

CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION IN THE POST-SOVIET “SOUTH”

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Abstract: Thanks to increasing globalization, both West and Islamic ideas are finding new adherents among young people in Central Asia, though an “Asian” identity is not developing, at least not yet. The changes are happening so quickly, it is hard to say whether one set of ideas will prevail or if the result will be a new amalgam.

Globalization, defined as an increase in the volume and intensity of flows—of goods, finances, technology, ideas, and people—has received a tremendous amount of attention in recent years. Most research to date has dwelt on either the causes or the consequences of this process, and has tended to focus on one or another discrete aspect of such flows. Specifically with regard to the flow of ideas, it has been widely observed that cultural globalization results in an overarching pattern of “hybridity,” according to which certain foreign ideas are absorbed while others are rejected. Yet such hybridized outcomes are hardly coherent; rather, they more closely resemble a wild chorus of competing ideas than a well-integrated intellectual model. It remains unclear exactly what kind—or kinds—of cultural amalgams are emerging in various regions, and what prospects there are that certain elements within these mixtures will become even more prevalent than they are now.

This article explores the answer to that question by considering the cultural impact of globalization in the majority Muslim states of the former USSR: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and

Uzbekistan. In particular, I aim to describe and explain cultural globalization in the form of specific identities that have begun to crystallize among a sizable group of adherents. Moreover, I focus on young people, since this segment of society is most powerfully connected to and influenced by globalization. I discuss the main causes of this process, as well as the most important constraints that may limit its further development.

Drivers and Enabling Conditions

A crucial factor driving cultural globalization is economic growth and, along with it, integration into the international economy. By far the most important indicators of this for our purposes are foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade—in particular, *inflows* of FDI and *imports* of goods and services. The overall picture is complex. On the one hand, considerable changes have taken place; on the other hand, they fall terribly short of meeting the requirements for full integration. The only question is whether such insufficiencies are so overwhelming as to nullify the effects of the progress to date. On the whole, the answer is that they are not.

FDI inflows have certainly risen significantly overall during the past decade. Of course, it is by far greatest in the four oil and gas exporters, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan attracted only relatively meager investment.¹ Nevertheless, this should not lead one to completely discount the importance of those investments that have been made. As observed in a 2011 report by the OECD, “In Central Asia, economies have achieved staggering growth performance over the past 10 years—labor productivity has grown between 3 and 6 percent above the world average, GDP has grown by about 8 percent annually and FDI has grown nine-fold.”² Even though (as the same report notes) expansion has slowed sharply since the onset of the “Great Recession,” these numbers are still noteworthy. Growth has been accompanied by a strong and sustained rise in imports, largely independent of each country’s degree of energy dependency.³ Freight import tonnage also increased markedly between 2006 and 2009, with all countries seeing

¹ According to World Bank data, FDI net inflows in 2010 were roughly as follows: Kazakhstan \$9.1 billion, Turkmenistan \$2.2 billion, Uzbekistan \$820 million, Tajikistan \$375 million, Kyrgyzstan \$230 million. Azerbaijan is the outlier with respect to trend, as it achieved an FDI net inflow peak of \$3.5 billion in 2004 followed by net outflows after 2006, before rebounding to \$560 million net inflow in 2010. See <http://data.worldbank.org>. Also Farra Fadi, Claire Burgio, and Marina Cernov. 2011. Competitiveness and Private Sector Development: Central Asia 2011. At <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/finance-and-investment>, accessed January 8, 2012.

² Fadi et al.

³ Using 2000-2005 as a baseline, each country’s percentage increase of total imports as of 2011 was: Azerbaijan 298%, Kazakhstan 221%, Turkmenistan 335%, Uzbekistan 300%, Kyrgyzstan 467%, and Tajikistan 255%. Based on data for imports of goods and services. IMF. 2011. Regional Economic Outlook: Middle East and Central Asia. At www.imf.org.

increases of over 50 percent, except Tajikistan (28 percent).⁴

It has been widely noted that these are not highly diversified economies. Only in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were 80 percent of exports from three or more sectors.⁵ Consequently FDI tends to be concentrated—especially into the energy sector of the oil and gas exporters (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan).⁶ Nevertheless, the investment that has occurred provides a framework for further development. More importantly, it has helped furnish the foundation for a dramatic increase in the intensity of cultural flows.

Of course, when speaking of economic progress in this part of the world, important caveats must be noted. While trade has certainly risen dramatically, it remains far below what it might be due to numerous bureaucratic, infrastructural, and policy barriers.⁷ Infrastructural challenges abound. There continues to be a serious lack of adequate transportation, storage, and (particularly in Tajikistan) electricity supply.⁸ Many local roads and bridges are in a state of utter disrepair (again, particularly in Tajikistan, as well as Kyrgyzstan). Investments into this sector have overwhelmingly focused on major national and international transit corridors rather than local transportation. As a result, these countries are receiving only a fraction of their potential cargo flows. As one might expect, the combination of bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption routinely stymies efforts to make a positive difference.⁹ There has been very slow progress in the diffusion of international economic norms and functional standards.¹⁰ Finally, the international economic crisis reversed some of the gains that had been made, heaping debt upon countries hard pressed to service

⁴ Transport Corridor Europe, Caucasus, Asia (TRACECA) dataset. At <http://www.traceca.org/en/routes/transport-data/trade>, accessed January 8, 2012. No data available for Azerbaijan.

⁵ World Bank. 2011. Trade Expansion through Market Connection: The Central Asian Markets of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. At <http://www-wds.worldbank.org>, accessed January 12, 2012.

⁶ Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeeddin and Anis Chowdhury. 2012. “International trade and foreign investment.” In Samiul Hasan, eds., *The Muslim World in the 21st Century: Space, Power, and Human Development*. New York: Springer.

