meetings and meetings with non-Muslims. Organised Islam, perhaps the one positive thing most Uzbeks have in common, is reviving, with mosques being opened on a mahalla basis. Malcomson finds it tolerant, coexisting with a widespread belief in magic. One young iman told him that money spent on mosques would be better spent on educating children, using modern methods and materials which are inappropriate for mosques. State schools have remained secular, providing neither any basic information about Islam nor time for prayers; there are not enough private schools to meet parents' demands. The young imam also complained of widespread hypocrisy – perhaps not unconnected with the acceptability of the traditional Shia practice of '*taqiya*' by which membership of an atheist organisation such as the Communist Party can coexist with faith in one's inmost heart.

Malcomson finds little evidence of fundamentalism. Mohammed Salih, former leader of *Erk*, an Uzbekistani opposition party, believes fundamentalism will become a problem only if the government makes it one; so far it has exploited fear of 'Wahhabism' to make itself more acceptable to foreign governments and the well entrenched ex-communist bureaucracy. Wahhabism derives from the teachings of Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–87), who believed all Muslims who were not following his austere path were infidels. However, Malcomson's conclusion is that Wahhabism is probably nonexistent as a real force in Central Asia. Salih emphasises that Islam is above politics, and that Islamic activities are not aiming at political power, although he believes that they have the potential to become politicised if reforms are not forthcoming.

Since Malcomson's visit many mosques which had been reopened in the Ferghana Valley and elsewhere have been closed again as 'hotbeds of fundamentalism', and families have had to revert to instructing children at home.

Particularly interesting are his encounters with Naqshbandi at a shrine near Bukhara where he learns how the Naqshbandi '*tarikat*' (secret order), which he had encountered in Istanbul, and even some Sufi '*sheyhler*' (heads of orders) here and there survived communism. Most imams, however, know only the sharia of mainstream sometimes bureaucratic Islam and now need to work out again what happens to tarikat practice where there are no proper sheyhler to learn from, and how Islamic mysticism, the Sufi path, the '*tarikatlar*', relates to modern life. Malcomson was also taken to the shrines of Bahauddin Naqshbandi's mother and aunts where women pray for solutions to their problems.

Uzbeks still do not identify with the state and their government is well aware that they probably never will. Malcomson stresses the absence of the tradition of a state as a point of reference. The concepts of Turkish, pan-Turkish and pan-Turanian, which arose in the nineteenth century, proved ephemeral in the face of Russian, and later of Soviet, policy. Their proponents had varied and irreconcilable aims: modernisation; Europeanisation; Turkism; an Islamic crusade against Europe. The communists at first adroitly exploited religious beliefs and localism and then, within three years, liquidated all Central Asian leaders of whatever brand. Malcomson believes there could be a revival of pan-Turkism, based primarily on unity of language.

As far as Islamic survival is concerned, his saddest chapter is on Bulgaria, where he concentrates on following up Todor Zhivkov's ethnic cleansing in the north-east and the Rhodope mountains. Ottoman Bulgaria's geopolitical situation attracted

Muslims from an astonishing variety of nations and religious traditions, including the Deli Orman ('lunatic forest'), Turks of the north-east. The warriors, the '*deliler*' ('the ones who were crazy for God') who colonised this frontier area were

> ... wild in their enthusiasm for Islam, so wild and hungry that they absorbed many things that hadn't the slightest connection to traditional, state-sanctioned Islam. ... Some believed, for example, in such non-Muslim notions as the migration of souls and absolution of sins by means of confession. Some practised adult baptism and a form of Communion involving not only bread and wine but also cheese. All believed in saints and saintly miracles, not as things of yesteryear but as realities of the present and future, as manifestations of God coming to visit their very own hearths, their own forests.
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> The *deliler* made excellent colonizers ... the flexible lunacy of their faith enabled them to convert the common folk they encountered ... sharing their soulful wares ... their poems, dances and songs, their arcane theories about numbers and colors, their secret rites, their tales of heroic saints and of miracles, their holy sacrifices, their dreams, their rhapsodic visions of God. (pp. 81–82)

What Malcomson found in Bulgaria was Muslims who had almost completely lost their individuality and their heritage, hardly even retaining vestiges of religious belief. Communism had destroyed the traditional Turkish capacity for hard work and given them a veneer of western life so that those who had been thrown out and moved to Turkey felt themselves to be in an oriental, alien land. But neither can they feel at home in Bulgaria any longer.

