3. Salafi Isalm: Social Transformation and Political Islam

Today, Islamic fundamentalists who intend to re-establish a Muslim society similar to that which existed during the life of the Prophet Muhammad are often referred to as Salafis. As Shahin explains, "[…] the *salaf* are the virtuous forefathers (*al-salaf al-salih*), and a *salafi* is one who draws on the Qur'an and the sunnah as the only sources for religious rulings" (Shahin 2009: 29). There are other terms such as 'Islamism,' 'Islamic radicalism,' 'Islamic fundamentalism' and many others that are used to describe the phenomenon of interest in this study. Whereas it is true that these terms are often used synonymously (Roy 2007: 59f), it is extremely important to clearly distinguish them in order to conduct a thorough analysis of the subject. I agree with other authors that it is better to speak of Salafis than of fundamentalists, because the latter is a western term. As this movement in itself is extremely broad I will first give some general notes on it: for example, it is worth pointing out that Salafis usually either refer to the Hanbali School of law or completely reject *taqlid* ('imitation') and thereby the affiliation to any madhab (Haykel 2009: 26). They are genuinely anti-western but do not necessarily oppose modern education or political reforms, neither do they necessarily dismiss democracy outright. Furthermore, whereas all Salafis are anti-Sufi and oppose other Muslims, who they do not consider to be 'real' Muslims, not all of them try to convert them by violent means.

I focus here mainly on the following groups: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islamic Revival Party, Tablighi Jama'at, Fethullah Gülen Movement. Only the first one of these groups, the IMU,

openly uses violent means – armed attacks and terrorist acts – in order to pursue its political goal of establishing of a caliphate. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir shares this political objective, it argues that it does not resort to violent means. The Islamic Revival Party was part of the armed opposition during the Tajik civil war but abandoned fighting in the wake of the peace accords in 1997. Tablighi Jama'at is a neofundamentalist Islamic movement with many followers, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The movement of Fetullah Gülen, which is totally peaceful, maintains schools in Central Asia which are supported by Turkish and local businessmen.

All these groups follow a very strict interpretation of Islam and are called Salafi here (I present a more detailed definition of such non-traditional groups in the *typology of non-traditional Islamic groups* in section 4.2). Some of them aim at establishing an Islamic society or an Islamic state while only IMU propagates violence against the Central Asian states, but all these groups are banned as extremist or terrorist organizations by at least one Central Asian state.

In the *typology of state regulation of non-traditional groups* (section 9.2) I will go into further details of how the Central Asian governments deal with these groups. First I will clear up the confusion surrounding some catchwords. Following this I will discuss the definitions of Salafism, Islamism and jihadism. This will be done with a comparison between definitions based on ideology and definitions based on the methods used for political struggle. Finally, I present the most important Islamic groups which aim at transforming Central Asian society into a particularly Islamic one or even hope to establish an Islamic state or caliphate and present my own typology of these Salafi groups.

3.1. CATCHWORDS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND IMPORTANT TERMS

In the current discourse on Islam in general and on 'political Islam' specifically, the terms *sharia*, *jihad* and *terrorism* are in common use. Political Islam is often reduced to a militant form of activism and its activists accused of illegitimate terrorism. We hear about radical groups who wage *jihad* against infidels or infidel rulers, and then 'establish' *sharia* after coming into power. But what do these terms signify exactly? It is indispensable to

have a closer look at these catchwords because they are so broadly used (and misused) by mass media and politicians.

3.1.1. Jihad

In Central Asia, instead of jihad, the term ghazawat can also be used (Halbach 1989: 232). It refers to an Islamic doctrine "connoting an endeavour toward a praiseworthy aim" (Peters 2009: 252). Jihad has an important place in Islamic deontology (*fiqh*) (Halbach 1989: 216). The term can refer to different things, but in the context of Islamic law and in the Quran, it commonly means "an armed struggle against the unbelievers" (Peters 2009: 252). According to Peters its main classical functions are (Peters 2009: 254):

- motivation of Muslims to take part in war
- enhancement of legitimacy of a ruler or a movement
- law of war

In modern times, the doctrine of jihad developed different interpretations: there are conservatives, who stick to the classical legal interpretations, and there are radical Islamic opposition groups who try to gain influence by using the term in their own way (Peters 2009: 255). Of course, many have tried to appropriate the term for their own ends:

"Throughout Islamic history, governments and opposition movements have declared their Muslim adversaries to be heretics or unbelievers (*takifr*, declaring someone to be a *kafir*, unbeliever) in order to justify their struggle against them. This line of reasoning is used by contemporary radical Islamic groups to legitimate their use of arms against rulers who are to all appearances Muslims" (Peters 2009: 255).

An example of such a contemporary group is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which calls the President of Uzbekistan *kafir,* thereby denying his legitimacy as a ruler of Muslims and legitimizing the fight against him. Indeed, jihad organizations are generally defined as radical Islamic groups, using violent means for political actions (Peters 2009: 257). Although this is true, it is important to note that:

"[…] automatically equating jihad to terrorism or to a kind of nihilism is largely incorrect. […] Furthermore, the war they wage should not be considered as necessarily unjust simply because it is legitimized through a religious vocabulary" (Peters 2009: 257).

All too often, though, jihad is associated with an unjustly waged war, to the extent that the term is now often used to describe terrorist behaviour even though the concept has its origin in the wars Prophet Muhammad fought lawfully in response to aggression, and was originally not allowed to be applied against civilians, as Peters explains: "Ideas of chivalry forbade warriors from killing noncombatants, especially children, women, and old people (Peters 2009: 252). It is furthermore important to note that the term 'holy wars' typically refers to the Christian crusades, which do not have a counterpart in Islam (Halbach 1989: 216). In fact, as Halbach points out, the whole militant dimension of the term is exaggerated and its meaning should not be reduced to that of an expansionist war:

- Jihad has an internal and an external dimension and should therefore not be translated as *war* but as *effort.* Generally too much importance is attached to the external dimension and 'the fight against infidels'. By contrast, the internal dimension is the fight against apostasy and an effort for unity and solidarity in the Islamic community (Halbach 1989: 216).
- Jihad is usually justified if it is defensive, an expansionist jihad as a collective duty of Muslims is only legitimate if a caliph organizes the struggle (Peters 2009: 253).

To summarize, jihad can be waged not only against non-Muslims but also against nominal Muslims who are not believed to be practising the religion correctly. Furthermore, the term can be used to refer to a defensive war with legitimate grounds.

3.1.2. Sharia and Fiqh

In the context of Islamic radicalism we often hear that Islamists want to 'establish' sharia. The term sharia conjures horrific images for a westerner such as the stoning of innocent women or the chopping off of hands. It is

therefore necessary to note that sharia is a positive condition in the Quran. Every Muslim has to follow the rules of sharia, by virtue of his belief, as it describes the "expression of Allah's command for Muslim society" (Encylopedia Britannica). The term means literally, "the path leading to the watering place" but in the western media and public a misconception prevails regarding it. As Roy makes clear:

"Here [in the debate on Sharia] total confusion rules. One can reject the Sharia as anachronistic and antifeminist, but in any event it is a legal system with norms and interpretations. Sharia is not by itself arbitrary, but defines a space of law […] " (Roy 2007: 74, translated by the author).

Sharia is therefore more to do with Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, the 'path' can only be totally known by God while the "human attempt to know the shari'a" is called *fiqh* (Rabb 2009: 255).

"In this sense, shari'ah is God's will expressed as an ideal reflecting perfect justice and equality. The human articulation of the ideal is a dynamic process that must constantly be worked and reworked to address new situations" (Rabb 2009: 255).

Sunnis derive fiqh from the four following sources of Islamic law:

- The Quran
- The *Sunnah* (prophetic practice and that of the imams)
- Consensus (*ijma'*)
- Analogical reasoning (*qiyas*)

There is no scope to go into more detail here, however a final point worth mentioning is that contemporary groups often use the term merely for political purposes. They carry out 'jihad' in order to delimit themselves from the West (Roy 2007: 53). Yet it is not only Islamists who use jihad and sharia as catchwords in their propaganda; conservative counter-propagandists also avail themselves of these terms to conjure fears of an Islamic threat.

