The Effectiveness of Applying Secularisation Thesis to the Post-Soviet World: A Review of Religious Conflict in Uzbekistan

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INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be secular? To have undergone secularisation? Is secularism an inevitability of human religious development? These questions have been posed by various scholars, with Steve Bruce, Charles Taylor, José Casanova, Talal Asad, and Peter L. Berger exploring secularism and its derivations in much of their work. Social scientists of the 19th century, such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx, proposed secularity to be a natural consequence of modernity, and secularisation thesis as a theory has been used to describe the decline of religion both in society and in the minds of individuals throughout the world. The concepts of secular, secularism, and secularisation are rooted in European Christian thought, in the religious wars following the Protestant Reformation, and in the early years of modern nation-building (Asad 2003, 1). The Age of Enlightenment in the 17th century further expanded on the ideas surrounding secularity, and the era consequently became associated with rationality, religious moderation, and religious pluralism (Calhoun 2010, 8-10). This period shaped our understandings of modernity and deeply influenced contemporary Western philosophical and theological thought. Modernity as a concept should be briefly outlined here in order to understand further discussions surrounding secularism and secularisation. Modernity does not simply to refer to our present, but it is a project – a list of principles that exist in the wake of Enlightenment thought. Specifically, it is the upholding of these ideas by society and those in power, with these values being: constitutionalism, democracy, industry, human rights, civil equality, and most importantly for this thesis, secularism (Bruce 2011, 26; Asad 2003, 13).

Philosophically, secularism stresses the necessary shift of focus from the metaphysical to reality, but when secularism is discussed in regards to the modern-nation state, it is viewed as a visible, active force where church separates from the state and religiosity decreases across all aspects of society (Hashemi 2010, 327). Here we can offer a preliminary definition of secularisation, as proposed by Bryan Wilson. Secularisation can be defined as a "decline in the social significance of religion", which includes the decay of religious institutions, a reduction in the amount of time people dedicate to supernatural concerns, and political powers obtaining facilities previously owned and controlled by religious organisations (Bruce 2011, 2). The ideas presented here are common throughout definitions of secularism and secularisation, that religion will slowly lose influence over our lives and we will apparently enter a new secular world. This shift should occur across the world regardless of pre-existing religious cultures and traditions; wherever there is a modern state (as in conforming to modernity rather than being 'current'), secularisation follows (Asad 2003, 2).

More recent works surrounding secularism and secularisation have sought to challenge the previously accepted notions that secularity is unavoidable. José Casanova refers to secularisation as a myth, and whilst there are still some supporters of secularisation thesis, notably Bryan Wilson and

Steve Bruce, more discussions are appearing that discount secular inevitability (Casanova 1994, 17). Consequently, desecularisation thesis has been suggested as an alternative. Peter L. Berger, a key scholar in developing this counter theory, has proposed that modernity does not have to lead to the decline of religion. Religion and its institutions may have been relocated in 'secular' countries, and modernity has resulted in a rise of religious pluralism rather than secularity (Berger 2012, 313). Whilst the ideas surrounding (de)secular and (de)secularisation will be expanded upon later in this paper, it should be noted here that even key proponents of secularisation thesis, such as Bruce, acknowledge that the theory cannot be applied universally (Bruce 2011, 3). As such, on the theoretical level, there is conflict between scholars and ideologies. Whilst this is hardly remarkable, as ideological discourse thrives amongst academics, the conflict is intriguing when applied to real-life religious trends and relationships. Therefore, we can now briefly introduce the case study that will be investigated in order to explore (de)secularisation thesis and associated concepts.

In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many countries found themselves experiencing independence for the first time in hundreds of years. Uzbekistan, a majority Muslim country in Central Asia, found itself in a similar predicament to its neighbours: how could the country establish itself as a democratic independent nation and what would happen to the now defunct Soviet institutions and culture? As a state within the USSR, Uzbekistan was secular and conformed to communist ideologies as imposed by Moscow. However, after 1991, Islam began to re-emerge as a political and societal force. Many countries within the post-Soviet sphere have begun to desecularise, and the Islamic heritage of Uzbekistan is being celebrated as a new national identity (Khalid 2003, 583). However, the Uzbek government is rejecting this religious re-emergence, with restrictions being placed upon religious freedoms and the authorities have identified Islamic extremism as an accurate indicator of societal desecularisation. There is a conflict between an apparently secular government and a seemingly desecularising society. This can be seen in the scores the country received in regards to Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI). The Pew Forum gave Uzbekistan a score of 7.8 (very high) in the Restrictions Index, which indicates severe limitations on religious freedoms. For the Social Hostilities Index, Uzbekistan received the low score of just 1.1, which is below the global average and implies that there are no internal religious conflicts occurring in the country[1] (Pew Forum 2016). The SHI, however, does not give much insight into the religiosity amongst Uzbeks, but all of this will be explored in the following chapters.

[1] The SHI is a measure of violence and intimation which is committed by individuals or organisations on the basis of a difference in religion, and the index result is arrived at through the answers to thirteen questions on social impediments to religion. The GRI also utilises twenty questions to arrive at a quantification of the restrictions upon religious practices and beliefs by local and national governments

In my research, I have found that the criteria within both secularisation and desecularisation thesis do not consider that society and state could experience different trends in regards to their relationships with religion. It is implied that the two are intrinsically linked: church and state separate, resulting in political secularisation, and religious beliefs decline in the minds of individuals and communities causing societal secularisation. This is true for Europe, in which religious institutions have little to no influence over political domains *and* people do not publicly participate in religious beliefs or practices (Berger 1999, 9). However, this is not necessarily the case for the rest of the world.

Consequently, I will pose the following hypothesis: secularisation thesis does not distinguish between state-religion and society-religion relations and therefore cannot be applied as a theory to explain the current religious conflict in post-Soviet countries. Specifically, post-Soviet Uzbekistan will be utilised as a case study. In order to fully explore this hypothesis, I will first begin with outlining the various definitions of secularism, secularisation, and desecularisation in the first chapter. In the second chapter, I will provide an overview of Uzbekistan, highlighting the most relevant periods of its political and religious history. For the third chapter, I will discuss two key events (1999 Tashkent Bombings and the 2005 Andijan Uprising) in post-independent Uzbekistan that have affected governmental and societal attitudes towards religion. The final chapter will explore and analyse these two events through the definitions that were established in the first chapter, and reflect on the inadequacies of secularisation thesis when applied to non-Western, non-Christian cultures.

CHAPTER I: THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Brief overview

Defining the terms 'secular', 'secularism', and 'secularisation' is notoriously complicated and convoluted; the concepts are multidimensional and the words have become interchangeable over the years (Casanova 1994, 18; Calhoun 2010, 1). The word 'secular' is derived from the Latin '*saeculum*' meaning age, century, or world. 'Secular' can also be traced back to Canon Law, which refers to a religious person leaving the cloister to return to the *saeculum*, becoming a 'secular' person. For 'secularisation', this term historically refers to the appropriation of the church-owned land and wealth by, typically, the state following the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century (Casanova 1994, 18-19). The ideas surrounding the sociological concepts of the secular and its derivations date back to theoretical works published in the 1950s and 1960s, though the core principles have roots in the Enlightenment period of the 18th century. These concepts are straightforward: modernisation inherently leads to the decline of religion not only in society, but also in the minds of individuals (Berger 1967, 8-9; Berger 1999, 2). Key influential social scientists of the 19th century, such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx, considered secularisation to be an inevitability of

modernisation with religion only being relevant on a personal level. The sociologist Steve Bruce states that once religion no longer serves a purpose, other than connecting people to the supernatural, then its influence will dwindle and secularisation will begin to emerge. Moreover, it is argued that secularisation would occur as a global trend regardless of a country's religious and cultural history (Haynes 1997, 713). However, there are those who oppose the ideas of secularisation thesis, such as Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and Peter L. Berger, the latter advocating for desecularisation thesis instead. This theory argues that religious re-emergence is occurring in previously secular countries and highlights the growth, not decline, of religion across the world.

This chapter will outline definitions for secularism, secularisation, desecularisation, and some models through which we can understand state-religion and society-religion relations. It is here where I will establish which definitions I will be using for the duration of this thesis.

What is secularism?