Malcomson's sympathy and learning make for a book which all who are interested in the Islamic peoples of the Balkans and Central Asia should read.

JANICE BROUN

The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism by Ahmed Rashid. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994, x+278 pp. Hardback, £36.95, $59.95; Paperback, £14.95, $25.00.

There are a number of recent books covering the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics. Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani journalist who has travelled widely in the region, has produced one of the most lucid. He devotes a chapter to each of the republics, with other chapters drawing out some of the common histories and current preoccupations. There are also useful chronologies and basic data in the appendices.

Much of Rashid's early history is derived from standard, mainly western works on the region, which he summarises competently. Most interesting is his own assessment of the current situation, based not only on reports by other visitors but on his own impressions and analysis.

Rashid begins by briefly outlining Central Asia's history and the rival claims of different empires to the region (of which the Soviet was just the last in a long line). The two competing currents among the Muslim resistance to the Russian tsars and later the Bolsheviks – the *Jadid* modernisers who wanted to bring Islam up to date to compete with the Russians, and the mullahs and traditionalists who joined the *basmachi* revolt against the Russians and Bolsheviks – ensured Russian control. 'The power of Islam to unite different tribal and ethnic groups or as an ideology to

mobilize the people, was weakened, and that allowed the Bolsheviks easily to crush Islam', writes Rashid. But Islam remained a powerful if hidden force, which 'reinforced ethnic solidarity and drove a wedge between Russians and non-Russian Muslims'. Rashid points up the different trends, with Wahhabism and Sufism retaining strong followings.

Both religion and nationalism played a key role in the upheavals in Central Asia as the Soviet Union collapsed. In his portraits of the individual republics Rashid shows how the old clerical establishment was overthrown, new establishments formed and greater contact – for good or ill – made with the rest of the Islamic world. Militants emerged seeking to establish their vision of Islamic states, often focusing around the Islamic Renaissance Party. In Uzbekistan, for example, 'groups such as the Wahabis and the IRP are bitterly pitted against each other ... the militants maintain a narrow and highly sectarian view of Islam, which will bring them up against not only the government but other Islamic groups in future. Much of this sectarianism has been imported ...' This divided Islam is unable to compete with the organised power of the old *nomenklatura* which has largely held onto and consolidated its power and brutally suppressed both Islamic and liberal opposition.

The one exception was Tajikistan which, for a while, had a coalition government with the IRP as one of the partners. The forced ousting of President Rakhmon Nabiyev sent a shock save through the communist establishment throughout Central Asia, as Rashid stresses. Tajikistan was already descending into the regional and factional fighting that has ravaged the country and seen some 50,000 killed since 1992. Russian and Uzbek intervention ensured the restoration of the old communist *nomenklatura* under a new president, Imomali Rakhmonov.

Looking to the future, Rashid sees the danger of a north–south divide in Central Asia, with rivalry between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for dominance in the region. The author highlights the important role Uzbekistan has come to play as Russia's local gendarme. Rashid believes Islamic fundamentalism will find the region difficult to master, with the open hostility of the republics' governments, the sectarianism of political Islam, the ignorance of peoples about the wider Islamic world and ethnic and national rivalry. He believes their fundamentalist puritanism is alien to Central Asia, and that more moderate Sufism is already providing a more attractive alternative. The chaos of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, both with powerful Islamic fundamentalist political movements, will, he believes, act as a deterrent; but he points out that change will come to these quasi-communist-ruled states. Ethnic, political and national alienation from the ruling regimes is growing. In Uzbekistan half the population is under 16 and both the mosque and discos are an attraction for the young.