3.1.3. Terrorism

Terrorism is a tactic of warfare and a communication strategy with a dual intention since the aim of a terrorist attack is often not only the victims themselves, who are also used to convey the terrorists' message (Girardin et al. 2002: 8). This message is directed towards two different types of recipients: the enemy (which might be the government or the whole population which the civilian victims are part of), who should be frightened by the attack, and sympathizers and supporters of the terrorists within their own ranks (Waldmann 2003: 88). Based on the analysis *terroristisches Kalkül* by Waldmann (Waldmann 2003: 88) I define terrorism as follows:

- Terrorism takes place as an act of violence against civilians.
- It aims at causing anxiety on the one hand and sympathy and malice on the other.
- It provokes political consequences.

With this definition I deliberately do not make a distinction between state and non-state actors.[1] In my analysis, all actors should be analyzed and characterized using the same criteria. As civilians I consider persons who do not hold public office and do not take part in fighting. Politicians are not defined as civilians as they are representatives of the country they work for. People working in the security sector and military personnel are not considered civilians even in a situation where they do not wear their uniform or are not on duty (because non-state combatants are usually also regarded as

1 In this regard the definition used here differs to a great extent to terrorism definitions used by states. As an example, see the definition of the US Department of Defense: 'The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.' (DoD 2003: xii). Here the term noncombatant refers to civilians as well as to army personnel that are unarmed or not on duty during the time of the attack (PoGT 2003:xii). Although the definition of a civilian is different, the author of this study agrees with the US definition in that a terrorist attack has a political motivation and is directed against civilians. However, the restriction that all terrorist groups are non-state actors is strictly disputed.

combatants twenty-four hours a day). Attacks against politicians and military personnel are by this definition not acts of terrorism but acts of guerrilla fighting (which does not necessarily mean that these attacks are legitimate or do not in many cases violate international law).

Not only are terrorists usually considered criminals, but their political ambitions are also often rejected as unjustified. For this reason governments use this term to try to delegitimize the armed struggle of political opposition groups while at the same time resistance fighters try to prove the 'terror strategy' of the state to legitimate their resistance fight (Daase 2001: 55).

Physical violence is defined by Clausewitz as a means to force the enemy to do what one wants him to do (Clausewitz 1952: 90). Terrorism used by non-state actors is violence that is usually used against a much stronger force. In this sense, terrorism is an indirect and asymmetric strategy. The sixth century Chinese thinker Sun Tzu, as well as the Chinese revolutionary Mao Tse-tung wrote much about asymmetric strategy and how the weakness of an actor can be used as a strength (Stahel 2002: 2): Good knowledge of the terrain, for example, or the ability to move like a fish in the water, are advantages that terrorists as well as guerrilla fighters can make use of. Terrorist and guerrilla tactics seem to be quite similar because both of them use asymmetric strategies, however they are distinct: guerrilla tactics are used by separatist groups to fight against the military and police to gain control over territory whereas terrorists do not have territorial goals; instead they seek to wear the enemy down over a long time period by committing acts of violence against civilians thus forcing politicians to give in to their demands (Kuster 2006: 47). An example of a terrorist group in the region is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which has been declared a foreign terrorist organization by the US Center for Defense Information (CDI). The IMU is active in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan and was accused of taking hostages on several occasions in 1999 and 2000, including four US citizens (see CDI).

In France, terror was employed by the Jacobins in 1789 as a systematic state programme known as 'régime de la terreur' (Al Treiki 2003: 30). State terrorism usually refers to abuses of power by governmental institutions against their own populations (Al Treiki 2003: 31). 20th century examples of terrorist states include the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the USSR under Stalin. They used immense repression to bring

about the total obedience of their peoples (Al Treiki 2003: 31). More recent examples of state terrorism might be Indonesia during the regime of Sukarno in 1965, Cambodia in the 1970s or North Korea under Kim Jong-il. Even though the governments of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are seen as authoritarian by Islamist movements and human rights organizations, who accuse them of human rights abuses and repression against their own population, they are not terrorist states. Interestingly, Islamists also accuse some western powers – primarily the US and Israel – of being terrorist states. As Bin Laden has argued: "The truth is that the whole Muslim world is the victim of international terrorism, engineered by America at the United Nations" (Bin Laden 1998).

3.2. POLITICAL ISLAM AND SALAFISM

3.2.1. Commonalities of Salafi Groups

Salafis refer to the first three generations of Muslims which ended with the death of Ahmad ibn Hanbal 855 C.E.. All changes which influenced the faith after this point are considered un-Islamic innovations to the extent that the "Salafis claim to be members of the only victorious group that will be saved in the Hereafter" (Haykel 2009: 27). Fellow Muslims, as Haykel makes clear, can also therefore be considered infidels:

> "The traditional targets of Salafi attacks are the Shi'ah, the Sufis, any persons who visit gravesites, and finally, followers of Ash'ari theology. […] The recently more politicized Salafis have added to this list of enemies any Muslim who subscribes to modern ideologies such as nationalism, democracy, socialism, and more significantly any rulers, governments, or systems of rule that do not strictly apply Islamic law and teachings" (Haykel 2009: 27).

Whereas Salafis previously only opposed Central Asian folk Islam because the latter is so intimately interwoven with pre-Islamic traditions, they have only more recently accused the Central Asian rulers of being 'infidels' and therefore have added them to their list of enemies.

Salafi groups are united by a particular theology and a hermeneutics of scriptural sources (Haykel 2009: 28). More specifically, these groups'

shared purpose is their commitment to particular theological doctrines that are associated with the pre-modern group known as the Ahl al-Hadith. According to Haykel this involves among other things:

- "a return to the authentic beliefs and practices of the first three 'generations' of Muslims […]
- an emphasis on a particular understanding of *tawhid* (God's oneness), […];
- claiming that the only valid sources of authority are the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad […] and the consensus of the Prophet's companions;
- arguing that a strict constructionist interpretation of the Qur'an and *sunnah* is sufficient to guide Muslims for all time and through all contingencies […]" (Haykel 2009: 27)

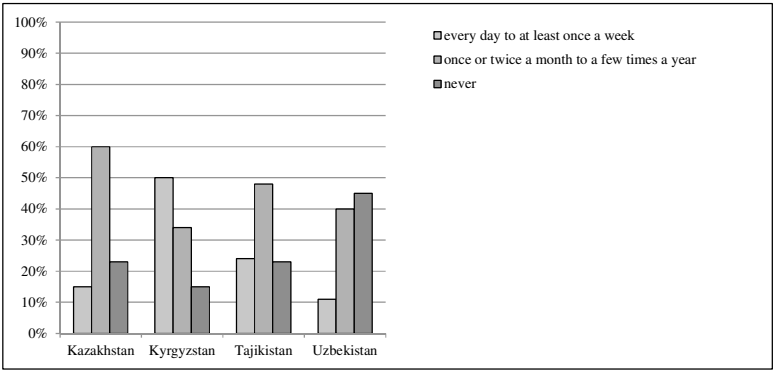
Salafis do not have a sure footing in Central Asia: because of their wish to live a 'pure' Islam as did the first generation of Muslims, Salafis reject local traditions related to the practice of religion in Central Asia (in contrast to the traditionally strong Hanafi madhab, Salafis classically refer to Hanbali school of law; see Shahin 2009: 29). As with fundamentalists in other religions, Salafis distinguish themselves from other believers by their very strict interpretation of holy texts. By contrast, the written word is not of great importance to the average Central Asian Muslim, who is not used to read the Quran. Instead, being Muslim is connected to being part of a community that claims to have ancestral lines to the Prophet Mohammad (Khalid 2007: 19ff) (this is comparable to the importance of silsilahs for Sufism; see section 2.3.1). Schlageter expresses this observation even more radically:

„Many Muslims in Central Asia share a fundamental ignorance with regards to Islam. […] The Qurans which were initially donated in large quantities by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were ritual objects, used for marriages and national customs. Almost no-one can read them" (Schlageter 2003: 165; 166, translated by the author).