Charles Taylor identifies the three aspects of secularity: 1) the retreat of religion in public life, 2) the decline in belief and practice, and 3) the change in the conditions of belief. These features can overlap, but they are not inherently bound to go together. Taylor does note, however, that the appearance of an alternative belief system (such as humanism) is a precondition for the rise of unbelief which consequently contributes to a decline in practice (Taylor 2007, 399-400). We can look at the term 'secularism' through the lenses of three disciplines within the social sciences: philosophy, sociology, and political science. In philosophy, secularism is the "rejection of the transcendental and the metaphysical with a focus on the existential and the empirical" (Hashemi 2010, 326-327). In sociology, secularism concerns itself with modernisation in regards to the process of religion's decreasing influence over institutions, daily life, and human relationships. Finally, politically, secularism refers to the separation of the public and private spheres, specifically between state institutions and religious ones (Hashemi 2010, 327). Secularism is often perceived as the absence of religion, but it should be considered as a presence in its own right. Its existence has had a significant impact on contemporary understandings of religion and culture, whilst simultaneously shaping our worldview on modernity and politics (Calhoun 2010, 1). In light of the research presented in this essay, it is imperative to stress that secularism is not simply remnants of faded religiosity, but is an active force that affects many facets of human society.

What is secularisation?

The term secularisation, however, can be seen as the consequence of secularism; it is a process that is an alleged inevitability of human development by proponents of secularisation thesis

(Calhoun 2010, 2). Secularisation has come to signify the "passage", movement, or relocation of persons, functions, things, etc. from their original and traditional location in the religious sphere to the secular (Casanova 1994, 19). Nikki Keddie and José Casanova supply tripartite definitions of secularisation. Keddie argues that it is an increase in the number of people with secular beliefs, alongside a reduction of religious influence over many spheres of people's lives and an increase in state separation from religion and its institutions (Keddie 2003, 16). Casanova similarly identifies secularisation as the decline of religious beliefs and its practices, religion becoming marginalised to the private sphere, and the separation of state intuitions from religious ones. An additional feature is posed by Charles Taylor, which elaborates on secularisation being a change in our understandings towards religion and recognising that it has been superseded by an alternative belief system (Hashemi 2010, 327; Taylor 2007, 400).

There is a dualistic system of classification that Casanova highlights – the world is divided into 'this world' (earth) and 'the other world' (heaven). However, he argues that there are actually three spheres, not two. 'This world' should be divided into two separate spheres: the religious world (the church) and the secular world proper (*saeculum*). The religious world acts as a mediator between 'this world' and 'the other world', thus, secularisation can also refer to the breaking down of the metaphorical wall between 'this world' and its mediator, the religious sphere. There is still a separation between heaven and earth, but only the secular world remains and religion now must find its own space in the *saeculum* (Casanova 1994, 20-21). This system that Casanova describes is based on medieval Christendom structures in Europe, but a dualistic worldview is not necessarily a solely Christian concept. The divisions outlined above, however, are not applicable to religions that do not have a centralised religious institution. If secularisation refers to the removal of the barrier between the religious sphere and the 'other world', how does this occur when the structure and position of the institution is not the same as it is in Christianity? Whilst most (if not all) religions have some type of organisation in the form of church-like establishments (mosques, synagogues, etc.), many religions have their institutions in a more localised position rather than having an overarching body that influences and controls the faith from a singular location. For example, Islam lacks an equivalent to the Catholic church; there are Islamic scholars and priests that interpret and enforce the religious teachings, but these take place in various locations across the world and within individual communities. The religious sphere is more fragmented, less concrete, and has perhaps already found its space within the secular world proper. Therefore, if secularisation is the transfer of the religious sphere to the *saeculum* following its destruction, then secularisation inherently requires a Christian-like institutional structure. It is important to note that this definition of secularisation is from a

historical perspective, but it does demonstrate that the origins of the theory are rooted in Christianity and European culture.

Secularism and the state

Ahmet T. Kuru argues that a state is considered to be secular once it fulfils two criteria. Firstly, the country's legal and judicial systems are not influenced by religious institutions and secondly, a state does not declare an official religion (including atheism) (2007, 569). These criteria do have their weaknesses, as they do not apply to countries like the United Kingdom or Sweden, both of which have low religiosity but have a declared state religion. As such, the requirements do not accurately represent how diverse secularisation can appear, as even within Christian European countries there are vast historical differences in how states have interacted with religious institutions. However, there are other processes to be acknowledged when considering if a state can be defined as secular in addition to the aforementioned criteria. In particular, five aspects of secularisation have been proposed, which are as follows: 1) constitutional secularisation (religious institutions no longer receive special recognition or support from a state's constitution), 2) policy secularisation (services previously controlled by religion are now provided by the state), 3) institutional secularisation (religious groups or political parties lose their influence within the government), 4) agenda secularisation (problems that affect politics are no longer overtly religious), and 5) ideological secularisation (belief systems and basic values that are utilised to assess politics are not functioning through a religious lens) (Haynes 1997, 713). These features are useful for defining secular states as they further expand the definitions provided by Keddie, Casanova, and Taylor. Additionally, they provide a wider range of characteristics to ascribe to a country which can aid in understanding to what degree a state is secular.

In regards to state-religion relations, Max Weber outlined three different types of relationships a state could have with an ecclesiastical power: hierocractic, in which secular power dominates but has religious legitimacy; theocractic, where ecclesiastical power dominates secular power; and caesaro-papist, where secular power dominates religion (Haynes 1997, 710). However, since the rise and fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Subrata Kumar Mitra proposed new church-state relationships can be sorted into four categories that reflect today's world more accurately. A state can be hegemonic (one religion is dominant, but others are tolerated); theocratic (state power is dependent on the institutions of the dominant religion); secular (state power is separate from religious institutions); and neutral (religions are treated equally by the state, including the dominant faith). In theocratic and neutral states, religion functions as a social framework, whereas in hegemonic or secular states, religion functions only on the personal level (Mitra 1991, 758). Moreover, regardless

of which set of categories used to define state-church relations, it is necessary to recognise that church-state-society relationships are inherently triadic, and that the role that religion has (or does not have) in a country is closely related to, and influenced by, the historical and cultural bounds in which it exists (Mitra 1991, 757). It is important to outline these relations in order to understand how secularism and secularisation functions within the jurisdiction of the state; we can denote a particular relationship to a state as a starting point for further research into the actual reality and presentation of secularisation in a country. The categories provided also work in conjunction with the previous five aspects provided above so the relationship that is occurring on the state level in Uzbekistan can be more accurately defined.

It is also important to note that there are two key contexts that prevent the expansion of secularisation: cultural defence and cultural transition. In the case of the former, this is "when culture, identity, and a sense of worth are challenged by a source promoting either an alien religion or rampant secularism and that source is negatively valued". For the latter, it is where "identity is threatened in the course of major cultural transitions" (Haynes 1997, 713-14). When these situations occur, religion functions to replenish a group's sense of worth and identity. This can be seen in some parts of the Islamic world in which there is a rejection and resentment of Western interference and political expansion (Calhoun 2010, 15; Bruce 2011, 49-50). This, in turn, creates a rise in Islamism in order to protect a community from Western 'un-Islamic' thought and values. A cultural transition can also be observed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, including amongst Christian-majority countries.

There is a difference, however, between a secular state and a secular society. Many nations throughout human history have declared themselves to be secular, which is usually understood to mean that the governmental and judicial systems within a country are not associated with or influenced by religion or its institutions. Bryan S. Turner argues that discussions surrounding secularisation could be more relevant if there was a distinction between what he refers to as 'political secularisation' and 'social secularisation'. The characteristics Turner applies to political secularisation are in line with the above more generalised definitions of secularisation: political secularisation is concerned with the removal of religion in political and public spheres, and is usually a fairly formal and institutionalised affair. For social secularisation, Turner associates this with social values, practices, and customs. Additionally, it operates both formally, through religious institutions, and informally in day-to-day activities. He notes that it is easy for a state to regulate religion in the political realm but it remains much more complicated to assert control over faith within the social domain (Turner 2010, 651-653). We can see this contrast of political secularisation and social secularisation in many countries around the world, most notably in the post-Soviet sphere. Therefore, we should view

countries through both lenses and acknowledge that there may be different attitudes towards secularisation in the governmental and societal realms that could be in conflict with one another. Consequently, this essay will view state-religion relations and societal-religion relations as two separate entities so as to evaluate the status of (de)secularisation in both spheres to gauge whether there is a conflict in Uzbekistan, applying the above definitions to each in order to fully explore the situation.

What is desecularisation?

Desecularisation is the growth of religion, religious beliefs, and its expansion into the public sphere. Specifically, it is the re-emergence of religion following a period of secularisation – desecularisation occurs only when religion revitalises as a reaction to preceding or ongoing secular trends (Karpov 2010, 236-340). A working definition of desecularisation is proposed by Vyacheslav Karpov, who states that it is: a reconciliation between formally secularised institutions and religious ones; a resurgence of religious beliefs and practices; the return of religion to the public sphere; and a revival of religion in a variety of cultural subsystems, including philosophy, arts, and literature amongst others (2010, 250). It is still important to take into account that, in a similar fashion to the above discussion concerning secularism, some features may not be mutually exclusive; the culture and local histories of different countries should always be considered.