Strangely, the footnotes give no page references when referring to books or articles. There are also a number of mistakes or inconsistencies in the spelling of names. It is to be hoped that these minor points will be corrected if a new edition of this useful book is published.

FELIX CORLEY

Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder by Suzanne Goldenberg. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994. xvi+233 pp. Hardback, £36.95, $55.00; Paperback, £14.95, $22.50.

'The combination of great antiquity, providing ample material for distortions, and

present-day bitter conflicts makes it exceedingly difficult to write an honest history of the Caucasus', Goldenberg confesses. This cool understatement should never be forgotten when studying this complex and volatile region where Europe, Asia and the Middle East combine. Goldenberg, who first visited the region in 1991 to cover it for the London *Guardian*, does her best to thread her way through the minefield.

She gives a reliable analysis of the recent history, current situation and prospects for the three republics of the Transcaucasus as well as the North Caucasian republics in Russia and the breakaway would-be states of the region. She fixes on some of the constants in a region which has always been a focus of change and upheaval – continuing even since her book was published, most notably with President Yel'tsin's invasion of separatist Chechnya in December 1994.

Just occasionally, Goldenberg gives an arguable assessement, or slips into error, for example declaring that the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has, since 1988, been the bloodiest of the post-Soviet conflicts. That dubious distinction is held by Tajikistan, which saw a bitter civil war in 1992–1993, closely followed by the Russian assault on Chechnya (which occurred after this book was published).

Goldenberg points out how reassessments of history have been misused to justify the ethnic cleansing seen all over the Caucasus in the past few years (indeed, most areas of the Caucasus are now more ethnically 'pure' than perhaps they have ever been). Georgians and Armenians have been tempted to 'glorify a fabled past', Georgians allege that Ossetians have arrived in the region only in the past 200 years, Ossetians 'peddle the notion' that they once had an empire that took in Catalonia and Britain. Even sadder are groups like the Shapsugis, down to 10,000 Russified survivors who hanker after a glorious past.

There are some signs that ethnic conflict is not the inevitable outcome: the author reveals a remarkable, peaceful resolution of rival land claims by the Chechens and Laks in Dagestan. The Laks agreed to move out of land given to them in 1944 when local Chechens were deported, and moved to southern Dagestan. 'It was the first land dispute in the region to be settled amicably', Goldenberg writes, 'and the first time that a nationalist organisation has facilitated compromise rather than conflict'.

Religion is not neglected in the book. In North Ossetia, Goldenberg reports, 'Islam is confined to the remnants of the old aristocracy'. She notes that while Isalam regained an institutional presence in Dagestan after the Second World War with the establishment of a Muslim Board, 'it became alienated from the majority of the population'. On the other hand, in neighbouring Chechnya, no new mosques were built until 1978, but parallel Islamic practice continued. Islam is not strong, however. 'Only the very old and the very young attend the mosque', Goldenberg observes, having visited the newly-built mosque honouring the Sufi saint Doka in the Chechen village of Tolstoy-yurt (formerly Doka-yurt). She notes that religion is just one of the factors, together with the wartime deportations of some of the North Caucasian nations, that provide a powerful symbol of national identity.

In the final chapter, 'Milestones', Goldenberg offers a grimly accurate description of the post-Soviet Caucasus, a region where 'normal life ... has broken down completely'. Only a few things can be taken for granted, she says, 'among them war, privation, crime and Russia'. The only suggestions she offers are for a reassessment of the bases of independence and a new model of cooperation between the nations, with enforced disarmament and outside mediation. She may be right, but she may be overly optimistic.

FELIX CORLEY

The North Caucasus Barrier: the Russian Advance towards the Muslim World edited by M. Bennigsen Broxup. London: Hurst, 1992, xvii+252 pp. Hardback. Paperback, 1996, £14.95.