PEW survey data about Quran reading confirms that Central Asians rather seldom read Quran (in many other regions such as in South Asia, Middle East and Africa around 50% of all Muslims read Quran every day). How-

ever, it would be wrong to call the Quran a mere 'Ritualobjekt' there: in Kyrgyzstan 18% of the Muslims read the Quran every day and further 32% read it at least once a week (PEW 2012: 50). This is the highest result for all Central Asians, which is interesting because traditionally Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs are said to be less 'scriptualist' than Tajiks and Uzbeks (see section 6.1.3 for this).

Figure 6: Quran Reading by Central Asian Muslims



Source: PEW 2012

3.2.2. Salafis in History

Despite the aforementioned commonalities, the Salafi movements that existed at different points in time had more or less diverse (political) agendas. In the late 12th century, for example, Salafis, "pointed to the 'adulteration' of Islam by various regional non-Islamic borrowings which they blamed for the political and economic decline of the Abbasid caliphate" (Yemelianova 2010: 13), while more recently they have combined anti-colonial, anti-western and anti-Israeli messages and organized themselves into grassroots societies and political parties to proclaim their ideas (Yemelianova 2010: 14). Shahin distinguishes the following stages in Salafi history (Shahin 2009: 29ff):

- *Classic Salafiyah*, 8th and 9th century: Ibn Hanbal (founder of the Hanbali School of Law) "laid out the tenets that later shaped the Salafiyah" (Shahin 2009: 29). The classic Salafiyah emphasized the "primacy of

the revealed text over reason," (see also section 5.1.2) set strict guidelines for the use of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and restricted the use of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) (Shahin 2009: 29: 30). Later, (through the teachings of Taymiyah), the Salafiyah became anti-Sufi and anti-philosophical because they rejected philosophy owing to its Greek influence.

- *Premodern Salafiyah*, 18th century: Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703 – 1792) referred to Ibn Hanbal's and Ibn Taymiyah's teachings and aimed at purifying the "Arabian Peninsula from un-Islamic practices and build[ing] an Islamic state modelled on that founded by the Prophet" (Shahin 2009: 30). Later Wahhabi movements also "advocated religious purification, moral and social reform" (Shahin 2009: 30). The contemporary (mis-) use of the term Wahhabi has already been noted in section 2.2.3).
- *Modern Salafiyah*, turn of the 20th century: their main representatives are Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh. During their time, the movement was characterized by its, "essentially intellectual and modernist nature and by the diversity and expanse of its objectives" Shahin 2009: 30). These features of the modern Salafiyah are similar to those of the Jadidis (see section 5.2.2) in that they regarded education and political reform as essential. Furthermore, they were the forerunners of contemporary pro-democratic Islamist parties like the IRPT (see section 3.4.2) because as Shahin makes clear:

> "Many reformist intellectuals attempted to reformulate Islamic concepts in the light of modern political ideals and practices. They reinterpreted such concepts as *shura* (counsel) and *ijma'* (consensus) and equated them with democracy and a parliamentary system. In practice, they called for gradually increasing representation in administrative and political institutions" (Shahin 2009: 32).

The modern Salafiyah regarded autocratic rulers and despotism as the main stumbling blocks for progress in Islamic societies. Their movement developed in the context of confrontation with western colonialism: "the Salafiyah worked to assert the validity of Islam in premodern times and to prove its compatibility with reason and science" (Shahin 2009: 31). They were anti-colonialist and nationalistic in a pan-Islamic regard (Shahin 2009: 33). As with the contemporary Gülen movement

(see section 3.5.1), their approach revived the original Qur'anic message but also offered an alternative "to the literalism of traditionalist interpretations" (Shahin 2009: 31). I will come back to the here mentioned present-day groups later on.

- *Modern Islamic Movements*: 20th century. Modern Islamic Movements such as Hasan al-Banna's (1909-1949) Muslim Brothers (Egypt) and Abu al-A'la Mawdudi's (1903-1979) Jama'at-i Islami (on the Indian subcontinent), both of which developed in the 1930s, are regarded as heavily influenced by the historical Salafis. In contrast to the modern Salafis, they did not support legal, political and educational reforms, but were instead populist in approach and "focused on reforming the morality and beliefs of the Muslim individual as a precondition for the reform of the society as a whole" (Shahin 2009: 34). It is my view that present-day groups such as Tablighi Jama'at share the following features with the Muslim Brothers and Jama'at-i Islami: "strict monotheism, divine attributes, purifying Islam from accretions, anti-Sufism, and developing the moral integrity of the individual" (Shahin 2009: 34). I will refer to such present-day groups later on as fundamentalist Salafis.

Although all Salafis share the common aim of establishing an Islamic society, uniting all Muslims and living according to the Quran and the Sunnah, the measures to realize this ideal distinguishes them, as Haykel asserts, "Salafi groups are numerous and often in contestation with each other, especially over matters of political action and the means of effecting reform of Muslim society" (Haykel 2009: 28). In the literature and, by extension, in political practice, different classifications of contemporary Salafi groups have been developed. Some are based on their underlying ideology and others are based on their tactics and behaviour. The following section gives some examples of such definitions.

3.2.3. Different Definitions of Political Islam

Olivier Roy, the renowned expert on political Islam and terrorism makes a distinction between neofundamentalists, who aim at Islamizing society from the bottom up, and Islamists, who want to seize political power to transform society from the top down. He moreover characterizes the

neofundamentalists as cut off from tradition and local culture and as being therefore a symptom of globalization (Roy 2007):

"Modern Salafism is both the consequence as well as the driving force of deculturalization. In no way is it the reaction of a traditional society which rejects modernization" (Roy 2007: 77).

As was already briefly mentioned in section 2.4 on folk Islam, traditional understandings of religion and their commingling with pre-Islamic religious rituals are regarded by moden Salafi movements as highly superstitious and sinful.

Although they aim to establish an Islamic state, Roy considers neofundamentalists to be primarily religious. As he explains, in their eyes, the state can solely declare Sharia the law of the land, but above that it cannot enact any laws (Roy 2007: 74). In his view, then, neofundamentalists regard sharia as the key to society and their only political concept. Islamists on the other hand, regard Islam as a political ideology from which many different political claims are derived (Roy 2010: 53). According to Roy, Neofundamentalists are primarily successful in rural areas, whereas Islamists (whom he describes as primarily political) tend to find more support in cities (Roy 2010: 53). I find it difficult to confirm this view, though, as corresponding data are not available.

Considering the same factors which affect contemporary developments in the realm of Islam, which Roy refers to as *globalisation*, Khalid argues that mass education and modern media call traditional authorities into question. Modernization has had an 'objectifying' impact on religion in general and on Islam in particular (Khalid 2007:12). In accordance with Roy he alludes to Islamists as having a political ideology that derives political goals and a need for action directly from the written sources of Islam (Khalid 2007: 13). They do not only appeal to a new political order but, as with the 20th Century Islamic movements mentioned earlier, also to the transformation of the individual (Khalid 2007: 14). It seems that he would also agree with Roy on the question of whether Islamists are de-territorialized and de-culturalized, as he goes on to say: "Islamism is modern in that it presupposes the objectification of Islam, for only when Islam is separated from custom, tradition, and indeed history can it become a stand-alone object that can in turn be applied to the practice of politics" (Khalid 2007: 13).

As we see, in many regards Roy and Khalid are in agreement. One key difference between the two theorists, though, is that whereas Roy uses the term 'fundamentalists' for groups such as Al-Qaida, Khalid defines this group, as well as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as jihadist, as the following passage demonstrates:

"These groups [IMU, Al-Qaida] differ from Islamists, because they have little or no political program beyond the conquest of power and the subsequent imposition of the shariat as the law of the land. They interpret jihad in a purely military sense, and unlike the Islamists, have no interest in the transformation of society beyond policing norms of behaviour" (Khalid 2007: 19).

He explains that jihadism arose in the context of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran when Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the US supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan (Khalid 2007: 16, 17). A further category that Khalid discerns are the modernists: these argue that Islam calls on its adherents to be progressive and they therefore challenge ulama and Sufi shayks, accusing them of corrupting religion (Khalid 2007: 13).