⁷ Jacek Cukrowski and Daniele Gelz. 2011. Behind-the-Border Trade Facilitation: Development Along Trade Corridors in Central Asia. At www.developmentandtransition.net, accessed January 1, 2012.

⁸ World Bank. 2011. Trade Expansion through Market Connection..., 14-34.

⁹ International Crisis Group. 2011. Central Asia: Decay and Decline. At <http://www.crisisgroup.org>, accessed January 1, 2012.

¹⁰ Martin Spechler and Dina Spechler. 2012. “The International Political Economy of Central Asian Statehood.” In Emilian Kavalski, ed., *Stable Outside, Fragile Inside? Post-Soviet Statehood in Central Asia*. Burlington: Ashgate. Jean-Louis Racine, ed. 2010. *Harnessing Quality For Global Competitiveness: Upgrading Eastern Europe and Central Asia’s Quality and Standards*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

it—especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Yet pockets of development and global connectedness have emerged throughout the region, including in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Such development is important, inasmuch as it brings with it technological advances that constitute key vectors of cultural globalization, including the Internet as well as global television and cinema. As with practically all of the other indicators of progress, the relevant indicators in this sphere are subpar by comparison with most other countries. But comparisons with other countries are far less important than internal comparisons over time when assessing conditions for cultural change. For all the lingering problems and shortcomings, such developments represent substantial improvement over conditions in the quite recent past. Most importantly, they reflect a situation in which enough flows increasingly enter so as to make a significant difference in cultural context—both directly, by impinging on attitudes, and indirectly, by facilitating more international contact.

A truly pivotal change is internet penetration. It is true that subscription rates for internet service have lagged behind global averages. This is especially true of fixed broadband in-home subscription, where only Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are ranked as having “medium” penetration at 26 and 25 percent, respectively, while the others barely register at all.¹¹ But this tells only a small part of the story. Overall connectivity in these countries has improved dramatically, and both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan score higher on such measures overall than does Russia.¹² The World Wide Web is typically accessed in crowded internet cafes, at the workplace, or via mobile phones, and statistics reflect a massive rise in such usage over the past decade. This is especially true in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, but in Uzbekistan and even Tajikistan and it is possible to access the internet in major cities for a reasonable sum.¹³ Blogging has also become popular, with lively discussions and often quite edgy posts on every imaginable topic. The majority are conducted in the native language or Russian, although English and mixed language blogs are also plentiful. Only Turkmenistan remains essentially off the Web—and even in Ashgabat there have been mild rumblings of change.¹⁴

¹¹ Peter Evans. 2011. Asia Fixed Broadband and Internet Market Forecasts, At <http://www.budde.com.au/Research/Asia-Fixed-Broadband-and-Internet-Market-and-Forecasts.html>, accessed January 1, 2012.

¹² Kazakhstan overtook Azerbaijan as the best performers in Global Information Technology Report rankings, at 67 and 70, respectively, while Russia was ranked 77 (although Russia was ranked 42 on infrastructure). World Economic Forum. 2011. Global Information Technology Report 2010-2011, At <http://www3.weforum.org>, accessed January 8, 2012.

¹³ Internet World Stat. 2011. At <http://www.internetworldstats.com>, accessed December 5, 2011.

¹⁴ Annasoltan. 2011. As the Turkmenet Slowly Blossoms, Is a New Strategy in Order? At <http://www.neweurasia.net>, accessed January 11, 2012.

Hollywood movies are popular, in addition to Turkish, Russian, and Indian fare. For example in Uzbekistan, despite the fact that the market is nationally regulated and domestic production is subsidized, pirated foreign films are still abundantly available in urban areas.¹⁵ Television programming includes American shows like *Friends*, *Sex in the City*, and *South Park*. Turkish, Russian and Islamic channels are also available. Watching such programming generally requires cable or satellite access, but this is fairly common. At Internet cafes customers partake in popular videogames and gambling (monopolized by young men), use social networking sites like *Vkontakte*, *Agent*, *Odnoklassniki*, and *Facebook*, and access various informational as well as media sites (*Wikipedia*, *YouTube*, pornography, etc.). Other indicators and conveyors of cultural globalization are Karaoke bars and discos, at which popular Western and Russian music is featured. In this context it is worth noting that in 2011, Azerbaijan's entry won the Eurovision song contest, while a contestant from Kyrgyzstan won the "CzechoSlovakia's Got Talent" contest. In short, young people are increasingly plugged in to global (especially Western) culture.

Another important vector of globalization is international migration, including sustained diasporas and return migration. The vast majority of such migration is from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan to Russia (and to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan), and consists of male menial laborers. While no reliable data exists, most estimates during the peak years (i.e., prior to the current economic crisis) have ranged from 1.2 to 2 million from these three countries alone, with another perhaps several hundred thousand from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.¹⁶ This massive cross-border movement of people has greatly contributed to the infrastructure of globalization, fostering the spread of internet-capable telephones, internet cafes, foreign exchange bureaus, money wire services, and travel firms—all geared to facilitating communication and remittances from the diaspora.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, in light of their often poor living conditions and marginal status, the social (as distinct from economic) remittances delivered by these migrants to their home communities appear to be small.¹⁸

¹⁵ The BBC's country assessment for Uzbekistan notes, "Foreign channels are carried via cable TV, which is widely available." BBC. 2012. Uzbekistan, At <http://www.bbc.co.uk>, accessed January 5, 2012.

¹⁶ Erica Marat. 2009. Labor Migration in Central Asia: Implications of the Global Economic Crisis, At <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>, accessed March 10, 2010; Irina Ivakhnyuk. 2009. The Russian Migration Policy and its Impact on Human Development: The Historical Perspective, At <http://hdr.undp.org>, accessed January 14, 2012.