Peter L. Berger is a key scholar in developing desecularisation thesis. He proposes that the world is, in fact, becoming much more religious than ever before. According to him, the notion that modernisation and secularisation go hand-in-hand is not entirely true; modernisation certainly has some secularising effects on society but secularisation on a societal level does not mean that individuals will also experience the phenomena and decreased religiosity (Berger 1999, 3). Additionally, religious institutions can maintain a level of power and influence, both politically and socially, despite low religious adherence. It is not uncommon for religious establishments to experience growth and decline at different points throughout history, yet the beliefs and practices of a religion will prevail for individuals (Berger 1999, 3).

Exceptions to the desecularisation argument

It should be noted that there are two key exceptions to the desecularisation argument. The primary outlier is the situation in Europe, in particular, Western Europe. As modernisation continues to flourish in European culture and society, secularisation thesis seems to hold true in this part of the world. Church attendance, recruitment into the clergy, and expressed belief in a faith have massively decreased, alongside a shift in codes of personal behaviour in regards to sexuality, reproduction, etc.

(Berger 1999, 9). What is interesting surrounding the concept of a secularised Europe is the fact that Christianity has continued to survive across the continent despite low church attendance, so there may have been a change in the institutional location of religion. This would be a more appropriate term to describe the trends in Europe rather than secularisation due to the widespread presence of Christianity and its various establishments, which is deeply entrenched in European culture (Berger 1999, 10). The relationship that a state has with religion is inherently linked to a country's history and culture – what has occurred in many parts of Europe is a by-product of the continent's unique religious experiences. There are four social trends that have had secularising consequences on Europe: the rise of modern capitalism, the rise of modern nation-states, the Scientific Revolution, and the Protestant Reformation (Hashemi 2010, 328-331). These events were fundamental in the shaping of modern-day European religious attitudes, and were, at the time, uniquely 'European'. Subsequently, to employ a standardised process for secularisation to occur in non-European countries would be inappropriate when it is evident that different types of religious relationships exist within their own localised cultures.

The second exception to desecularisation thesis is the role of a globalised elite culture. This international subculture contains people typically with Western-style higher education (usually humanities or social sciences) who are secularised themselves. According to Berger, secular theologians frequently assume that traditional religious values are no longer reasonable because they do not meet modern criteria of validity (either philosophical or scientific) and they do not adhere to a 'modern' worldview that they believe the general public also share (1967, 5). Consequently, this group is the main 'carrier' of progressive, Enlightened, and secularised beliefs and values. This subculture, although small, is highly influential in the global sphere as its members frequently control the institutions which determine the 'official' definitions of what reality entails – these institutions are the education systems, the higher aspects of the judicial systems, and much of the media aiding global communication (Berger 1999, 10). Secularisation thesis appears to be plausible and true amongst these intellectuals because they likely associate with other likeminded scholars and individuals and consequently be easily misled into believing the notion that the people that make the globalised elite and their views represent society as a whole, which is untrue (Berger 1999, 11).

Reflecting on these two exceptions presented above, it is apparent that secularisation only seems to hold true under certain circumstances: within a uniquely European experience and amongst a particular subculture which has been influenced by European and Western cultural thought. It appears that secularisation continues to operate through a Christian lens and is applied to non-Christian cultures, such as post-Soviet Central Asia, almost without regard for the cultural and

historical differentiations (Casanova 2011, 438[2]). Colonial legacies of inserted top-down secularism are still apparent when discussing a secular versus a desecular world and as such, it is relevant to acknowledge Western lens through which secularisation thesis is applied (Hashemi 2010, 334-335).

Working definitions for this thesis

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the political science and sociological definitions as supplied by Hashemi to understand state-religion and society-religion relations respectively. This means that, in the case of Uzbekistan, the government activities in regards to secularism (state-religion relations), such as policies which discourage or limit public participation of religion, will be reviewed through the political approach that defines secularism as the separation of church and state. In investigating societal trends (society-religion relations) in Uzbekistan, I will study public opinion and participation in religious organisations through the lens of the sociological approach, meaning that secularism is understood as a process in which religion loses its influence over institutions, daily life, and human relationships. The reason for using two separate approaches for understanding state-religion and society-religion relations is because the definitions as supplied by Hashemi are not mutually exclusive; one can be politically secular and desire the separation of church and state whilst continuing to be sociologically non-secular (2010, 327-328). As such, it aids in a better understanding of the religious conflict that is happening in Uzbekistan and the interplay that is occurring between secularisation and desecularisation. It is necessary to note here that the Uzbek government perceives participation in Islamic fundamentalist groups to be indicative of religious revitalisation. Consequently, events surrounding Islamic extremism will be analysed through exploring government policy and reactions so as to examine state-religion and society-religion relations via the conflict.

Secularisation will be considered as the process of implementing secularism and its associated ideas on both the state and societal level. It is the actions undertaken by governments or communities to conform to the criteria as provided by Casanova earlier in this chapter. Secularisation is to be understood as the process or transfer of power and functions from the religious sphere to the secular world proper. The criteria provided by Casanova, as well as by Keddie, can assist in determining to what degree Uzbekistan has secularised (or not), both politically and socially. In addition, the definition of desecularisation as proposed by Karpov will be employed in gauge whether Uzbek society has undergone desecularisation. Moreover, since secularisation is considered to be the transfer of power from the religious world to the secular, desecularisation can be understood in the same but in reverse. It is the return of power and functions from the secular sphere back to the religious.

[2] This reference is in a review by José Casanova on the publication *The Future of Christianity* by David Martin. I cannot access the original source, and as such have used a third-party review.

Methodology

This essay will explore the hypothesis that secularisation thesis does not distinguish between state-religion and society-religion relations, and therefore the theory does not offer a sufficient explanation to the current religious conflict in post-Soviet countries. The definitions provided above will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the concepts when applied to a real-life religious conflict. This will be done in chapter two, by detailing an outline of the case study, Uzbekistan, which includes both broader historical context as well as contemporary societal views of religion. In conjunction with this, in chapter three, two crucial events in Uzbekistan's recent history, the 1999 Tashkent Bombings and the 2005 Andijan Uprising, will be discussed. These chapters will provide a sufficient overview of the current religious and political situation in the country, and consequently will provide an understanding of the societal-religion and state-religion relations in Uzbekistan. The final chapter of this thesis will then apply the aforementioned definitions and theories in order to evaluate whether secularisation thesis is effective is explaining the religious conflict that has arisen in the last few decades in the country. It is important to highlight here that I am assessing the practical application of these theories, and using the definitions as instruments to analyse

CHAPTER II: UZBEKISTAN AS A CASE STUDY: CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

A Brief Introduction to the Republic of Uzbekistan

This chapter is first going to present a brief outline of Uzbekistan's history in order to provide an overview of key events that have impacted the political and religious culture. Afterwards, this chapter will outline some statistics that provide insight into contemporary societal opinions surrounding religion. This is intended to aid in understanding the current situation of society-religion relations in the country.

Uzbekistan declared independence from the Soviet Union on the 31st August 1991, with its first president, Islam Karimov, being elected into office on the 29th December that same year. Uzbekistan is considered 'not free' in regards to both political rights and civil liberties, and has retained some of the government restrictions that existed during the country's time as part of the USSR, many of them pertaining to religious freedom laws (Freedom House 2022). In terms of its religious landscape, 96.7% of the Uzbek populace self-identify as Muslim (Pew Forum 2016). The largest minority faith is Christianity (2.3%), with the remaining affiliations being less than 1% of the population, of whom are mostly Bukharan Jews, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Pew Forum 2016). The main theological school in the region is Hanafi; typically, the Hanafi school has been perceived to be one of the more liberal schools of thought within Islam, and is more compatible practices and culture of the diverse populations living across Central Asia (Baran 2004, 68). Article 61 of the Uzbek

Constitution declares that religious organisations are separate from the state and are equal before the law, and the government does not interfere in the activities of religious groups (Uzbek Const. Art. 61[3], 1992). This is further reinforced in Article 5 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations, which reasserts that religion and the state are separate, and that religions are subject to neither any privileges nor restrictions. The state does not interfere in religious matters, and vice versa (Alimova et al. 2020, 549). If we return to Kuru's criteria in defining a state as secular, then the requirements of a legal separation of church and state alongside no preferential treatment to any religion, including atheism, then the state of Uzbekistan can be considered to be secular for the purpose of this chapter.