Similar to Khalid, Haykel distinguishes groups according to the form of political engagement they advocate and therefore distinguishes between political and jihadist Salafis:

- Those calling for violent action are called *jihadis*
- Those engaging in nonviolent political activism are *harakis*

Furthermore, he adds a group of Salafis who deny all forms of political organization and action are therefore are called quietist *taqlidis.* They argue that "obedience to Muslim rulers is religiously mandated" (Haykel 2009: 26). Another author, who distinguishes Islamists based on their behaviour and tactics is Hafez:

"By *moderates* I mean those individuals and groups that shun violence and insurgency as a strategy to effect social change and, instead, seek to work through state institutions, civic associations, or nonviolent organizations to Islamize society and politics. Conversely, *radicals* are those who reject accommodation with the state re-

gime, refuse to participate in its institutions, and insist on the necessity of violent revolution or mass mobilization to Islamize society and politics" (Hafez 2003: 5).

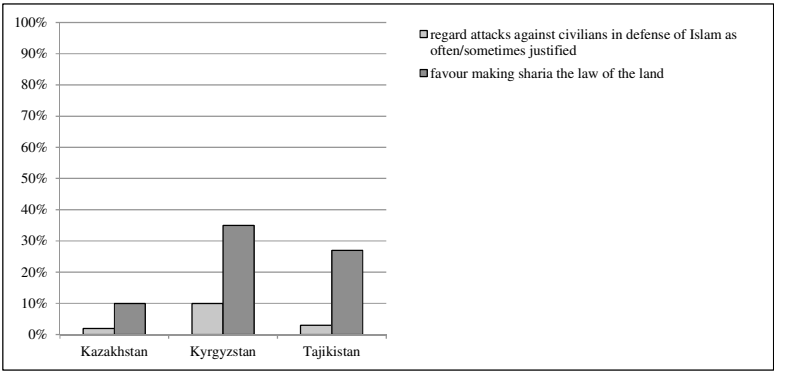
A final ideology-based definition worth mentioning in the specific context of Central Asia is that made by Peyrouse, who distinguishes between conservative Hanafis and fundamentalist Hanbalis. At the vanguard of the latter he names Ziyauddin Babakhan, who was the supreme mufti of SADUM during Soviet times and whose family led this institution for three generations.

All these definitions incorporate important aspects (distinction of means used by a group, the priority given to religion over politics or vice versa and the character of the movement: progressive or backward-looking). However, since no generally accepted terms yet exist, I will elaborate my own definitions for the main groups that are active in Central Asia. I will now introduce the most prominent non-traditional religious groups active in the region and subsequently elaborate my own typology for categorizing them in chapter 4.

3.3. JIHADISTS: ARMED WARRIORS FOR THE CALIPHATE

Islamic Terrorism is here understood as attacks against civilian targets perpetrated by jihadists. Furthermore, the establishment of an Islamic state with the introduction of sharia as the law of the land would be jihadists' primary and most fundamental political act when establishing an Islamic state. PEW survey data regarding attitudes of Central Asian populations towards Islamist terrorist acts are therefore of great interest to us. Figure 7 shows how the level of acceptance is proportional to the wish of Muslims to introduce sharia as the law of the land. I consider the level of support for both issues surprisingly high for a region that is very often described as only superficially Muslim or where most of the people regard themselves only as 'ethnic Muslims'.

Figure 7: Approval for Terrorist Attacks Compared to Support for Sharia



Source: PEW 2013

Recently there have been many reports by Central Asian online media on individuals from the region who have gone to Syria in order to fight there alongside local *jihadis*. This is comparable to Chechens and Arabs who fought alongside the Taliban and Al-Qaida in the 1990s in Afghanistan. However, despite the existence of a global network of jihadis, these affiliated groups do not belong to a single homogenous tradition. In other words, although Central Asian Muslims are influenced by globally agitating Islamic networks there is no 'Islamic Mastermind' responsible for coordinating jihad-networks in the CIS-countries (Halbach 2010a: 86). In order to qualify this statement I will now present the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its successor organizations.

3.3.1. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad Union

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, several Islamist groups emerged in the Ferghana Valley. Voluntary militia and patrol units were active in the Uzbek cities Namangan, Andijan and Kokand, and groups such as Adolat, Islam Lashkarlari and Tawba even established control over mosques and government buildings (Khamidov 2009: 153). Those in charge of these groups went on to become leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (Naumkin 2005: 96). The governmental policy towards these precursors to the IMU changed over time:

"Initially, President Karimov maintained dialogue with Islamic organizations, deferring some powers of the local governments to them. This allowed the authorities time to focus on bolstering the security structures – the army, police, and national security service (the successor to the KGB). By 1993, the Uzbek authorities began to renege on their prior agreements with the Islamists and launched a frontal attack on them" (Khamidov 2009: 153).

Subsequently, hundreds of them were jailed or fled the country to Tajikistan and Afghanistan, where they continued fighting. In Tajikistan "Ethnic Uzbek Islamist fighters led by Namangani and Yuldashev fought alongside the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in the Tajik Civil War (1992- 1997)" but were obliged to leave the country after the Tajik government and UTO peace accords had been signed (Khamidov 2009: 153). Namangani and Yuldashev, however, refused to comply with the Tajik government's demands and fled with their combatants to the Garm Valley, which became their stronghold in the late 1990s (Khamidov 2009: 153). In 1998 they founded the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), (in Russian IDU for *Islamskoe Dvijeniie Uzbekistana*).

Ideologically, the IMU is influenced by Salafism but it has always avoided being directly linked with a particular group of Sunnism in order not to alienate itself from supporters of different schools of thought (Khazanov 2005: 33). Due to its legitimation of violence, the movement can clearly be characterized as a jihadist organization since fighting is one of its main reasons to exist, as Salmorbekova and Yemelianova make clear: "Unlike the Islam Lashkarlari, the Adolat and Tawba, the IDU [= IMU] prioritized political and military engagement rather than religious education and indoctrination" (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 222). Indeed, the group is so committed to armed struggle that it has almost become apolitical:

"These groups [Al Qaida, IMU] differ from Islamists, because they have little or no political program beyond the conquest of power and the subsequent imposition of the shariat as the law of the land. They interpret jihad in a purely military sense, and unlike the Islamists, have no interest in the transformation of society beyond policing norms of behaviour" (Khalid 2007: 19).

Or, as Roy puts it:

"Like all neofundamentalists the group is primarily religious and not political, as they are not really interested in the state, the nation or the establishment of political institutions but just aim at the strict implementation of Sharia (Roy 2007: 68; 107)."

Some governments say that the IMU widened its scope in 2004 to the whole of Central Asia and Xingjiang and has since renamed itself the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT). Members of the IMU, however, have denied this claim (Khamidov 2009: 155). A real successor organization of the IMU is the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which was responsible for acts of terrorism 2004 in Tashkent and 2009 in Andijan (interview with Ponomarev).

3.3.2. Caucasus Factor

One reason why particularly the "oil-rich west" of Kazakhstan has been the victim of terrorism more recently could be due to "social tension and dissatisfaction at inequality and living standards" (Lillis 2011). During my field work in Central Asia I learnt from OSCE staff members about the influence of Caucasian radical groups in the region and in Kazakhstan specifically. It is interesting to mention this connection because the link between Central Asian jihadists and Afghanistan is much more prominently reported in the literature.[2] The relationship to the Caucasus suggests itself, though, as Chechnya and Dagestan are historically (and in some parts also geographically) much closer to Central Asia than Afghanistan. Indeed, this is also true to a special extent for western Kazakhstan not least because of the rather high percentage of ethnic Chechens living in Kazakhstan as a result of Stalin's deportation policies who today still maintain family ties to their relatives in Chechnya.

According to my interview-partners (interviews with members of OSCE Units in Almaty and Bishkek), groups affected by the Chechen civil war

2 Police shootings and suicide bombings in Atyrau, Taraz and Boraldai (near Almaty) in 2011 were reportedly executed by Jund al-Khilafah (JaK), a Central Asian groups of jihadis fighting in the Afghan-Pakistan border area against international troops (Zenn 2013).

primarily target security forces. The actions of such groups can be characterized as clearly political statements. For example, in May 2011, a man executed a suicide attack in Aktobe in north-western Kazakhstan against the KNB security services (Lillis 2011).[3]

As the following report shows, though, these Caucasian radicals do not appear to be entering Kazakhstan to wage jihad there. On the contrary, it appears to be the Kazakhs who are leaving their country to join their co-fighters in Dagestan:

"In October 2010 Russian police shot dead a Kazakh citizen from Aktau who they said was an extremist holed up in an apartment in the Caucasus republic of Dagestan, […] In July 2009 five alleged militants carrying Kazakh passports were shot dead in Dagestan, and this [2011] February two alleged extremists from Kazakhstan surrendered to police in Dagestan […]" (Lillis 2011).