¹⁷ Kursad Aslan. "Labor Migration and Its Potential Consequences for Central Asia." CACI Analyst. April 17: 08, At <http://www.cacianalyst.org>, accessed November 11, 2011.

¹⁸ Vanessa Ruget and Burul Usmanalieva. 2011. "Social and Political Transnationalism Among Central Asian Migrants and Return Migrants." *Problems of Post-Communism* 58:

However, recent years have also seen a substantial increase in young people going abroad to study or for professional internships at foreign firms.¹⁹ This has taken place largely through state-funded scholarships. The governments of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan have been especially active in underwriting study abroad, and Kyrgyzstan has established a scholarship program as well. Moreover, in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, while there are no such government-sponsored programs, graduates from foreign universities have elevated status.²⁰ In addition, thousands of scholarships are provided by foreign governments and private foundations in the developed world, such as Fulbright, Gates, and Erasmus Mundus. Russia has long been the most common destination for students from Central Asia. While not generally regarded as part of the global core, particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg students are able to access the most advanced technological and ideational flows. However, perhaps because of the many well-publicized incidents involving violence against emigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, a growing percentage of such students have tended to choose other destinations. Increasingly, this leads them to the West, which now accounts for close to 20 percent of the total.²¹ For example, to note one favorite location, there were over 3,600 students from these countries studying in colleges and universities in the United States during the academic year 2010-2011.²² While smaller in number, an increasing number of training programs and internships for young professionals have also become available from state-based organizations like the OSCE and USAID, private foundations such as AIESEC, and private firms (both national and multinational). Here again, Western destinations are considered to be by far the most desirable.

This point deserves to be underscored, because such sojourns are especially disruptive to established beliefs. Even for migrants who have already been exposed to (and perhaps influenced or attracted by) Western

6 (November): 48-60.

¹⁹ As of 2010, the following numbers of students from these countries were abroad (in thousands): Azerbaijan 10.0, Kazakhstan 35.1, Kyrgyzstan 4.3, Tajikistan 6.5, Turkmenistan 11.9, Uzbekistan 23.3. The numbers for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are down from peaks of 46.4 and 31.1, respectively, in 2008. UNESCO. 2012. At <http://www.stats.uis.unesco.org>, accessed January 3, 2012.

²⁰ This is a particularly significant development for Turkmenistan. "Turkmenistan Set to Allow Foreign-Educated Graduates to Work in State Bodies." RFE/RL News Digest. March 30, 2011, At www.rferl.org, accessed January 6, 2012.

²¹ 17.4% of all Central Asian students who studied outside their country of origin in 2007 did so in the West, compared to 9.7% in 1999. UK Higher Education International Unit. 2010. International Higher Education in Facts and Figures, at <http://www.international.ac.uk>, accessed November 19, 2011.

²² IIE. 2011. Open Doors 2011, At <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>, accessed January 8, 2012.

ideas and practices via the internet or the media, experiencing them as a lived reality is far more vivid and affecting. Those who return home bring with them a host of new ideas and practices, some of which (as discussed below) jostle uneasily with mainstream identities.²³

In addition to these key drivers of globalization in the former Soviet south, several important enabling conditions should be mentioned. These include widespread anomie and a lack of high levels of legitimacy on the part of ruling regimes. There are several reasons for this, but salient among them throughout the region one finds an absence of democracy, limited personal freedoms, widespread poverty, obstacles to upward mobility and barriers to market entry.²⁴ All of these negatively impact people's everyday lives.

First, all of these regimes (except, for the moment, Kyrgyzstan) have been highly authoritarian and clientelist. While small coterie of elites have managed to enrich themselves and establish a form of oligopoly, the masses remain essentially unrepresented.²⁵ The collapse of the Soviet system has also resulted in a system characterized by stratified wealth, including extreme poverty in many areas (population below the national poverty line is 47 percent in Tajikistan and 43 percent in Kyrgyzstan).²⁶ This is compounded by a generally poor system of education, which dims any hopes for social improvement.²⁷ Economic distortions pose an immense obstruction to mobility. As Gerald Hübner argues, rather than focusing on formal rules, it is more instructive to examine actual business operations in the region. Doing so highlights the obstacles posed by price distortion, corruption, and a lack of strong property rights.²⁸ Judged on that basis, all of these countries perform poorly, with Kazakhstan the best at an unenviable 78 on the Index of Economic Freedom.²⁹ Corruption is

²³ Nan Sussman. 2000. "The Dynamic Nature of Cultural Identity Throughout Cultural Transitions: Why Home is Not So Sweet." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4: 4 (November): 355-373. Odil Ruzaliev. 2006. *Attitudes Toward Globalization and the Use of New Technologies*, At http://www.nbr.org/Downloads/pdfs/PSA/Uzk_Conf06_Ruzaliev.pdf, accessed April 8, 2008.

²⁴ EBRD. 2010. *Transition Report 2010*, at <http://www.ebrd.com>, accessed January 1, 2012.

²⁵ Scott Radnitz. 2010. *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press.

²⁶ Rates for Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are 15.4% and 15.8%, respectively. UNdata, At <http://data.un.org>. No data are available for Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan.

²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*.

²⁸ Instead of relying on World Bank indicators, Hübner emphasizes the rankings assembled by the Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones, Inc., which are based on opinion polling of business people. Gerald Hübner. 2011. "Foreign Direct Investment in Azerbaijan-the Quality of Quantity." *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 28: 21 (June): 2-6.