Islam has been present in Central Asia since the latter years of the 7th century, and by the 9th century, Sunni Islam had emerged as the dominant faith amongst the settled populations, though it was as late as the 19th century for the nomadic tribes in the north to be fully Islamised. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Uzbekistan flourished as a hub for scientific and spiritual learning. There was an era of political and economic growth for the region during these years with the newly consolidated Central Asian kingdoms under the Uzbek leader Amir Timur. A "Golden Age" was established which created an early enlightenment, with scientific advancements and religious values being encouraged despite the state remaining secular throughout this period (Baran 2004, 69). These two fields of study are frequently debated in regards to their compatibility, but within this kingdom, they thrived not in spite of each other, but because of one another. This is argued to have occurred due to the widespread presence of Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism which first appeared in the 13th century, which encouraged a culture of learning across the country (Baran 2004, 69). Eventually, this Golden Age began to decline following a rise of interest in the region by Western powers, and with the arrival of Imperial Russia in the 19th century, the religious, political, and economic landscape of the continent was irreversibly changed. In order to combat Western imperialism, new forms of Islam emerged and the region's role as a theological centre became less prominent. However, regardless of Islam's place within Central Asian governments, the *ulama* (religious interpreters) in the area have always functioned on the spiritual level rather than within the political sphere, and as such, there has never been a theocratic regime operating in any Central Asian country (Baran 2004, 68-70).

By the latter part of the 18th century, the Russian Empire had consolidated its power in Central Asia and Uzbekistan fell under the control of Moscow. Russia initially became interested in the region due to the wide variety of resources available. In the beginning, there was very little change in

[3] Article 61: Religious organizations and associations shall be separated from the state and equal before law. The state shall not interfere in the activity of religious associations.

the daily lives of the Uzbek population, except for an increase in agricultural programmes that benefited the Russian agrarian policies at the time. This, in turn, boosted the economy of Central Asia although it eventually negatively impacted local living standards as cotton production was prioritised over other industries (Weinerman 1993, 464). Russification was widely implemented across Central Asia, and Moscow sought to undermine and eliminate local political and religious authorities. There were fears of Islam and potential fanatism, especially in cities with reputations for Islamic learning, and consequently, Islamic positions of power were removed and replaced with Russian officials, and the spread of Muslim propaganda was restricted (Malikov 2020, 195-203). The mass suppression of Islam led to the rise of pan-Islamist movements. By the early 20th century, Jadidism had emerged as a one of the first major political Islamist groups. They were modernist thinkers who desired cultural and educational reforms in order to modernise Islam and re-elevate Muslims following the end of Russian colonialism (Khalid 2006, 6). In 1918, many Jadids, inspired by nearby revolutionary sentiments, joined the Bolsheviks and the communist party. This led to understanding that Islam could be mass mobilised and used as a vehicle for large-scale radical social change (Khalid 2006, 5-6). However, with the formal establishment of the Soviet Union, Jadids and other Islamist organisations were victims of the regime.

This leads to the final important era of history that has had a considerable impact on contemporary Uzbek religion-state relationships: Soviet Central Asia. Religion was viewed to be inherently incompatible with communism, and during the 1920s and 1930s, there was a 'cultural assault' within the USSR to eliminate religious groups. New laws were introduced across Central Asia which forbade Islamic education, worship, and ritual. Children received anti-Islamic indoctrination though state-sanctioned schools, mosques were closed, and the annual pilgrimage for *Hajj* was banned. Furthermore, Sufi leaders were arrested and executed, their texts forbidden, and schools closed; the repression of Sufis during these decades is considered to be a "loss of the collective memory of Sufism in Central Asia" (Basan 2004, 70). The Jadids, now seen as allies of the bourgeois, also underwent the same treatment alongside their previous opponents, the *ulama*, who upheld Islamic traditions and the *madrassas*. Anti-religious campaigns slowed down by the mid-1930s but they had effectively destroyed most of the Islamic traditions that existed in Central Asia (Khalid 2006, 242). In the 1940s, Soviet authorities attempted to create a 'Soviet Islam' as an official branch of the religion. State-sponsored *mullahs* were deployed to various Arab countries to study in an attempt to legitimise this new form of Islam, although many of them became influenced by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood (Roy 2001, 1-3). Soviet efforts to eradicate or control Islam resulted in much of the religion moving underground and ultimately becoming more political and resistant to the regime, but it was not until the 1980s and the introduction of *perestroika* and *glasnost* did Islam resurface (Baran 2004, 70-71).

Religion and Uzbek Society

But why does this all matter? In the last decades of the 20th century, Uzbekistan has undergone an Islamic revival. It has emerged as a grass-roots movement by non-state actors as an attempt to rekindle pre-USSR culture and traditions, as well as reconnecting with the Muslim world. Uzbekistan's long history as a centre of scientific and Islamic learning has become a source of national pride, and after so many years under foreign rule, it is logical that newly independent Uzbeks would look towards religion to create a new national identity. In fact, for many countries within post-Soviet sphere there has been a revitalisation of religion in order to rediscover lost national identity; this is notable in Russia in which the state has begun to rebuild a relationship with the Orthodox Church. However, what has occurred in Russia with Christianity simply is not happening in Uzbekistan, with the government maintaining secular laws and continuing to restrict Islam in the public domain. It is now important to understand how Islam functions within Uzbekistan today, and the social opinions presented in the following section are relevant in understanding how society-religion relations are being expressed in daily life. So, how to Uzbek citizens perceive religion?

The Pew Forum released a survey in 2013 which aimed to provide an overview of general attitudes towards Islam in Muslim-majority countries, ranging from sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia. For Uzbekistan, this report had a sample size of 1,000 with 965 of them being Muslim. Whilst it is a small number, considering that the population of Uzbekistan is approximately 27 million, the study included a wide variety of ages, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds in order to provide an accurate overview of Uzbek society. It is important to note that there were more women interviewed than men, and some questions pertaining to sexual issues were deemed too sensitive to ask in Uzbekistan, and so were rephrased or omitted (Bell et al. 2013, 148). Furthermore, Uzbek responders were not asked about their views on Sharia law or religious courts but we can see how Central Asia as a whole considers the implementation of religious law within the state. However, we can still use the statistics provided by the Pew Forum in order to understand general views towards faith and the state, and how Uzbekistan compares to its neighbouring states as well as the wider Muslim world. A mere 12% of responders in Central Asia expressed a desire for Sharia law to be the official law of the land, although this was most prevalent in Kyrgyzstan (35%), and of those who supported the implementation of religious laws, 59% believed that it should only be applicable to Muslims (15-22). 92% of Uzbeks supported religious freedom for non-Muslims, but only 39% considered themselves to be 'very free' to practice Islam openly in the country (63; 32). Moreover, a mere 26% of responders believed that other religions were free to practice their own faiths in Uzbekistan (62). This is likely due to the government restrictions rather than problems between religious communities, as just 3% believed that religious conflict was a large issue in the country (114).

Muslims in Uzbekistan presented a variety of different views towards Islam in this survey. In terms of religiosity, only 17% stated that their day-to-day lives represented the Sunna and the hadiths a lot whereas 45% said that their lives represented this at least a little (Bell et al. 2013, 102). More than half of interviewees said that Sharia is the literal, revealed word of God (rather than being developed over time by humans) and 38% believed that Sharia has just a single interpretation, compared to 22% who felt that there can be multiple (42-44). It also seems that differing degrees of religiosity is not a problem within communities, as just 3% of people said that there were issues between more or less devout members of the population (105). Opinions concerning modernity are perhaps a consequence of Uzbekistan's history as a cultural and scientific hub, with 66% of people stating that there was no conflict between religion and science and 58% maintaining that there is no conflict between Islam and modern society (128-130). In the wider Central Asian region, Uzbek support for these statements were lower than its neighbouring countries but was significantly higher than other regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In regards to women's rights, some views were fairly liberal; 67% of those interviewed believed that women had the right to choose if they wore the veil. Moreover, support for women being able to initiate a divorce was 59% and half of responders agreed that there should be equality in receiving inheritance for both sons and daughters. However, this is contrasted by 84% stating that women should always obey their husbands (Bell et al. 2013, 92-97). It is important to consider that these statistics are not significantly different to general global opinions of women's rights within this survey.