More evidence of this view is provided by Vitaly Ponomarev from the Memorial Human Rights Center who judges that there are no Caucasians coming to Kazakhstan to take up armed struggle but rather the other way round. The detentions of Kazakhs abroad, reported by Lillis above, concurs with this assessment. Furthermore, the many reports about Central Asians leaving for Syria during 2013 also indicate that international jihadis do not come to Central Asia to fight but rather that Central Asians prefer to join jihad elsewhere.[4] This, however, could change of course if a more severe conflict between violent Islamists and Central Asian governments were to develop. Other reports about Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan claim that a new IMU is forming itself with recruits from Chinese Autonomous Uighur province as well as with "militants from Caucasus and other Russian regions" (Seisenbekova 2011b).

3 He was described by the security services as a criminal and not an Islamist, though.

4 See for example the following news articles: www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1387878900; www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1384942260; http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan-syria-suzak-jihad/25176282.html.

However, the facts for confirming such speculations are rather vague and the conflation of IMU with HT detracts from the reliability of the report. In any case, the fact that international relationships between militant organizations exist is a concern for both Central Asian governments and societies.

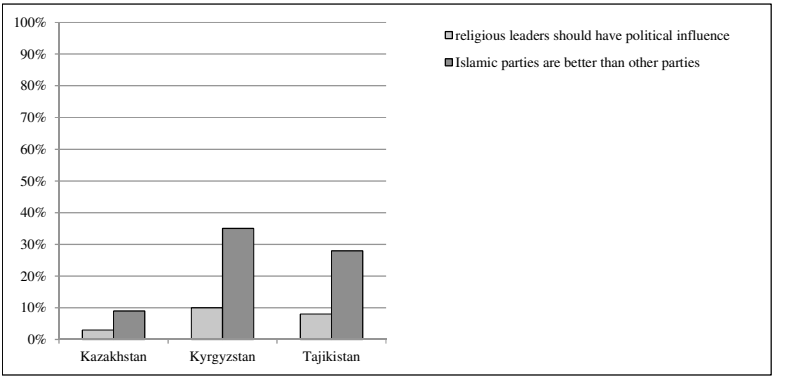
3.4. ISLAMISTS: POLITICAL PARTIES

The Central Asian states are corrupt, their economic situation is dire and traditional societal structures are disintegrating due to growing urbanization and high percentages of migrant workers abroad. In this context, Islamists argue that the poor economic situation and the rampant corruption could be solved if the society and the state followed the rules of social justice deriving from the Quran. Islamists refer to the ideal of an austere ruler (Matveeva 2010: 36) and make reference to moral guidelines grounded in Islamic principles which would solve society's problems (Murzakulova and Schoeberlein 2010: 156). In addition, the official clergy is ill-equipped to deal with the difficult socio-economic situation in Central Asia, paying little attention to people's sorrows:

"Theological incompetence, corruption and the pro-government position of many registered Muslim clergy, as well as their avoidance of a debate with Islamists on vital socio-economic political and ideological issues, undermined public trust in them" (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 237; see also Halbach 2010a: 84).

The data presented in Figure 8 show the opinions of Central Asian Muslims concerning the political influence of religious leaders and their attitude toward religious parties (there are no data available for Uzbekistan).

Figure 8: Attitudes towards Political Islam among Central Asian Muslims



Source: PEW 2013

In this section I will present some political parties or groups who take these concerns seriously and who use Islam as a basis for their political ideology. First of all, Hizb ut-Tahrir will be characterized. After that, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), the only institutionalized religious party in Central Asia, will be presented.

3.4.1. Hizb ut-Tahrir

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1977), who had links to the Muslim brotherhood; currently the best known Salafi group, the brotherhood has its origins in Egypt in 1928. HT has since its very beginning maintained its ideological and operational cohesion (Taji-Farouki 2009: 423, 425), as Karagiannis explains:

"Hizb ut-Tahrir's consistency is associated with a dogmatic and consistent implementation of its ideology, which envisions a peaceful overthrow of the existing regimes in Muslim countries" (Karagiannis 2010: 48).

Despite its political goal, which is to establish a caliphate, this transnational movement differs from jihadi groups in that it can be regarded as a *purely political party* which is conceptualized and organized in a modern way (Khalid 2007: 160; Roy 2004: 67). It also regards itself not as a religious organization but as a political party that draws its legitimacy from Quranic sources (Karagiannis 2010: 40).

Hizb ut-Tahrir has been increasing its influence in Central Asia since the mid-1990s and has a considerable membership there (Taji-Farouki 2009: 423). At first glance, this is surprising since it emphasizes the unity of the *ummah* whose concomitant denigration of national peculiarities seems to contradict the regional understanding of the nation as well as of religion and Islam in particular (Khalid 2007: 162). However, as Khalid explains, although they have transnational links, the political Islamist groups in Central Asia (IRPT, HT and IMU):

"[…] have roots in domestic political realities and focus primarily on local issues. They are not implantations of a global Islamist movement with a monolithic agenda. […] [but] represent forms of homegrown opposition to the political order" (Khalid 2007: 164).

In Khalid's opinion, the success of HT is understandable because it ties in with the populations' dissatisfaction with the political and moral order in the region; it stands for the fight against corruption and the abolition of the recently established borders between the former Soviet republics (Khalid 2007: 163f). With their agenda, the party was able, "[…] to respond effectively to the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of Communism and problems of socioeconomic deterioration" (Taji-Farouki 2009: 424). When they claim that they can provide better security, growth and welfare than a secular state, their advantage is that they seem credible since they are God-fearing and therefore should not be corruptible (Matveeva 2010: 19). HT's political aim is to build a modern welfare state (Khalid 2007: 161). With their reference to the Quran, the party constructs Islam as an ideology that is superior to capitalism and socialism: it emphasizes justice and inclusion and criticizes the neo-colonial exploitation by global western hegemony (Taji-Farouki 2009: 424). Its political agenda has a clear goal: the re-establishment of the caliphate and a Pan-Islamic state. Hizb ut-Tahrir sees the Quran as "the only acceptable source of political thought; the ummah constitutes a unitary entity and the caliph symbolizes its political cohesion" (Karagiannis 2010: 94). The party's historical narrative and its reference to the caliphate must be understood in terms of its original contraposition "to secular Pan-Arabism in the struggle to reverse the fragmentation caused by the implantation of nation-states and Israel" (Taji-Farouki 2009: 424). It interprets nationalism as a western innovation and regards the borders between Muslim countries as artificial creations (Karagiannis 2010: 42). This makes the party especially popular in the Ferghana Valley with its arbitrary demarcations. According to Naumkin, the party changed its focus in Uzbekistan in the wake of the Andijan events 2005. It started to criticize the government by

„[…]addressing the daily needs of the population. This is in marked contrast to previous publications, in which the HT paid much attention to Middle Eastern problems, such a support for the Palestinians and criticism of Zionism" (Naumkin 2005: 164).

More generally, the party's leaflets criticize local governments and also contain anti-American, anti-western, and anti-capitalist propaganda (Khamidov 2009: 155).

Interestingly, HT does affiliate members from different madhabs, as the party itself points out:

"The party […] invites all Muslims to carry Islam and adopt its systems regardless of their nationalities, colours and *madhahib* (Schools of Thought), as it looks to all of them according to the viewpoint of Islam" (HT).