²⁹ The other countries' scores were: Kyrgyzstan 83, Azerbaijan 92, Tajikistan 128, Uzbekistan 163, and Turkmenistan 169. The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc.

omnipresent. According to Transparency International, the least afflicted country is Kazakhstan, ranked 120 out of 183 measured.³⁰ Finally, high interest rates and collateral requirements effectively restrict financing for small and medium enterprises and would-be entrepreneurs.³¹

Despite such pervasive problems, numerous scholars have noted the low levels of overt dissidence in these countries. Less clear is the reason for such relative quiescence. Is it mainly a matter of fear and intimidation, or is it more a reflection of apathy, or perhaps even a reflection of high levels of confidence in government policies? In the absence of sound opinion data—due to the repressive nature of these regimes—no unequivocal answer is possible. Nevertheless, there is reason to suspect that popular support is based on considerations of order and stability, as well as a shared interest in at least a modicum of welfare provision. As Anna Matveeva notes, “[s]ince the governments partly base their legitimacy on their ability to look after the people, they are especially vulnerable to a crisis over welfare.”³² Obviously, this is a rather weak standard of legitimacy, reflecting a wish to avoid lurching destabilization more than anything else. Certainly, there has been no overt clamor for democratization as in the Arab Spring—at least not yet. Charles Ziegler argues that publics across Central Asia are wary of devolving too much authority below the state level.³³ This is hardly surprising in light of the tumultuous events of the past two decades, coupled with the absence of a tradition of independent civil society. Yet a lack of enthusiasm for democratization *per se* should not be misconstrued as active support for authoritarian leaders.

John Heathershaw’s conclusions about Tajikistan may thus be broadly applicable in this region: “...while legitimate order has emerged in Tajikistan, this order is contingent and differentiated. Tajiks resign to authoritarian government not because they value it but because there are no plausible alternatives.”³⁴ In view of the recurrent turmoil in Kazakhstan since 2005, sporadic indications of unrest in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan,

2011. Index of Economic Freedom, At <http://www.heritage.org>. For comparison see World Bank and IFC. 2012. Doing Business 2012. At <http://www.doingbusiness.org>, both accessed January 17, 2012.

³⁰ The others received even more abysmal rankings: Azerbaijan 143, Tajikistan 152, Kyrgyzstan 164, and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan tied at 177. Transparency International. 2011. Corruption Perception Index 2011. At <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011>, accessed January 6, 2012.

³¹ OECD, *Competitiveness and Private Sector Development...*

³² Anna Matveeva. 2009. “Legitimising Central Asian Authoritarianism: Political Manipulation and Symbolic Power.” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61: 7 (September): 1095-1121.

³³ Charles Ziegler. 2010. “Civil Society, Political Stability, and State Power in Central Asia: Cooperation and Contestation.” *Democratization* 17: 5 (October): 795-825.

³⁴ John Heathershaw. 2009. *Post-conflict Tajikistan: the politics of peacebuilding and the emergence of Legitimate Order*. New York: Routledge.

and repeated charges of radical Islamism in Uzbekistan (better understood as crackdowns on potential or actual opposition forces), one suspects that the foundations of such legitimacy are flimsy. What little evidence exists offers some tantalizing glimpses into the wellsprings of discontent, especially among the educated younger generation that is increasingly exposed to cultural globalization.³⁵ As a result there is widespread disillusionment and cynicism. To the extent that people draw “necessary” connections between accepted ways of thinking and suboptimal outcomes, they are likely to become cognizant—and begin to question the necessity—of tradition. As such, they are susceptible to alternate cultural identities and beliefs, which in turn are readily available through the conduits of globalization. Thus, in the post-Soviet south, globalization and delegitimation are reciprocally causal.

Cultural Identity Impact

As a result of the drivers and enabling conditions discussed above, a welter of new ideas and influences have rapidly penetrated the region. It is possible to single out several particularly cultural developments that have occurred as a result. Again, these influences are especially prevalent among the younger generation, and may therefore have weighty portent for the future. First, in its shallowest manifestations, globalization has coincided with a rise in disposable income. While the distribution of this income is highly unequal, inevitably there has been the rise of a middle class, however paltry, as a share of the population in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This has led to predictable, strenuous efforts to reproduce some of the most alluring images presented in the foreign media and on the internet, such as home renovation, interior design, fashionable clothing, and mocha lattes. In and around urban centers, shopping malls and big box stores have sprung up where customers can engage in the conspicuous consumption of cell phones, computers, high-priced cars, and so on. In short, such consumerism is rampant but is it also essentially fetishistic, revealing an utter preoccupation with superficial status and style. As such, it is unreflexive and does not in itself seriously challenge traditionalism. Nor does it constitute a distinct cultural identity. On the contrary, it is typically grafted upon other models. The most important of these are what may be termed Western and Islamic cultural identities.

Before turning to these, however, it is necessary to consider briefly an additional model: Asian cultural identity. After all, in the economic realm Asia has become a powerful presence throughout the region. One might well imagine that one or another associated identity package would

³⁵ European Stability Initiative. 2011. *Generation Facebook in Baku*: Adnan, Emin and the Future of Dissent in Azerbaijan. At <http://www.scribd.com>, accessed January 9, 2012.

emerge to claim adherents in this region, awash as it is in competing flows and collective orientations. In particular, there has been a surge in imports from China, mainly consisting of cheap consumer products as well as other manufactured goods. China has also been active in providing investments for infrastructural development of all kinds, including both energy and non-energy projects. Much the same, albeit to a lesser extent, can be said of Japan's economic involvement in Central Asia, and South Korea has been making considerable inroads of late as well (although in each case Kazakhstan is by far the major partner).³⁶

Yet in spite of the fact that China has lately become the single most important regional source of trade and investment, and regardless of the influx of various other East Asian ideas and products, so far no overarching political, social, or cultural reorientation has followed. In particular, consuming China carries no panache since its products are widely perceived to be low quality and unfairly underpriced.³⁷ More generally, however, with regard to its impact on cultural identity, the Asian model is weak. Partaking of its attributes (in the form of jobs, goods, and popular culture) does not accord social status. There are, of course, certain exceptions, such as the popularity of various Asian martial arts, South Korean "K-pop" music, cinema and television, Japanese anime and hi-tech manufactures, and to some extent Indian Bollywood films. But these remain rather isolated phenomena, and do not add up to a general fancy for things Asian, much less a coherent cultural identity. In fact they often owe their popularity to their ability to mimic prevailing (Western in origin) aesthetics. A good example is the currently popular Korean movie, "You Are My Pet!" A fluffy and at times provocative romantic comedy, except for the physiognomy and language of the characters, it could easily be set in Dayton, Ohio. Which brings us to the irresistible panache of Western-style globalization.