What is evident in this report is that Uzbekistan is overwhelming religiously homogenous. As noted above, over 95% of people identify as Muslim and 98% of Uzbeks said that all or many of their close friends are also Muslims (Bell et al. 2013, 123). A mere 10% of responders said that they had a decent amount of knowledge of Christianity, and consequently, 52% of people said that Islam and Christianity had very little in common as faiths. 16% stated that they would be comfortable with their son marrying a Christian, and this decreased to just 11% when asked about a daughter. Moreover, fewer than 20% of Uzbeks said that they attended inter-faith meetings (118-126). It is clear to see here that there are limited interactions between different religions, but Uzbeks have shown considerable support for non-Muslims to be able to worship freely, even if there are not many minority groups. Finally, this survey provided some insight into how Uzbeks view the Western world. Only 38% enjoyed Western entertainment and a massive 81% believed that Western media hurt morality within Uzbekistan, the highest percentage in Central Asia. Additionally, 68% of people said that it is necessary to believe in God in order to be a moral person (134-136; 74). These statements concerning the West are not uncommon in the wider Muslim world, but it is interesting when considering the political and religious history of Uzbekistan.

Concluding Thoughts

As seen above, Uzbekistan has had a complex history with religion; pre-Western rule, Uzbekistan was a centre for religious learning but following colonialism, Islam has been removed from public life and was frequently supressed. However, the information provided by the Pew Forum indicates that the Uzbek population actively participates in religious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, the Uzbek government has had a different approach. Throughout the 1990s, thousands of mosques were built alongside the rise in interest in Islam and its teachings, and in the early years of his presidency, Karimov presented himself to the country as an active Muslim, which made him appear supportive of the religious revitalisation in the country and lent him legitimacy as a leader in the face of suspicion after his decades-long association with the Communist party (Hanks 2007, 215-216). However, this public tolerance of Islam waned following the 1999 Tashkent bombings which were intended to assassinate Karimov. Religious groups are forbidden to organise political parties, and more mundane aspects of the faith, such as growing a beard or wearing a hijab, are highly discouraged by authorities (Uzbek Const. Art 57[4], 1992). Those who engage in religious activities, like prayer groups, are at risk of being labelled as extremists and being arrested. Whilst the 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations permits the training of clergy and establishment of religious schools, it is not possible in practice for Islamic groups to do so. This is because the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims (the *Muftiat*) is state-controlled, and consequently dictates Islamic hierarchies, sermons, and publications (Ruzaliev 2005, 22). Due to this contrast between societal religious views and political anti-religious sentiments, Uzbekistan is relevant as a case study as it demonstrates a clear difference in state-religion and society-religion relations, and as such, can allow us to review whether it would be beneficial to make a formal distinction when using secularisation and desecularisation thesis. As a non-European and non-Christian country, it is an interesting country to attempt to apply the theses, as we will be able to more easily see limitations of the theories that imply that neither culture nor history affects the inevitability of secularisation.

CHAPTER III: SECULAR GOVERNANCE IN CONFLICT WITH DESECULAR POPULATIONS

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Uzbek administration has upheld a secular regime that is reminiscent of the Soviet predecessors. Islamic revitalisation and Central Asian countries seeking

[4] Article 57: The formation and functioning of political parties and public associations, aiming to do the following, shall be prohibited: changing the existing constitutional system by force, coming out against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the Republic, the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens, advocating war and social, national, racial and religious hostility, and encroaching on the health and morality of the people, as well as armed associations and political parties based on the national and religious principles.
Secret societies and associations shall be banned.

the company of the wider Muslim world has divided opinions, with some celebrating this eradication of Soviet culture but many critics remained suspicious. The main fears were that Islam would politicise and become a significant political force as well as the risk of terrorism, which could threaten the security of the entire region (Khalid 2003, 573). In Uzbekistan, the Islamic revival occurred as a grass-roots movement in the 1980s, with non-state actors participating in the public sphere whilst exploring national and cultural legacies of the country despite Soviet restrictions. In the wake of independence, the return to Islam for many Central Asians is a point of national identity; the rediscovery of Islamic culture as well as finding old spiritual values which were believed to be lost under the control of the USSR allowed local populations to reassert a more unique and individual national identity once more (Khalid 2003, 583). However, these feelings were not always reciprocated by governments who perceived a rise in religion to be more detrimental than beneficial to the newly formed states. In Uzbekistan, the governmental approaches to religion in the 1990s are sometimes contradictory. Karimov and his cabinet applauded the accomplishments of Islamic scholars and the humanist traditions of Sufism as a celebration of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage and rejected Russian icons that indorsed Tsarist and Soviet imperialism but by establishing the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims, it is evident that the state is apprehensive of Islam. The Directorate promotes an 'official' form of Islam, and regulates its role in society; whilst the government may embrace the spiritual history of the country, any aspects of Islam that deviate from the approved local traditions are perceived as backwards, and could impede political and economic progress (Khalid 2003, 587). What the government deemed to be an unacceptable form of Islam is difficult to ascertain. 'Extremism' is a notoriously difficult term to define, and in Uzbekistan, it is frequently used interchangeably with 'fundamentalism' and 'Wahhabism'. The state argues that fundamentalism "struggles to maintain religion in its original form" and that extremism is the fundamentalists desire for power, which then leads to the politicising of religion and the consequent attempt to take over a government and country (Khalid 2003, 588). For Islam Karimov, the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the late 1990s validated the government's fears concerning political Islam and fundamentalism, prompting Karimov's war against religious extremism. Uzbekistan's restrictions upon religious freedom only increased in the 21st century, and are vastly different to the image of tolerance and democracy that were presented by Karimov in his early years of presidency.

So, who was Islam Karimov? He was born on the 30th January 1938 (and died on the 2nd September 2016) in Samarkand to civil servants, which permitted him to pursue higher education and received undergraduate degrees in both economics and mechanical engineering. Until the 1980s, Karimov worked in engineering before being appointed as Minister of Finance to the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) in 1983 and in 1986, he became deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers

as well as the deputy head of government. He rose quickly within the ranks of the Communist Party, and by 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the UzSSR elected him as president. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union becoming imminent, Karimov became the head of the People's Democratic Republic of Uzbekistan (the successor to the UzSSR) and declared Uzbekistan's independence on the 31st August 1991. He won 86% of the vote in the country's first elections, and was appointed to a 5-year term which was then extended to end in the year 2000 instead. Throughout his tenure as president, Karimov has extended presidential term times and faced token opponents when elections are held (Pottenger 2004, 60-61). As well as initially embracing Islamic revitalisation, which was detailed in the previous chapter, Karimov also stressed the need for democracy, civil society, and a free market economy. In order to achieve a civil society, Karimov maintained that religious freedom was paramount, and believed that secular thought is parallel to religion and aids in human development and enriches culture. He also acknowledged that religion assists in providing a moral framework for people and that the societal return to Islam as a push for a new national identity was necessary for the creation of a decent society. This can be seen by his refencing of Islamic political philosophy as well as publicly demonstrating his personal religiosity, but is also apparent in the construction of the Uzbek Constitution in 1992, which stresses religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and democratic values (Pottenger 2004, 65-67; Uzbek Const., Art. 31[5]; Art. 1[6]; Art. 13[7], 1992). Reflecting on this, we can see that Karimov certainly appeared to back the societal desecularisation of the country whilst still upholding a politically secular state. However, with the increasing lack of tolerance towards religion in the 21st century, it is not clear whether this initial support was simply performative in order to solidify his position in an unstable situation or that this stance was one he genuinely agreed with. But what is clear is that key events and the associated organisations in the late 1990s and early 2000s were crucial in understanding the Uzbek government's later restrictions on societal and political desecularisation.

1999 Tashkent Bombings

The first and perhaps most pivotal event in changing the Uzbek government's approach to Islam is the 1999 Tashkent Bombings. On the 16th of February 1999, six car bombs detonated in Tashkent, including outside a government building in Uzbekistan's capital city, shortly before

[5] Article 31: Freedom of conscience shall be guaranteed to all. Everyone shall have the right to profess or not to profess any religion. A compulsory imposition of religion shall be impermissible.
[6] Article 1: Uzbekistan is a sovereign democratic republic. Both names of the state "the Republic of Uzbekistan" and "Uzbekistan" shall be equivalent.
[7] Article 13: Democracy in the Republic of Uzbekistan shall be based on the principles common to all mankind according to which the ultimate value is a human being, his life, freedom, honour, dignity and other inalienable rights. Democratic rights and freedoms shall be protected by the Constitution and laws.