In the eyes of Naumkin, this openness is tactical since it enables HT to build on its transnational status and gain supporters from different strands of Islam. As he explains, "a number of researchers believe that Nabhani was an adherent of Hanbalism on questions of law, rejecting in particular the tribal laws" (urf and adat) (Naumkin 2005: 135). Yet even if we assume this to be true, today they do not preach the idea of takfir nor are they fixed on bid'a, which would be typical for Salafis (Naumkin 2005: 145). Indeed, according to Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, HT should be classified as a moderate Salafi group:

"It should be noted that compared to other *Salafis*, and especially *Wahhabis* in the North Caucasus, who have treated the local Islamic traditions as *bid'a* (sinful innovation), *Tahriris* have attuned their *da'wa* to local 'folk' Islamic traditions. They have been respectful of local *'urf* and *'adat* norms and appreciative of regional Hanafi Islam. They have also been more cautious in applying the concept of *kurf* (non-belief) in relation to the actions and policies of local and national government officials" (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 224).

Apart from its moderateness, HT also differs from other Salafi groups in the political measures it propagates. Although it does not participate in democratic processes, neither does it directly advocate armed jihad for establishing the caliphate. According to some authors, it is even open to dialogue with Central Asian governments (see Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 224; Naumkin 2005: 146). For the moment, it only considers armed jihad as an option for defence (Roy 2004: 255). The party is therefore not classified as a jihadist organization (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 224). Yet, if Hizb ut-Tahrir's "position against the launching of jihad is purely tactical" (Roy 2004: 256), and justifies jihad at a later stage, this means that it cannot be called strictly non-jihadist either (Naum-

kin 2005: 145). This is why I classify the party here as *non-violent but potentially jihadist*.

What we know for certain is that Central Asian governments are concerned by the party's activities in their countries and have banned it as an extremist or terrorist organization. Indeed, even though it claims to use only peaceful means "[…] the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have blamed it (without convincing proof) for various violent acts on their territory" (Khalid 2007: 161). Since the Andijan events in Uzbekistan in 2005, the Central Asian governments have intensified their repression of HT and other Islamist groups (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 225).

Despite the big differences in relation to the means used for their political struggle, apart from their common goal (an Islamic caliphate), there is evidence of personal links between members of the IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir. For example, former HT members from Central Asia fled to Afghanistan in the late 1990s and joined the IMU ranks there (Khamidov 2009: 155). Furthermore, "the IMU has supposedly used HT literature to teach its illiterate members to read" (Khamidov 2009: 155). Despite these connections, I assume that in addition to the question of violence, the following differences speak for a clear distinction between them:

- The IMU has a predominantly national agenda, its most important goal being the overthrow of the Karimov regime, whereas the HT is a large transnational movement.
- The IMU pays money to its members for their membership in contrast to HT, which concentrates its efforts on convincing members to join their group with leaflets and books (Khamidov 2009: 155).
- The fees that party members pay to HT are its main source of income, whereas the IMU is involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and hostage taking (Salmorbekova and Yemelianova 2010: 222).

While the non-violent HT shares the goal of establishing a caliphate with IMU, the Islamic Revival Party, which I will introduce next, would be compatible with democracy, although it once was an armed conflict party in the Tajik civil war.

3.4.2. Islamic Renaissance Party

At the June 1990 Congress of Muslims in the USSR, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was legally founded as a pan-Soviet political party with a religious foundation. Already during its foundation, the IRP was criticized by young Salafi revivalists, who took issue with it because it did not strive for an Islamic state (Naumkin 2005: 57). With regard to its ideology, the party therefore can be classified as moderate Islamist (compared to the HT's goal of an Islamic caliphate). After independence, however, the Party was outlawed in all Central Asian countries, as Naby explains:

"The IRP- […] languished in the tribally organized and more superficially Islamized parts of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan) while it competed for political power in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan" (Naby 2009: 157).

In Tajikistan, it became part of the opposition during the civil war from 1992-1997. In the peace accords, it gained a 30% share of parliamentary seats and was promised some ministerial posts. Since then, Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country in which a religious party can participate legally in the political process (in all other countries the existence of religious parties is forbidden). It is therefore worth taking a closer look at this party and how it gained its share of governmental power.

It is debatable whether the Tajik civil war should be considered first and foremost as a war between secular ex-communists and Islamists or, rather, a "struggle of regional factions that for various reasons had chosen different political orientations and ideological garments" (Khazanov 2005: 30). In fact, the members of the IRPT primarily stemmed from the Gharm and Karategin regions, while the ex-communists gained support from Russia and Uzbekistan and mainly had members from the Kuiab, Khujant and Gissar provinces (Khazanov 2005: 30). In any case, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) was principally made up of Islamists, with Democrats playing a merely supportive role.

During the civil war, the IRPT fought for an Islamic state but transformed itself into a modern political party after the peace agreement so that it is now compatible with democracy and comparable to the Turkish Justice and Development Party (Karagiannis 1997: 97). The IRPT participated in the 1999, 2005 and 2010 elections but boycotted the November 2006 presi-

dential election (Naby 2009: 158). In the 2013 presidential elections the IRPT supported a female secularist human rights lawyer as a challenger for Rahmon (Najibullah 2013). However, according to Naby, the "establishment of an Islamic society" remains "the ultimate goal of the IRP […]" (Naby 2009: 158). The party has the following three fundamental objectives: spiritual revival, economic freedom and the "political and legal awakening of Muslims with the aim of activating in everyday life the basics of the Qur'an and the *sunnah*" (Naby 2009: 158). In this regard, the party is a typical Islamist party. It mainly represents Hanafi madhab but claims to have members from all over Tajikistan, among them even Ismailis (interview with Kabiri). The party brings together members with more and less radical ideas, which has given rise to factions (Naumkin 2005). Salafi elements in the IRPT, for example, condemn Novruz celebrations or the visiting of mazars and oppose the organization of expensive funerals (interview with researcher for Alert International).

Image 4: Meeting at the IRPT Headquarter in Dushanbe

Source: Lisa Harand

The IRP members see themselves as reformists who combine anti-imperialism against the West and Russia with progressive ideas for the improvement of society and Islam as the route to socio-political development (Naby 2009: 158):

"The thirty-two-point agenda of the IRP stresses moral interpersonal actions, the defense of Islam against the accretion of any 'ignorant contemporary' (i.e., non-Islamic) doctrine, and the resolution of disputes through the Qur'an and *sunnah*. In addition, the agenda supports the promotion of sports and health programs, provision of welfare for the needy, private ownership of property, and support of ecological activity" (Naby 2009: 158).

However, when asked what he would change first, if he had the opportunity, Kabirir, the president of the party, responded that he would a) hold free elections; b) fight corruption; and c) allow for more religious freedom in the country (interview with Kabiri).

Image 5: Kabiri, President of the IRPT (Dushanbe)

Source: Lisa Harand

The reasons for these demands are that since the peace accords the IRPT has been losing seats in parliament. After the 2010 elections it received only two parliamentary seats (which means a share of less than 3% instead of the assured 30%) and no ministerial posts. The party therefore accuses the government of election fraud.

The Tajik government fears the IRPT and closely monitors its operations. The party, for example, has to provide the names of all members to the government. As it fears the repression of its members the IRPT does not

release all names or sometimes advises sympathizers not to become members (they fear, for example, that officials or Muftis could lose their job if they were known to be party members) (interview with Kabiri). Also in other regards the party does not fully respect the law: it is, for example, a fact that the party holds illegal prayers at its headquarters in Dushanbe, which is forbidden by a law that restricts Muslim worship to mosques, homes, and cemeteries.

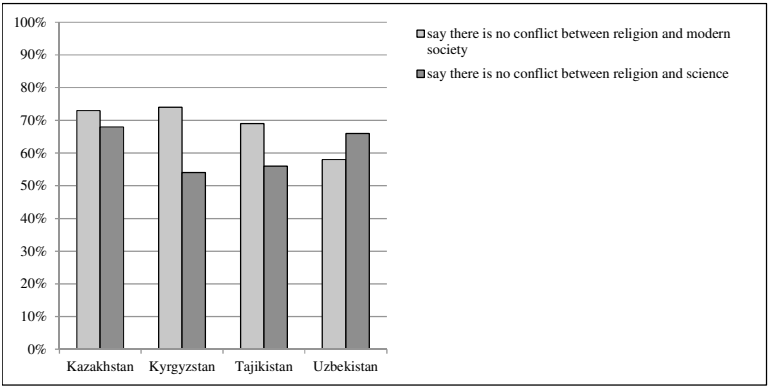
According to a researcher for Alert International, the party is totally powerless at the moment. It usually only criticizes governmental policies on religious issues and tries not to jeopardize the relatively good relationship it currently has with the government by avoiding any open confrontation. Confronted with the party's powerlessness, Kabiri explains that the party is far too interested in stability to engage in protests such as demonstrations (interview with Kabiri).