"Western" Globalization

At the level of everyday, cutting-edge "cool," there is simply no contest. Most trendy cafés, shops, and icons of popular culture continue to be either explicitly Western in origin and imagery, or monolithically "global" in the sense that they exude modernity without any specific national character.

³⁶ Michael Clarke. "China's Deepening Ties with Central Asia." *Businessweek*. May 26: 10. At <http://www.businessweek.com>, accessed January 11, 2012. David Walton. 2010. "Japan and Central Asia." In Emilian Kavalski, ed., *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing. Robert Cutler. "South Korea Deepens Role in Central Asia." *Asia Times*. Sept. 2: 11. At www.atimes.com, accessed January 17, 2012.

³⁷ Kyrgyzstan: China's Economic Influence Fostering Resentment. At <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed January 1, 2012. Konstantin Syroezhkin. 2009. "Social Perceptions of China and the Chinese: A View From Kazakhstan." *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 7: 1 (February): 29-46. 2011.

As one market analyst has observed, there is “empirical evidence that generation Y consumers in transition economies had favorable attitudes towards Western goods and services, in particular, they had higher appreciation especially for global brands, and ... the ownership of certain global products was ultimate status symbol.”³⁸ In the main cities, too, there are innumerable other examples of contemporary international trends and fashions, including but in no way limited to fancy name brands. This includes various markers of popular as well as alternative orientations, such as art cooperatives, tattooing, and “global youth corporate culture.”³⁹ Crucially, however, in the latter case such offerings are widely perceived as approximating Western standards, even if the specific items in question are physically produced in Central Asia or elsewhere in the East.

Western-style cultural globalization consists of flows clearly originating in, or explicitly modeled on, Europe and North America. It includes two distinct variants, which I label “liberalism” and “transcendent individualism.”

Liberalism

Besides a heightened work ethic (which is equally consonant with Asian values), liberalism manifests itself in the form of market assumptions (efficiency, competition, innovation, and unequal returns), rampant materialism, and an embrace of rational objectivism in public life. It also involves complex instrumental calculations about specialized knowledge, social status, and wealth. Individuals holding this cultural identity perceive specific functional benefits of Western society, but do not accept the notion that Western norms are broadly consonant with global norms, or that they ought to supplant traditional values. On the contrary, while they wish to incorporate new practices as a means of getting ahead, they tend to question, or seek to qualify, Western norms of equality (gender, family, social), and “excessive” freedom or informality (i.e., licentiousness and public vulgarity). Indeed, they often uphold key tenets of traditional culture, such as patriarchy, respect for elders, and various symbols of everyday propriety. In addition, they often evince an abiding attachment to Islam. For such individuals domestic institutions thus retain much of their previous legitimacy and influence. As a result, liberalism has important but also limited political and institutional implications, including openness to

³⁸ Jung-Wan Lee and Simon Tai. 2006. “The effects of country-of-origin and corporate image on the perceptions of product quality and purchase intention.” *Journal of the World Review of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development* 2: 4 (February): 335-350.

³⁹ For evocative examples see: Christopher Schwartz. 2011. Bishkek, the Berlin of Central Asia? Parts 1 and 2. At <http://www.neweurasia.net/author/schwartz/>, accessed January 8, 2012. Also: 2011. Kyrgyzstan: Inside the Burgeoning Rap Scene, at <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed January 13, 2012.

global flows, increased transparency, adherence to international functional standards, and (perhaps) more equitable access to economic opportunities.

Transcendent Individualism

This cultural identity goes beyond the realm of consumption to involve a different conception of self as well as the realization of new, non-material desires. Adherents wholeheartedly embrace an idealized American or Western mentality, which they consider generally representative of prevailing or incipient global norms. This tends to diminish the legitimacy of the domestic institutional system. People having such attachments often reject the prevailing local culture and seek to craft new (typically transnational) identities and social ties.

Transcendent individualism thus constitutes a classic case of value change associated with modernization, including an attachment to global norms and universal values of democracy and human rights. As sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued, modernity leads to a diminution of group solidarity (professional, confessional, local, familial) in favor of an expansion of the individual realm, including lifestyle choices geared toward “self-actualization.”⁴⁰ It represents a powerful challenge to the traditional mentality. This shift is particularly evident among return migrants who have lived in the West. Although numerically limited, such individuals are nevertheless disproportionately influential. There is a strong market demand for Western-educated returnees, and many of them quickly acquire prestigious positions as well as social cachet.