President Karimov was due to speak. Sixteen people were killed, and over one hundred more were injured, but the attacks are widely accepted to be a direct attempt to assassinate Karimov (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 541). It was reported that four or five men drove a car bomb to the entrance of the Cabinet of Ministers building just a few minutes before the president was due to arrive. The drivers escaped before the bombs detonated, and it was revealed that there had been an explosion a hundred metres away several minutes prior in order to distract armed personnel. The official report by the Uzbek government states that the offenders fled the scene and managed to cross the nearby border into Kazakhstan (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 542). It is still uncertain as to who orchestrated the attacks, although the most commonly presumed culprit is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), however other factions have been discussed as potential perpetrators, including the Russian and Tajik governments, as well as the Uzbekistan administration. Karimov's cabinet were quick to blame the IMU, but before outlining this organisation, we will first discuss the theory that the Uzbek government were responsible. Whilst both Russia and Tajikistan have been regarded as potential culprits, their alleged role in the events are not relevant for this essay.

The theory that places the blame with the Uzbek government is somewhat compelling. Opponents of Karimov and leaders of banned political parties, such as *Erk* (Freedom) and *Birlik* (Unity), have claimed that the President ordered this false-flag attack in order to justify further suppression on dissidents. Whilst there is not sufficient evidence to firmly accuse Karimov and his cabinet, there are a couple of explanations that are not entirely implausible. This is especially true when considering the lack of concrete information surrounding the bombings and the unreliable accounts from official government sources. The first explanation outlines the large income inequality between the wealthy elite and the rest of the Uzbek population; salaries are low and often infrequent, and youth unemployment is high. These socio-economic issues can breed resentment amongst a populace, and it has been suggested that the government planned these attacks in order to solidify its legitimacy and establish a common enemy of the people: Islamic extremism. The second reason is due to the ineffectiveness of the actual explosions – supporters of the Karimov theory highlight the fact that if the bombings were a genuine attempt on Karimov's life, the bombs would have been detonated at the same time and place for maximum damage. Moreover, if the blame is placed with an Islamic fundamentalist group rather than the government itself, it seems unlikely that a car filled with explosives would be able to get close enough to an official building with the most important cabinet ministers inside in order to do significant damage. Additionally, the perpetrators managing to escape an open square in broad daylight seems difficult to imagine, unless we rely on the notion that the security forces were incompetent. This hypothesis, however, can be refuted as there are advantages in causing chaos and confusion in the surrounding areas so as to facilitate an escape (Polat & Butkevich

2000, 543-546). Accusing the Uzbek government is a logical conclusion for opponents of the regime, even if there is not enough evidence to do so. It maintains the narrative that Karimov removes those he perceives as a threat as well as permitting him to continue to publicly denounce Islam as a threat to national security.

The Uzbek government has officially declared the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan as responsible for the attack, and three men: Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani (the leaders of the IMU) and Muhammad Solih (of *Erk*) were accused of "conspiring to forcibly takeover the government". In retaliation, the IMU called for the Uzbek regime to be overthrown and the officials to be placed on trial before declaring a *jihad* against Tashkent in the following August. The IMU and other Islamist groups stated that Karimov was "a Jew and an enemy of Islam" (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 541-542). We can now turn to outlining who the IMU are, and what role they have played in Uzbekistan's recent history. The IMU is a militant Islamist group founded in 1998, though its origins date back to 1990 and the USSR Islamic Renaissance Party. The creators, Yuldashev and Namangani, were originally members of the aforementioned party before forming a splinter group, *Adolat* (Justice), in 1991. They mainly operated in the Fergana Valley region but relocated to Tajikistan to assist in the civil war (1992-1997) after *Adolat* was deemed illegal by Uzbek authorities. Following the ceasefire in 1997, members of various Islamic groups in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan regrouped and emerged as the IMU. Throughout its history, the primary goal of the organisation is to remove Islam Karimov from power, although the IMU also advocates for militant Salafism and a return to a more authentic form of Islam that was seen during the lifetime of the Prophet Mohammad (Karagiannis & McCauley 2006, 318-319). The IMU also seeks to maintain public order and uphold justice and equality, as well as calling for Islamic governance and the creation of a state ruled by Sharia law (Naumkin 2003, 48). Considering the overtly opposing political nature of this organisation, it is easy to see why Karimov and his cabinet would be concerned about the activities of the IMU. They certainly were a legitimate threat to the stability of the government and national security, and it would validate fears of religious fundamentalism. However, Karimov's response to the attacks were extreme.

The Consequences of the Tashkent Bombings

In the days following the bombings, the Uzbek authorities began to arrest hundreds of suspects despite there being a significant lack of evidence to support the accusations. The arrests were not in accordance with international judicial standards. Moreover, much of the evidence was obtained via testimonies and confessions but various human rights groups have documented that these were frequently acquired through torture and manufactured evidence (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 542). Twenty-two people were brought to trial and found guilty of attempting to assassinate Karimov and

trying to overthrow the government. They were also accused of targeting other cabinet ministers. All twenty-two were found guilty, and six were sentenced to death via firing squad whilst the rest were given ten to twenty years in maximum security prisons. The court stated that the accused were associated with extremist groups and desired to remove the incumbent government in order to establish an Islamic state (Naumkin 2003, 29-30). The defendants also admitted to this, but it is known that the Uzbek judicial system is flawed and corrupt; the trial was deemed to be closed and unfair with only the confessions used as evidence. As such, there is substantial reason to doubt the presented testimonies and confessed guilt. Interestingly, shortly after the court ruling for the death penalty had been announced, Karimov expressed apparent dissatisfaction with judicial proceedings to journalists, stating: "these young men are our children, and we have to treat them accordingly". This comment sparked a degree of hope that the president would overrule the sentences and instead allow the defendants to serve time in prison instead. This did not happen, and in January 2000, the government announced that the six men had been executed (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 542-543). It is rumoured that Karimov decided the outcome of the trials himself, which makes his sympathetic statement to the media less clear. We can assume that Karimov wanted to present himself as a tolerant and just leader. This would have been an attempt to improve Karimov's public image whilst he could begin cracking down on political opponents under the guise of protecting the country from religious extremism.

We can see that the 1999 Tashkent Bombings were absolutely crucial in regards to changes in government attitudes towards religious freedom and suppression of desecularisation. Karimov began an aggressive campaign against suspected opponents and those who engaged in religious activities which was all done in the name of combatting Islamic fundamentalism (Naumkin 2003, 30). Many political prisoners that have been incarcerated since the attacks in 1999 have frequently been detained for non-violent religious or political activities, and their sentences are usually severe and disproportionate for the alleged crime. Often, there is little to no credible evidence either to support the arrests but the government continues to perpetuate the narrative that Islam intrinsically leads to extremism and violence (Polat & Butkevich 2000, 548). Human rights organisations estimate that there are up to thirty-thousand religious and political prisoners in Uzbekistan, many of whom are accused of being active within Islamist groups as well as hundreds who are simply pious Muslims and unaffiliated with political Islam (Naumkin 2003, 63). So, can we use this event as a way to understand whether the Uzbek government actively supresses desecularisation? If we employ the two theories of secularisation and desecularisation in their current forms, then we can clearly see that Uzbekistan is trying to limit religious freedoms, and not only Islamic fundamentalists are being targeted. Many day-to-day practices are restricted, including public expression of faith. This discussion will be expanded upon further in this essay, but what is important to underline here is that Karimov exploited the

attacks in Tashkent to justify openly oppressing religion. It is no longer particularly relevant to attempt to place blame with a specific faction, whether it be the IMU or the Karimov himself, because the consequences of the bombings allowed the government to legitimise its restrictions and establish itself as an anti-religious state.

2005 Andijan Uprising

Six years after the events in Tashkent, unrest arose in the Fergana Valley region of eastern Uzbekistan. On the 13th of May 2005, large-scale violence broke out across the city of Andijan following protests and civil unrest. Death toll estimates range from 180 to 1,500 people, including small children, and the government has been accused of burying victims in mass graves (Hartman 2016, 56). This violence has since been named the 2005 Andijan Uprising, although the word 'massacre' has also been used. In a similar fashion to the bombings of 1999, the events surrounding Andijan are not always clear, and there are many aspects to consider when trying to understand how this tragedy happened. The first thing to note when addressing this incident is the location of Andijan. The Fergana Valley has long been perceived as a region of instability and a centre of Islamic extremism and consequently, the area requires careful management from the government. However, there has been poor support from the Karimov administration (Azhiben 2008, 5). This may be due to the activities of banned organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and the IMU in the area which may have dissuaded the government to provide appropriate resources. Additionally, the Fergana Valley's reputation may have influenced Karimov's response to the unrest in May of 2005 as well as lends further legitimacy to the governmental stance on religious fundamentalism (Hartman 2016, 16). Whilst the origins of the unrest perhaps begin with the crackdown on religious freedoms following the 1999 Tashkent Bombings, a more direct precursor are the trials of twenty-three local entrepreneurs in May 2005 who were accused of affiliations with an Islamic extremist group, Akromiya, an alleged splinter group of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) (Azhiben 2008, 5).