3.5. MODERNISTS AND NEO-FUNDAMENTALISTS: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

As has already been stated, Central Asian governments tend to classify all Salafi influences on Islam in their countries as foreign. This is why it is especially important to have a closer look at actually foreign movements – even more so because it is undeniable that transnational movements have a stark influence on Central Asians and on how Islam is practiced today in Central Asia. In the following section two transnational Islamic groups will be presented which declare themselves as apolitical and non-violent: the Turkish Gülen movement and the Pakistani-Indian Tablighi Jama'at. Both are presented as examples of religious movements aiming at the transformation of the society. Whereas I describe the Gülen movement as modernist, the Tablighi Jama'at are fundamentalist and backward-looking. For this reason the current chapter begins with Figure 9 which shows different understandings of the relationship between religion and modernity. For the PEW survey Central Asian Muslims were asked:

- whether they think there is a conflict between religion and modern society; and
- whether they think there is a conflict between religion and science.

Figure 9: Relationship between Religion and Modernity



Source: PEW 2013

As we can see from Figure 9, the majority of Central Asian Muslims are neither backward-looking nor anti-modernist. On the contrary, most Central Asians are among those who are "least likely to see a conflict between being devout and living in the contemprorary world" compared to other regions in the world (PEW 2013: 128). This may help account for the extraordinary expansion of the Gülen movement in the region over the last few years.

3.5.1. Nurcu and Gülen Movement

The Gülen movement is named after Fetullah Gülen, a Turk who currently lives in the United States. The Gülen movement (FG), which also calls itself *Hizmet* movement is a neo-Nurcu movement,[5] an offshoot of the original *Nurculuk* movement, which was founded by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960). Nursi "was educated in a Naqshbandi circle", but although he placed an emphasis on mystical and spiritual Islam, he was never a member

5 See for example Gülen News: http://gulennews.de/.

of a Sufi order (Kuspinar 262; Mardin 2009: 257f).[6] He believed that Muslims should take advantage of western technology and knowledge and was interested in developing a new form of education, combining religious and positivist sciences (Kuspinar 2009 260; Mardin 2009: 258). His goal was to establish a republic based on Islamic principles and Turkish nationalism (Markedonov 2013: 25). The Gülen movement, however, is not political; Peuch describes it as a socio-religious movement (Peuch 2004). It places a particular emphasis on education at the secondary school level (9th to 11th grade). Additionally, the movement finances universities such as Suleyman Demirel and Ahmet Yesevi University in the Kazakh cities Almaty and Turkistan, as well as the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University in Bishkek (Peuch 2004).

Image 6: Manas University in Bishkek

Source: Lisa Harand

Fetullah Gülen, who was born in Erzurum in 1942, "has had a complicated and controversial relationship with Turkish authorities" (Markedonov 2013: 25). He was accused of clandestine religious activities, indoctrinating

6 Despite this, the World Almanac of Islamism describes the Gülen movement as 'mainstream Sufism'. See: http://almanac.afpc.org/fetullah-g%C3%BClen-movement.

youths in illegally run summer camps, and infiltrating the Turkish military (Markedonov 2013: 25). Yet although Gülen was accused of diverse offenses against the Turkish state, today his activities are considered as "useful for the promotion of Turkish national interests. The movement therefore benefits from the support of the Turkish embassies" abroad (Markedonov 2013: 26). According to Peuch, "it is in Kazakhstan, where it has some 27 schools, that the Gulen community has been the most successful […]" (Peuch 2004) but the movement is active in all Central Asian countries. The common ethnic origins that Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks share with Turks not only explains the special influence the movement has in Central Asia; the fear that it is spreading a pan-Turkish ideology is at the same time the main reason for governmental restrictions on its schools, especially in Uzbekistan and in Persian Tajikistan. However, the lack of educational resources in Central Asian countries has led many to welcome the Turkish schools, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

> "[…], unattractive salaries have drained the profession of many of its most competent teachers and university professors. With its teams of dedicated Turkish-born teachers and its emphasis on modern technology, the Gulen community has helped local governments overcome this situation" (Peuch 2004).

In addition to the high educational standard, many parents send their children to Gülen schools because the fees are economical (Markedonov 2013: 27; interviews with sympathizers of the Gülen movement). In Bishkek I was able to observe first-hand how well-equipped the private 'Silk Road International School' is. It is headed by a Turkish director while teachers come from different Islamic countries. Sports and performance spaces are available and pupils already begin receiving English instruction at kindergarten level. The students' parents work for the Kyrgyz government or for international organizations. It is not uncommon to see nine-year old school children playing with their iPhones during recess or paying with $100 bills at the school's kiosk.

In the literature, the running of private schools is more prominently treated than the maintenance of charity lyceums. It is even often stated (e.g. Peuch 2004) that the education provided by the movement is totally secular. However, my research revealed different findings: in Dushanbe I was informed that students at these schools who receive a special promotion be-

cause of their high school achievements have almost no free time because of their very tight timetables which not only include lessons and time for homework but also Islamic learning and reading namaz. In this way a 17-year old boy is busy from 5am in the morning until 10pm in the evening with one hour off at midday (interview with an independent Tajik researcher). What has to be stressed, though, is that although the secondary schools claim not to be especially religious, there are stories of parents of students who have expressed concerns regarding either the religious transformation of their children or a very tough timetable without any free time (see also Markedonov 2013: 27). In addition, I can give an example of an Islamic college in Bishkek, a madrasa, which is also sponsored by the Gülen movement. Forty students from all over Kyrgyzstan receive three years of free secondary education there.[7]

Image 7: Madrasa supported by Gülen Movement in Bishkek

Source: Lisa Harand

The students have to pass an entrance examination but afterwards they are fully provided for. During the first year they live at the madrasa, and during the second and third years they live in a dormitory in the city. The founda-

7 This seems to be no exception – I was told that other such schools exist in Nary and Osh, for example.

tion not only pays for their education but also their food (they eat together with their colleagues at the madrasa), accommodation and sports and cultural activities (interview with a sympathizer of the Gülen movement). The students are schooled in literature, history and languages but also pray together five times a day (*namaz)* and are instructed in Islamic subjects such as Arabic grammar, *hadith* and the reading of the Quran.

Generally, at Gülen schools special emphasis is laid on sciences, ethics, and self-discipline. (Peuch 2004). The teaching is usually in English and Turkish but also in local languages (Peuch 2004). When I met members of the movement in Kyrgyzstan I was astonished by their excellent language skills and how well-travelled they were. To give an example: one of my Kyrgyz interview partners had lived abroad for seven years, mainly in Turkey and Switzerland, obtaining a Masters degree in Business Administration in the latter. Today he works in a business consultancy for foreign companies in Kyrgyzstan. His office is affiliated to the Gülen movement and located in a building together with other Gülen enterprises. One of these is a charitable organization and another is 'Radio Maral' – the Gülen-radio for Kyrgyzstan.

Image 8: Gülen Radio Maral in Bishkek

Source: Lisa Harand

It is very typical for the Gülen movement that apart from education, it is active in the fields of business, media and charitable work. Indeed, the movement not only runs schools but also large and small businesses, student apartments and even organizes weekly 'discussion circles'. This explains why schools are being built by either Gülen-owned or Gülen-linked companies such as the Turkish company Serhat or by organizations such as the Tolerance Foundation (Markedonov 2013: 26f). The fact that sympathizers not only meet other members once a week to read and discuss Nursis and Gülen's texts, but also work in firms affiliated to the movement, or often live in student-homes run by Gülen (or, like my interview-partner, in an apartment rented very cheaply from a fellow sympathizer) lends this religious group the appearance of a sect.[8]

Apart from the fact that being a member seems to have a far-reaching effect on their lives (as it impacts which friends they have, the restaurants they choose and the places where they work and live), the following can be said of the political ideology that the movement is built on:

"In contrast to the Salafis, the Fethullahcilar movement suggests a focus on understanding Islam through education. […] Gülen considers the primary tasks of the Fethullahcilar not to be in conflict with official policy […] the movement interprets armed jihad as a mistake […]" (Markedonov 2013: 26).