Western Globalization and Gender

As with globalization generally, shifting attitudes toward gender are far more common in urban than in rural areas. Some of the ongoing change can also be traced back to the two major economic downturns: the first (and by far most severe) following the Soviet collapse, and the second since the global recession started in 2007. Due to the resulting dislocations, more women have moved into the market, and have had significant success as entrepreneurs. There are also intriguing reports of incipient changes in gender roles due to massive labor migration, as women are left alone to manage households and make decisions previously reserved for men.⁴¹ Moreover, as a result of broadened cultural exposure and transnational

⁴⁰ Anthony Giddens. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

⁴¹ For background see Marlene Laruelle. 2007. “Central Asian Labor Migrants in Russia: The ‘Disaporization’ of the Central Asian States?” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5:3 (August): 101-119.

contacts, identities associated with the (originally Western) women's movement have become increasingly attractive within educated circles.⁴²

Gendered differences are noticeable with regard to the impact of cultural globalization—particularly the influence of modern, Western notions of romantic love. For example, as Colette Harris has observed, teenage girls in Dushanbe are often drawn to idealistic notions of love and marital equality, while boys tend to discount such ideas.⁴³ Another example concerns premarital sex. Globalization has introduced hypersexualized commercial and media imagery that has contributed to a relaxation of sexual mores among youth, which is widely lamented by the older generation. As one important indicator of this change in attitudes, according to anecdotal reports, girls who have lost their virginity are increasingly able to marry (even without a virginity-restoring operation). And yet, although far more often challenged than ever before, such double standards about virginity remain widely in place, along with the general notion of male dominance.⁴⁴

Likewise, the available data on gender inequality cut both ways. For example, higher education enrollment is roughly equal (or even more heavily female than male) except in Tajikistan, and to a lesser extent in Uzbekistan.⁴⁵ Yet the economic payout from rising educational equality is not yet manifest, as the gender pay gap ranges from a low of 32.7 percent in Kyrgyzstan to a high of 46.8 percent in Azerbaijan.⁴⁶ Perhaps not too surprisingly, prevailing gender attitudes appear to be well-internalized among the relevant populations at large. Many well-educated young women continue to favor customary male dominance within the family structure—perhaps almost as much as do young men.⁴⁷

The situation with regard to gender is hardly clear-cut. Overall there is reason to believe that established gender roles are widely being reproduced throughout the region, far more than they are being challenged. Nevertheless there are broad differences in gender attitudes among the

⁴² An example is the blogging platform “Women’s Forum,” based in Azerbaijan. At <http://women-forum.net>, accessed January 8, 2012.

⁴³ Colette Harris. 2006. *Muslim Youth: Tensions and Transitions in Tajikistan*. Boulder: Westview, 112-114.

⁴⁴ Colette Harris. 2011. “State business: gender, sex and marriage in Tajikistan.” *Central Asian Survey* 30: 1: 97-111.

⁴⁵ Female enrollment in tertiary education was 29% in Tajikistan as of 2010, and 40% in Uzbekistan as of 2009. UNESCO. 2011. At www.stats.uis.unesco.org. See also UNDP. 2011. *Human Development Report 2011*. At <http://www.beta.undp.org>, accessed January 8, 2012.

⁴⁶ Robert C. Shelburne and Claudia Trentini. 2010. *After the Financial Crisis: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia*. At <http://www.unece.org>, accessed January 11, 2012.

⁴⁷ Leonid Gurevich and Karlygash Rakhimova. 2006. *Brand Building Insights from Kazakhstan*. At <http://www.bisam.kz/en/articles/esomar2006.html>, accessed October 8, 2011.

countries concerned, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan tend to be more traditional than Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁸ In the most modern enclaves and in educated circles, such attitudes are undergoing a significant shift. Among “transcendent individualists,” traditional gender roles and expectations have been largely discarded.

Constraints on Western Globalization

Aside from infrastructural deficits that impede global flows, a number of social and public policy factors also constitute important obstacles. Young people are constrained by norms and practicalities at both the micro- and macro-levels. First, in many areas they remain economically dependent on relatives for housing, employment, and even marriage. Such prolonged economic dependence gives elders far greater control over young people’s lives than occurs in the West, and helps perpetuate traditional thought and practice.⁴⁹ Yet constraints on globalization are in no way restricted to blood relations. There is, as already noted, broad social pressure not to indulge in lax, promiscuous, or otherwise deviant conduct (this is especially true for women). Young people who are perceived to be “Westernized” or “Americanized” may be shunned or mocked by their peers.⁵⁰ To a significant extent such constraints are class-based, as a function of unequal access to higher education, the internet, and foreign travel.

Much has been made of media censorship (and self-censorship) in the countries under discussion here. Undoubtedly, the highly authoritarian regimes in question are able—and at times willing—to exert a great degree of control over the media, including cinema, radio, newspapers, and internet sites alike.⁵¹ This is particularly the case in Turkmenistan, one of the most closed states in the world. Yet it is also the case elsewhere, as opposition outlets—and even outlets suspected of carrying inconvenient news stories—have been blocked at least intermittently in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan is a relative exception,

⁴⁸ Ayse Gunes-Ayata and Ayca Ergun. 2009. “Gendered Politics in Transitional Societies: A Comparative Perspective on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.” In Linda Racioppi and Katherine O’Sullivan See, eds. *Gender Politics in Post-Communist Eurasia*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press. See also OECD. Social Institutions & Gender Index. At <http://genderindex.org>, accessed January 4, 2012.

⁴⁹ Ken Roberts. 2010. “Post-Communist youth: is there a Central Asian pattern?” *Central Asian Survey* 29: 4 (December): 537-549, at 542-543.

⁵⁰ Harris, *Muslim Youth*..., 114.

⁵¹ According to Freedom House, all of these states were categorized as “not free”; the highest ranking member of the group was Kyrgyzstan at 155 out of 196. Freedom House. 2011. *Freedom of the Press 2011*, At <http://freedomhouse.org>. Not too dissimilarly, according to Reporters Without Borders, Kyrgyzstan was the best performer at 108 out of 179, while the others were mostly far behind even that. Reporters Without Borders. 2012. *Press Freedom Index 2011-2012*. At <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html>.

although even there several outlets were blocked during presidential elections in the fall of 2011.