In order to understand the series of events in May 2005, we must discuss Akromiya. Firstly, it needs to be noted that it is a splinter group of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international political Islamic organisation. It identifies itself primarily as a political movement which is based on Islam; it was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 and became increasingly active in Central Asia from the 1990s. The group aims to restore the Caliphate but non-violently, as HT are pacifists. Their doctrine is based on two fundamental principles: the requirement of Sharia law and the necessity of an Islamic state as it was during the era of the Prophet. For HT, there can be no separation of religion and state and a truly just society can only exist within their aforementioned parameters. It is difficult to gauge the membership count of HT in Uzbekistan, but estimates have placed the numbers anywhere from seven

thousand to sixty thousand (Karagiannis & McCauley 2006,316-317; Baran 2004, 77-78). Akromiya was inspired by the writings of Akrom Yuldashev, who had previously been a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir but seemingly left in the early 1990s over ideological differences. He published *The Path to Faith* in 1992 which outlined his own personal philosophy and views on Islam. (Rotar 2005, 1; Khalid 2007, 193). His publications generated initially a small following of approximately eighty members, although there was a much larger group of affiliate supporters, associates, and sympathisers. Almost all of these followers were from Andijan and the wider Fergana Valley area (Hartman 2016, 10). Yuldashev unsurprisingly had a difficult relationship with the Uzbek authorities and was frequently incarcerated, but he refuted claims that he was an extremist and denied any interest in politics. His work discussed spirituality, morality, and a desire to search for a better life through the teachings of Islam (Rotar 2005, 1). Yuldashev was especially critical of HT's intentions to create a global Caliphate due to its impracticalities, and instead, he argues for Islamic ruling on a local level (Khalid 2007, 194).

The twenty-three businessmen, inspired by Yuldashev's work, were attempting to create a unique model of 'Islamic socialism' in Andijan. Uzbekistan has one of the lowest standards of living in Central Asia, and the businessmen aimed to improve the local economy. They calculated the actual minimum living wage in Andijan, which was ten times more than the official minimum wage, and decided to pay their employees substantially more. Additionally, they organised a support fund that would serve as a charity – they financed children's homes and schools, and set up a social welfare system which provided housing and medical care (Rotar 2005, 2). However, the Uzbek government arrested the businessmen and accused them of Islamic extremism, with their trials taking place on the 12th of May. Protestors gathered outside of the court house in the days leading up the trials, many of whom were relatives and employees of the defendants, although more people arrived from outside the city who were also unhappy with Karimov's regime (Rotar 2005, 2). In the early hours of the 13th of May, gunmen stormed the jail and freed the businessmen, alongside some other prisoners, and took control of the building. A hostage situation ensued and the gunmen negotiated with Uzbek authorities, and demanded the release of Yuldashev from prison and the resignation of Karimov as president (Hartman 2016, 27-44). What was happening in the jailhouse, however, was initially in stark contrast with the people gathering on Babur Square. The crowd was calm, and protestors were making speeches about injustice, poor human rights, and poverty. In the early evening, Uzbek security forces received orders to clear the square and retake the jail, and shortly after, troops open fired on the protestors. Later reports say that injured civilians were executed and the bodies of women and children were removed by authorities. On the 14th of May, Karimov appeared in a press conference and declared that Islamic extremists were responsible for the massacre, and used women and children as human shields (BBC News 2005).

If the 1999 Tashkent Bombings were a key turning point in Uzbek attitudes towards religious freedoms and Islam, then the 2005 Andijan Uprising demonstrates how far the government was willing to go to maintain the narrative that religion is inherently dangerous. The situation in the Fergana Valley is a clear indicator of desecularisation amongst the populace. Whilst there is some support for political Islam, evident in the support for Hizb ut-Tahrir, the rise of Akromiya in Andijan shows a more peaceful form of active Islam in the public sphere. That being said, it is difficult to ascertain whether Akromiya would have been nearly as successful in garnering support had it not been for the dismal living standards in the country, especially in the Fergana Valley region. Moreover, Karimov's approach to the unrest firmly demonstrates that the government is systemically shutting down any degree of desecularisation and maintaining its official secularism. In addition, continually blaming extremists and Islamist organisations is a blatant attempt to crack down on potential political opponents as well as allowing Karimov to further restrict religious freedom. In the wake of Andijan, it has been reported that government repression has worsened. Religious organisations became more closely monitored across the country, and fines were issued if groups violated the already strict religious laws. This did not just affect Muslim communities, as many Christian sects have also been the target of raids and interrogations by government officials and secret police (Corley & Rotar 2005). To conclude this chapter, we can utilise the 1999 Tashkent Bombings and the 2005 Andijan Uprising to demonstrate that the state-religion and society-religion relations in Uzbekistan are on firmly different paths, and the events in the Fergana Valley indicate that these two routes are perhaps not compatible. If we consider the presentation of social Islam in the previous chapter with the actions of the Uzbek government in response to the above two incidents, we should now look at whether the current definitions and ideas surrounding secularisation and desecularisation are still appropriate to apply to such a polarised country.

CHAPTER IV: THE INADEQUACIES OF SECULARISATION THESIS

Is Uzbekistan a secular country?

In light of what has been discussed in the previous two chapters, this essay will now explore state-religion and society-religion relations in Uzbekistan. Firstly, is Uzbekistan a secular country? According to the criteria presented by Kuru, then Uzbekistan is a secular state, at least politically. It has legally established itself to be so in its constitution, and does not demonstrate a preference for any religion (Uzbek Const. Art. 57; Art. 61, 1992). Despite its rejection of religion and the continued suppression of religious expression and practice means that whilst we may consider the country to be 'anti-religious' in attitudes, it cannot be defined as such because Uzbekistan has not declared an alternative belief system, such as atheism (Kuru 2007, 569). Turning to Mitra's church-state relationships, Uzbekistan would also fall under the category of 'secular', in that religion is officially

declared separate from the government, and can only function on the personal level (Mitra 1991, 758).

Has Uzbekistan undergone secularisation?

In regards to the process of secularisation, Uzbekistan does align with some aspects within Casanova and Keddie's definitions when applied to state-religion relations. If we review Keddie's definition, Uzbekistan only conforms to one of her criteria: an increase in state separation from religion and its institutions (Keddie 2003, 16). For Casanova, there are two features that are applicable: the separation of state institutions from religious ones and religion becoming marginalised to the private sphere. The latter of these two features is relevant for further elaboration, since the separation of church and state has been detailed above. Religion has been marginalised to the private sphere in the country in two ways. Firstly, Article 57 of the Constitution (1992) forbade religious political parties, thus restricting public religious participation and organisations. Secondly, following the 1999 Tashkent Bombings, the mass suppression of religion by the Karimov administration demonstrates not only a push for secularism, but also a widespread rejection of desecularisation. This also occurred following the 2005 Andijan Uprising, with the government tightening the already strict religion laws and pursuing all religious activities, not just Islamic. Politically, religion is not welcome and has been further pushed into the private sphere. State-religion relations can be further explored if we employ Turner's definitions of 'political secularisation' and 'social secularisation'. The former is the removal of religion in the political and public spheres, typically in a formal and institutionalised way, which Uzbekistan has done, as there is a clear official stance towards political secularism. However, Karimov's exploitation of the bombings in Tashkent has pushed political secularisation into the social sphere. If we consider Turner's definition of 'social secularisation', it acknowledges that religion can operate both formally (in institutions) and informally (through day-to-day activities). By operating under the guise of protecting the country from Islamic extremism, the state could further restrict religious freedoms, allowing Karimov the ability to pursue fundamentalists and to be able to regulate more casual forms of religion, thus making it far easier for him to remove political opponents. The events surrounding the 2005 Andijan Uprising had similar consequences for both the political and social realms. Religion, in any form, is considered a threat to the state, and therefore to national security; there is an inability and unwillingness to separate religious revitalisation with radicalisation (Montgomery & Heathershaw 2016, 194-197). Consequently, the Uzbek government has restricted both formal and informal practices of faith through its rampant suppression of religion in the name of protecting the country from radicalism. Therefore, I would argue that whilst we can view state-religion relations in Uzbekistan through both political and sociological lenses, it is important to highlight that the latter is intrinsically tied to the former insofar as the assertion of secularisation over the social

spheres is linked to the government's focus on religious fundamentalism. This means that restrictions on public freedoms of religion are justified by a war on extremism and so the government's motivations for secularisation are much more political. Moreover, as Turner notes, it is much easier for the state to interfere in society, so in Uzbekistan, political secularisation has bled into social secularisation. However, has Uzbekistan undergone secularisation? The state-religion relations certainly successfully achieved political secularisation, but if we use the definitions of Casanova and Keddie, then technically, this has not fully occurred.