In the words of Fetullah Gülen, terrorism is incompatible with Islam because "in true Islam there is no terror since the killing of a human being is equivalent to disbelief (*kufr*)" (Gülen 2012). Besides arguing against terrorism, the Gülen movement is apolitical and it stresses the importance of tolerance and love in its interpretation of Islam (Akdag 2012). Nonetheless, government responses to the Gülen movement in Central Asia differ greatly from country to country. In Kyrgyzstan many government officials even send their children to Gülen schools, such as the International Silk Road

8 The fact that not all employees of affiliated firms are members or sympathizers of the movement could counterpose this statement (I was told that at Radio Moral, for example, only 80% of staff were sympathizers). However, this could be judged as a good recruiting-strategy since it demonstrates that not only is it interested in isolating its members from too many outside influences but also in gaining new members.

School in Bishkek, and over time, Gülen teachings may have had a major influence on the elite for this very reason (interview with a sympathizer of the Gülen movement). In general it is clear that the influence of the Fetullah Gülen movement in Central Asia is profound and, by disseminating its modernist understanding of religion, has had a part to play in the revival of Islam in the region.

3.5.2. Tablighi Jama'at

Tablighi Jama'at (TJ) is a transnational movement with a global outreach and a clear centre in South Asia – in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. The movement was founded in 1926 under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) "in the context of British colonial and cultural domination" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 293) and "in order to purify Islam of Hindu and Christian influences" (Roy 2004: 156). The group follows "orthodox Deoband traditions and emphasize *taqlid* (following the established schools of Islamic law) over *ijtihad* (independent reasoning)" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 297). It has 12 to 15 million followers worldwide and spread to Central Asia in the 1980s (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 293, 295). Today, Tablighi Jama'at is considered "the largest Muslim missionary group in the world […], its annual conference has become the second largest Muslim congregation after the *hajj*" (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012: 180).

The members of this Islamic missionary movement do not proselytize among non-Muslims. Instead they seek to bring Muslims back to "true Islam" and correct their practices (Markedonov 2013: 29). Tablighi Jama'at attaches considerable importance to *dawat* – preaching by inviting others to the mosque. Every Tabligh should fulfil this duty in exact time spans: three days per month, one month per year and four months in a lifetime (see Nasritdinov 2012). This means that preaching is not restricted to the clergy but that "everyone who joined the Jama'at became an instant preacher" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 295). The *dawat* is strongly connected to travelling. Nasritdinov very neatly explains the implication travelling has for the spiritual experience and process of a Tabligh (Nasritdinov 2012). On their journeys the members of the movement are organized in groups (jama'at) of 10 people who "invite the local Muslims to assemble in the mosque or some other meeting place, and present their message in the form of six directives" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 294).

Roy regards the fact that every Tabligh is an instant preacher as grounds for classifying the movement as neofundamentalist. He argues that neofundamentalists are more interested in the immediate experience of faith than in thorough religious knowledge and scholarly learning (Roy 2004: 165). Along with Salafis and other fundamentalists, the movement shares a strong disdain for Sufi practices and other 'innovations', as Reetz and Mumtaz explain:

"It rejects such popular expressions of religion as the veneration of saints, visiting shrines, and observing the syncretic rituals associated with popular Sufism. Jama'at workers are rigid in following orthodox rituals and practices and in observing the rules of *shari'ah*" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 297).

The fact that the movement is rather more interested in the transformation of the individual and less in social change also fits Roy's classification of Tablighi Jama'at as a neofundamentalist movement. Karagianni also states that the group can be considered neofundamentalist because it operates mosques and schools (Karagiannis 2010: 52).

Despite this, my own experience with a member of Tablighi Jama'at was that of a quite tolerant person. Although he explained on a theoretical level why he did not regard it as correct to pray at a saints' grave, he did read the Quran for the other people present at this place because he was the most knowledgeable person there. Such tolerant behaviour does not fit Roy's neofundamentalist description. Furthermore, Nasritdinov's research and his work with Ismailbekova, in which they reveal conflicting observations, make me hesitant to conclude that we are dealing with an exclusionary organization or movement.

In terms of its political ambitions it seems appropriate to conclude that since the movement is primarily interested in the transformation of the individual into a good Muslim, it is apolitical. As Alexiev makes clear:

"Tablighi Jamaat officials work to remain outside of both media and governmental notice. […] By eschewing open discussion in politics and portraying itself only as a pietistic movement, Tablighi Jamaat works to project a nonthreatening image" (Alex Alexiev, cited in Markedonov 2013: 28).

Reetz and Mumtaz (2009: 292) also consider Tablighi Jama'at to be apolitical citing as reasons the fact that it neither aspires to an Islamic state such as a caliphate nor proclaims armed jihad. In certain countries, such as Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Malaysia, the movement even profits from the fact that governments accept it as an "antidote to militant Islam" (Reetz and Mumtaz 2009: 298). Not so in Central Asia: Uzbekistan banned Tablighi Jama'at as an extremist organization in 2004, Tajikistan followed in 2006, Russia in 2009 (Markedonov 2013: 29) and Kazakhstan in 2013. Only in Kyrgyzstan is the movement still able to operate legally, though its missionary trips are regulated by the Muftiate.

It is difficult to give a clear answer regarding the movement's organizational structure. Whereas Tablighis themselves claim not to have a strong formal organization, "a closer look at their functioning reveals that this is far from true. Their international administration has become very strong and robust" (Reetz 2008, cited in Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012: 183). Indeed, its vertical and horizontal structures appear to function fairly well as we see in the example of Kyrgyzstan. Here a national council called mashura (Arabic for council) oversees the adherents of the movement (Zenn 2013). Decisions concerning domestic issues are taken at these national councils and, "are passed down to the regional, city and local levels" where they reach the individual mosques (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012: 183). Moreover, Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov write that on their trips to India, Kyrgyz *jama'ats*:

> "[…] report the success and difficulties of their practice in Kyrgyzstan: the range of issues reported can include the number of 3-day, 40-day and 4-month *jama'ats*, which travelled inside Kyrgyzstan and abroad, the quality of everyday local efforts, the main patterns and trends in comparison to previous years, etc. They also receive instructions and recommendations form the veterans of the movement, which are then brought back to Kyrgyzstan" (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012: 183).

Despite this, the impact of the existence or non-existence of a hierarchical structure with regards to fundamentalist elements in the movement remains open to discussion. Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov and a researcher for Alert International all argue that only a strong leadership and hierarchical structure could prevent the Tablighis from being overrun by political movements (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012: 183; interview with researcher for Alert

International). Nevertheless, my interview partner from Alert International questions Ismailbekova's and Nasritdinov's assertion that the organization is strong enough to resist fundamentalist elements. Furthermore, there are critics who argue that the movement is Salafi; that it aims at establishing a global Islamic caliphate, and even maintains connections to al Qaida (Zenn 2013). However, these arguments refer to individual relationships or changes of members of one group to the other rather than organizational links between the two groups (interview with a researcher for Alert International).

Image 9: Kyrgyz Member of Tablighi Jama'at

Source: Lisa Harand

Compared to the progressive Gülen movement Tablighi Jama'at is backward-looking and conservative. At first sight Tablighis seem to be much more devout than Gülencis because of their Pakistani dress code of long shirts and wide trousers. My Tabligh interview-partner, for example, described himself as God's slave, which sounds extreme. By contrast, a sympathizer of the Gülen movement with his band collar shirt, v-neck pullover and intellectual speech seemed moderate and almost western. Which of these two movements is having a broader effect on Islam in Central Asia? This question is impossible to answer in the scope of this study. However, it seems to me that the Gülen movement is much more difficult to pin down than the Tablighi Jama'at. Moreover, the Gülen movement's projects

to transform society are much more diversified and complex than the Tablighi's proselytising efforts among fellow Muslims.