Nevertheless, it is important not to paint the image of state control with too broad of a brush. With the exception of Turkmenistan, the vast majority of censorship pertains to political opposition and/or news agencies; it generally does not apply to “merely” cultural content or social networking. Short of remaining hermetically sealed, it is difficult to avoid the danger of contamination entirely. This is particularly true in the internet age, when access to the Web affords glimpses of all sorts of content at odds with the established worldview. After all, even in China, where the state expends immense resources on monitoring and controlling the Web, vast amounts of unregulated traffic and cultural transmission occur. None of the states of the former Soviet south have anything like that capacity. Turkmenistan essentially solves the problem precisely by remaining cut off from the world. Yet this policy carries enormous costs, a fact that may be starting to dawn on the Berdymukhammedov regime. Along with development and international integration unavoidably come cultural flows, and managing their political consequences is far easier and more palatable than shutting oneself off from globalization entirely.

Among the political elite for the most part, the preferred outcome of globalization is modernization without “excessive” Westernization. Thus, in addition to diffuse social pressures, globalization takes place within national institutional contexts that condition the uptake of particular flows. This includes numerous “culture industries” such as print and electronic media, cinema, museums, and even sports.⁵² The state plays a crucial gate-keeping role in these arenas through its involvement in licensing and the regulation of public order and morality. For example, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan have recently introduced a requirement to register cell phones, as a way to keep track of (and potentially control) communication and internet access.⁵³ There are extreme cases of hysterical overreaction, such as the Uzbekistan government’s denunciation of rock and rap music, and even cartoon characters like Tom and Jerry.⁵⁴

But on the whole authorities are more moderate in their positions, preferring to inculcate positive role models for youth. Throughout the region—at the national, regional, and grassroots levels alike—this attitude results in a range of pedagogical measures designed to manage

⁵² For example, Joanna Lillis. 2011. Kazakhstan: Astana Harnesses Soft Power of Silver Screen. At <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed January 11, 2012.

⁵³ 2011. Azerbaijan Tightens Control of Mobile Telephone. At <http://www.news.Az>, accessed January 8, 2012.

⁵⁴ Alima Bissenova. 2011. “Uzbekistan Warns Over ‘Evil, Satanic’ Rock Music.” CACI Analyst. March 3: 11, At <http://www.cacianalyst.org>, accessed January 11, 2012; Avicenna. 2011. Uzbek Authorities Protect Childhood. At <http://www.neweurasia.net>, accessed October 11, 2011.

globalization, including localized adaptation as well as the reassertion of traditional culture.⁵⁵ Such efforts tend to meet with considerable social approval, inasmuch as they dovetail with popular yearning for a unifying ideology or national idea. The result is an uneven patchwork of Western globalization, limited mainly to the capitals and other urban centers.

Islamic Globalization

Although Western globalization is palpable and powerful in many urban areas, and in middle- and upper-class, educated circles, it is being increasingly challenged by an Islamic alternative. Islamic globalization as used here refers to flows that emanate within transnational Islamist networks—networks whose members are devoted to Islamic values and practices, and who consciously identify as such. This includes, but is in no way limited to, radical Islamism. Far more prevalent is a moderate form of Islam, whose practitioners often blend religious devotion with modern sensibilities and consumerist lifestyles. This resurgence originated in efforts on the part of the new states to foster national identity revival, in part by reestablishing an “authentic” set of pre-Soviet traditions and cultural tropes. Part of this process involved co-opting Islam while also harnessing it through official channels of oversight.⁵⁶ In addition, Turkish (also known as Gulen network) universities and high schools have offered an attractive, “soft Islam” alternative to public educational outlets, for middle- and upper-class families able to afford the tuition. The schools were banned in Uzbekistan in 1999, but continue to operate in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.⁵⁷

This Islamic movement has gained traction among the youth, especially among the lower-class and in less developed areas. Indeed, in many parts of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, the turn to Islam has become quite fashionable. This is a highly paradoxical development, arising as it does alongside Western globalization, which also exerts its greatest influence among the younger generation. Even in Baku, Astana, Almaty, and Bishkek—the most important outposts of Western globalization—one finds an increasing number of young people wearing identifiable Muslim garb (or in the case of men, sporting beards). A report from Tajikistan is indicative of this trend:

⁵⁵ Douglas Blum. 2007. *National Identity and Globalization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁶ Ghoncheh Tazmini. 2001. “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?” *Central Asian Survey* 20: 1 (March): 63-83; Abdeeb Khalid. 2007. *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁵⁷ Berna Turam. 2004. “A Bargain Between the Secular State and Turkish Islam: Politics of Ethnicity in Central Asia.” *Nations and Nationalism* 10: 3 (July): 353-374; Annasoltan. 2011. *Berdimuhammedov Deserves an ‘F’: The Secretive Mass Closure of Turkmen-Turk Schools*. At <http://www.neweurasia.net>, accessed March 31, 2011.

Strolling through the streets of Dushanbe, the influence of religion is ever-present. One can see young people listening to sermons instead of pop music. Religious speeches and sermons are used as ring tones and groups of students can be seen listening to the speeches and sermons of their favorite imam-khatibs out loud on their phones.⁵⁸

Some of this is, apparently, at least partly for show—a testament to the “coolness” of Islam. However, it is in large measure a sincere response to a number of significant developments. As with Western globalization, one important factor appears to be disenchantment due to poverty and corruption. For many, it bespeaks a spiritual longing (in this way it is akin to the phenomenon of Orthodox rebirth in Russia, which was recently praised by then President Medvedev). The trend also reflects identification with Islamic countries around the world, and to some extent a related resentment of the West due to its perceived oppression (e.g., of the Palestinians) and/or unfair meddling in national affairs (Afghanistan, Libya). Finally, for some practitioners, it stems from revulsion over certain aspects of Western globalization that are seen as resulting in moral decay. To some extent this movement has become politicized, but in general it reflects the same underlying discontent already referred to, concerning inadequacies in the economic and political spheres.⁵⁹

Constraints on Islamic Globalization

To a significant extent, Islamic globalization is compatible with traditional thinking—itsself inflected by Islam—with the crucial exception that it tends to challenge established patterns of authority. For this reason, however, as well as for its recent associations with fanaticism, Islamic fundamentalism is fairly widely resisted by people of all ages. This includes traditionalists who regard the new trend as subversive, dysfunctional, and potentially leading to a violent form of fanaticism. Young people seeking to embrace Islam may be subject to the same kinds of familial browbeating experienced by excessively Westernized youth.