Has Uzbek society undergone desecularisation?

We can now turn to the society-religion relations and look at the religious revitalisation that is occurring in Uzbekistan. If we consider Karpov's definition of desecularisation, there are four features presented: a resurgence of religious beliefs and practices, the revival of religion in various cultural subsystems, the return of religion to the public sphere, and a reconciliation between formally secular institutions and religious ones. The first feature is easy to identify in Uzbek civil society. The information provided by the Pew Forum in 2013 demonstrates that Uzbeks are, on the personal level, religious. Over 95% of the population self-identify as Muslim, and 45% stated that the teachings found in the scriptures represented their lives at least to some degree. These statistics are already enough to reject notions of a socially secular society; it is clear in the report by the Pew Forum that religion plays a significant role in the way that Uzbeks view the world, especially when pertaining to issues of morality and social values. I would argue that Uzbek society is experiencing a resurgence of religious beliefs and practices simply because people are demonstrating that religion is important to them in their daily lives. The second and third features can be seen in the events leading up to the 2005 Andijan Uprising. The rise of Akromiya in the Fergana Valley shows that there is at least some support for the presence of Islamist groups, and whilst we cannot say to what degree this support exists, we can say that there is a return of religion to the public sphere even if it is only at the local level. Attempts to establish Islamic socialism within the region is also an example of this, alongside a revival of religion in cultural subsystems which includes economic issues and world-maintenance (Karpov 2010, 250). Revitalising Islam in order to improve living conditions and local economies, and to receive support for doing so, indicates that there are communities within Uzbekistan that perhaps want religion to reconcile with governance, even if only locally, and this clearly validates the argument that society-religion relations are experiencing desecularisation. One of the most important aspects of society-religion relationships is the role that religion plays in people's daily lives and how it shapes their social values. This is posed by Turner in his definition of social secularisation, as well as being a key feature in the sociological approach to secularism. I believe that these definitions also apply to an opposite circumstance: if a society is experiencing an increase in the influence that religion has over daily life,

customs, and social values, then it can be considered to be social desecularisation. Overall, we can say that society-religion relations in Uzbekistan are aligned with desecularisation but there is one aspect of Karpov's definition that is missing: the reconciliation between secular and religious institutions.

The Conflict

It is clear now that the Uzbek government and society are operating under two different worldviews. State-religion relations are firmly associated with secularisation whilst society-religion relations align with desecularisation, and the 2005 Andijan Uprising is a demonstration of what can happen when these opposing views come into conflict. I stated above that, according to Casanova and Keddie's definitions, Uzbekistan has not undergone secularisation. This is because of the state-religion relations can (mostly) be considered to have experienced desecularisation. If we return to the definitions of secularisation and review them in the context of the state, both Keddie and Casanova's statements discuss the decline of religious beliefs and practices. This is not applicable to Uzbekistan, so can we consider the country to not be secular? In fact, if we look at the five aspects of secularisation as proposed by Jeff Haynes, it seems that neither policy nor agenda secularisation is technically occurring there either. Policy secularisation, requires that services previously controlled by religion should be provided by the state but as noted in the Fergana Valley, the Islamist group Akromiya was supplying financial aid for education and healthcare as the government's contribution was insufficient. Agenda secularisation, states that problems affecting politics are no longer overtly religious yet many of the issues still plaguing the Uzbek government are religious in nature, whether it be combatting Islamic fundamentalism or the state concerning itself with controlling how religion can be expressed in the country. In the same fashion, if we consider Karpov's definition for desecularisation, there is no reconciliation between religious and formally secular institutions in Uzbekistan so can we use this definition to explain what is happening within Uzbek society?

This final part of the analysis will determine how effective secularisation and desecularisation theses are in understanding the situation in Uzbekistan. There are two issues that need to be addressed in order to review the employability of these theories. The first relates to the way the theories and definitions are structured for application. Secularisation thesis does not distinguish between state and society, which implies that secularisation on the governmental level, i.e., the separation of church and state, occurs simultaneously or at a similar time as secularisation on the societal level. Turner's proposal that we should differentiate between political secularisation and social secularisation is more helpful, as it separates a country into its two spheres: political and social. This then creates a tool through which we can independently investigate state-religion and society-religion relations. However, there is still little discussion surrounding the consequences where one

form secularisation may arise without the other. Desecularisation thesis is much the same – a reunion between religious and secular institutions is expected to occur alongside the re-emergence of religious beliefs and practices. As such, these theories do not entertain ideas of a hybrid system, in which both secularity and desecularity exist in one place. This makes both theses inadequate in explaining the situation that some post-Soviet states are experiencing – it is neither one or the other. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the theses to be able to apply to both state and societal (de)secularisation independently so as to better understand how they may interact with one another. A final issue is the assumption that secularisation is an inevitable consequence of modernity, which we can already refute. If secularisation thesis was truly a universal experience regardless of religious and cultural history, then we would not be observing desecularisation in a variety of countries around the world. By virtue of desecularisation only being able to occur following a period of secularisation, then secularisation thesis can already be challenged. A presumption of a universal experience of religion leads to the next problem that limits the effectiveness of applying these theories to explain Uzbekistan's situation: its origins.

It is vital to acknowledge that the role religion plays in a country is deeply connected to, and influenced by, the historical and cultural parameters in which it exists (Mitra 1991, 757). A major shortcoming of secularisation thesis is that it does not consider the various experiences a nation may have with religion and secularism. This can be seen in the fact that secularisation, as it is currently understood, has only flourished within the culture that it was created in: Western Christian countries. Moreover, many academics who support secularisation exist within the confines of the already secularised West. Due to the nature of subcultures, supporters of secularisation thesis can easily fall into echo chambers of like-minded people and may be misguided into believing that what has occurred in their own cultures is what must be happening everywhere (Berger 1999, 10-11). Therefore, what is overlooked when applying secularisation thesis outside of the West is the legacies of colonialism and imperialism that continue to operate in the world today. It is commonly accepted by scholars that Muslim societies were more tolerant of religious pluralism than their European counterparts. Religion was not politicised in the same way, and secularism was never discussed as a solution to political issues (Hashemi 2010, 332-333). However, with the expansion of European colonisation, secularisation was forced into Muslim societies from the top-down by colonial elites rather than from the bottom-up as had happened originally in Europe. As such, secular rule is a legacy of colonial times, which was upheld in post-colonial regimes and is consequently associated with the ideologies of the oppressors (Hashemi 2010, 334). Moreover, Western powers have asserted secularisation as the only way to resolve religious violence and hostilities, and have such demanded that the Muslim world also adapt to European standards to secularism and modernity (Asad 2003, 10;

100). If we return to Uzbekistan in particular, it is imperative to always consider the legacies of both Tsarist Russian colonialism and Soviet imperialism which have had lasting impacts on the societal and political structure of the country. Islamic revival in Uzbekistan is not only a way to rediscovery national identity after colonialisation, but it has to exist in a freshly independent nation that has not completely separated from its old imperial ties (Khalid 2007, 583). A brief note to add here is that it is still too recent to be able to fully understand the consequences and long-term effects of the Soviet Union and its dissolution. Therefore, secularisation thesis is limited in how effective it can be in explaining the current religious trends in Uzbekistan as it fails to accommodate religious, cultural, and historical diversities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This thesis has sought out to prove the hypothesis that secularisation thesis does not distinguish between state-religion and society-religion relations and therefore cannot be applied as a theory to explain the current religious conflict in post-Soviet countries, specifically, Uzbekistan. I have done this by examining the various definitions of secularism, secularisation, and desecularisation, and applied them to both state-religion and society-religion relations. This has been done by analysing Uzbek public opinion concerning religious beliefs and values, as well as investigating government attitudes towards the religious revitalisation that has occurred by reviewing the consequences of the 1999 Tashkent Bombings and the 2005 Andijan Uprising. My findings have shown that because secularisation thesis does not separate political and societal attitudes and activities, it cannot explain how there can be two different religious trends occurring simultaneously in one country. Moreover, it is unable to fully separate from its origins in Western European thought, and as such, it does not acknowledge the variety of different religious and cultural values. More research should be undertaken to further explore the ideas of secularism and desecularism in the post-Soviet sphere.

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