The Muslim North Caucasus, home to several of Russia's rebellious colonies, is an interdisciplinary area of study shared by sovietologists and orientalists. Neglected by both, it has remained considerably underresearched. Those scholars who have specialised in the area are the main contributors to the present publication, which covers a span of four centuries in the history of the North Caucasus.

Following an introduction by Marie Bennigsen Broxup on Russia and the North Caucasus, two chapters cover the period of military struggle of the North Caucasians against Russian colonisation in the nineteenth century. Moshe Gammer (the author of '*Shamil and Muslim Resistance to the Russian Conquest of the North-Eastern Caucasus*' (London, 1994)) discusses Russian strategies in the conquest of Chechnya and Dagestan from 1825 to 1849. Based on comprehensive use of western and Turkish archives, his research provides an analysis of the situation whereby the indigenous peoples, who were technically and numerically inferior to the Russian military machine, succeeded in nullifying Russian advances in the area for over half a century. The resistance of the North-West Caucasian tribes, which remains one of the less known pages in the history of the Caucasian War, is researched by Paul Henze. His study is set in the context of contemporary politics, which makes it particularly illuminating. The chapter by Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay looks into the Russian policy of cooptation of local elites in the Circassian and Kabardian societies and its results. This case-study of traditional Russian colonial policy applied from sixteenth-century Tartarstan to twentieth-century Afghanistan reveals patterns of relations between the indigenous North Caucasian peoples and Russian colonial authorities, a subject which is still relevant.

Lemercier-Quelquejay is a well-known authority on the Muslim peoples of the former Soviet Union. She bases her research on extensive use of Russian sources, which unfortunately means that, in her writing on social structures, she applies a Soviet Marxist terminology which is not always appropriate.

The period of the Civil War is, perhaps, the most confused and least studied period in the history of the North Caucasus. The chapter by Marie Bennigsen Broxup is therefore extremely valuable. It provides important data on the 1919–1925 uprising in Chechnya and Dagestan, and one can only wish that the author had been more thorough in providing source references to all her most valuable information.

The period of the struggle of the Chechen and Ingush peoples against the Bolshevik regime and the history of Bolshevik persecutions of those peoples are the subject of Abdurahman Avtorkhanov's chapter. Himself a Chechen émigré, Avtorkhanov fled from Stalin's Russia in the 1940s. Since then he has specialised in the study of Soviet politics. What makes his contribution most interesting, however, is the fact that he was an eye-witness to most of the events he describes, and he possesses a unique first-hand knowledge of the subjects he writes on. For me this is the most fascinating chapter in the book.

The investigation by Fanny Bryan of the way Islamic institutions have operated in the Soviet and post-Soviet North Caucasus is based on the assumption that Islam has remained the predominant force in the Muslim societies of the North Caucasus and that at present it is 'on the offensive' (p. 196). While providing an interesting account of the activities of the Sufi brotherhoods in Chechnya and Dagestan and the role they have played in preserving religious values in those societies, the author places an

emphasis on the influence of Islam on contemporary political developments which seems hard to justify. Unfortunately, no attempt is made to investigate changes within the religious institutions themselves and in their relations with other social and political forces which have occurred during the process of intensive Soviet-style modernisation in the communist period.

Finally, the editor brings us to post-Soviet developments in the area. The collapse of the Soviet Union has left the North Caucasian peoples within the structure of the Russian Federation. The only North Caucasian republic which has attempted to gain political independence is the Chechen Republic. The declaration of independence by the Chechen government in November 1991 has not been recognised by Russia or any other foreign country. The events which led to this declaration and the subsequent developments are discussed in the closing chapter by Marie Bennigsen Broxup.

The book presents a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of political, social and religious life in an area which for centuries has presented a formidable barrier to Russian territorial and political expansionism. Published at a time when the North Caucasus has once again become a top priority in Russian national and security policy, it is an excellent source for anyone anxious to attain an insight into one of the most complex and explosive regions of the former Soviet Union. It will certainly prove to be a classic work in the field.

ANNA ZELKINA