In addition to facing diffuse social pressures, Islamic globalization is also inhibited by varying degrees of official discrimination.⁶⁰ While

⁵⁸ “Tajiks Increasingly Turning To Shari’a To Resolve Disputes, Family Affairs.” RFE/RL News Digest September 12: 10. At www.rferl.org, accessed January 6, 2012.

⁵⁹ Svante Cornell. 2006. *The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan*. Silk Road Paper, Central Asia Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program. At <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>, accessed May 13, 2007.

⁶⁰ Eren Tatari and Renat Shaykhutdinov. 2010. “State Responses to Religious Revivalism in Post-Soviet Central Asia.” *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* 3: 2 (Winter): 85-110.

this has long been the case in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan have also introduced tougher measures. In Azerbaijan, where the Aliev regime had previously been relatively lenient, Islamic groups have been denied legal status and in 2011, a ban on wearing the hijab in high school was announced.⁶¹ A similar restriction was imposed in Tajikistan (where harassment of bearded men is common), while in Kazakhstan, religious parties have been required to re-register and religious activities are forbidden in state buildings.⁶²

It is important to recognize that such repression is not only aimed at overt opposition, but at independent sources of social service provision that effectively compete with—and thus potentially undermine—the state.⁶³ The fact that such independent organization takes place under the aegis of Islamic groups is an expression of the cooperative space incipiently available in this social realm, in these predominantly Muslim states, and does not generally connote any attachment to extremist views. Nevertheless, in the context of the “Arab Spring,” such tendencies have inspired crack-downs in all of these majority Muslim states. Students attending foreign religious institutions have fallen under extreme suspicion.⁶⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, where no such restrictive laws have been passed, the issue has roiled public opinion.⁶⁵ Thus, while having to balance between accommodating the swelling mass of devotees and cracking down on real or imagined opponents, in many parts of the post-Soviet south the tendency is to err on the side of caution—which means on the side of repression.

What Next?

Against this extraordinarily tumultuous backdrop, it is difficult to imagine what the next stage in the post-Soviet saga will bring. Rather than hazarding any specific predictions let me conclude by noting a few of the processes in play and their implications for the future.

First, even without dabbling in “endism,” one may be tempted to

⁶¹ Stephen Blank. “Azerbaijan and human rights: not as simple as it looks.” CACI Analyst. February 16: 11. At <http://www.cacianalyst.org>, accessed November 11, 2011.

⁶² Felix Corley. 2011. Kazakhstan: President Signs Two Laws Restricting Freedom of Religion or Belief. At <http://www.eurasiareview.com>, accessed January 1, 2012. Tajikistan: From Beards to Mosques, Dushanbe Cracking Down on Suspected Radicals. At <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed January 11, 2012.

⁶³ Eric McGlinchey. 2012. *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

⁶⁴ David Abramson. 2010. Foreign Religious Education and the Central Asian Islamic Revival: Impact and Prospects for Stability. At <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>, accessed December 1, 2010.

⁶⁵ Nate Schenckan. 2011. Kyrgyzstan: Hijab Controversy Charges Debate over Islam’s Role in Society. At <http://www.eurasianet.org>, accessed January 11, 2012.

speculate that rising levels of democratic openness, in addition to greater economic opportunity and higher standards of living, will diminish the prospects of Islamic globalization and promote the triumph of Western cultural identities. Thus, secularization—driven by scientific rationalism and complex social differentiation—has not yet reached a critical mass in these societies, which are still largely marked by traditional patterns of thought and organized according to patron-client relations. Yet the competitive pressures of maintaining viable statehood—particularly in light of challenges posed by internal political as well as external geopolitical factors, may eventually lead in the direction of this-wordly, Weberian rationalism. Perhaps we just need to wait? However, this does not appear to be the case in the short-run—at least not if urban, educated bearers of Islamic globalization are indicative of a trend. On the contrary, as the example of Turkey suggests, Islamic globalization is potentially compatible with development, economic integration, consumerism, and political pluralism. At least so far, the truly obscurantist forms of radical Islamism are no more than a marginal presence.

A second major possibility is that time is trending in a quite different direction. According to this hypothesis the global center of gravity is shifting to the East, and nowhere will this be more acutely felt than in Central Asia and the Caspian region. Not only will China (and maybe Japan, South Korea, or even India) increase its economic and geopolitical presence, but its unique cultural flows will become more salient as well. Accordingly, as the key Asian economies continue to crest, a distinctive and compelling Asian identity may yet congeal and gain influence. Aside from the imputed triumph of the “Beijing Consensus,” this may also usher in a raft of alternative values and norms for social relations and organization. Perhaps both Western and Islamic identities are doomed, and are blissfully unaware of their impending demise?

Yet a final, significant option is “none of the above.” So much innovation has taken place, so quickly, that the ability of most actors to absorb it has been outstripped. One of the key tendencies associated with this is increasing social fragmentation, which has been partly driven by, and partly justified in terms of, the novel ideas and identities that have poured into the region. We are still unclear about the nature of these developments and far more sociological and anthropological fieldwork is needed in order to get a clear grasp of their meaning as well as their relative strengths. All bets on the future are off. It may well be that we simply cannot anticipate the seemingly improbable admixtures that are already beginning to form, as these kaleidoscopically changing currents of culture continue to sweep the post-Soviet South.