

**MORAL FUTURES: THE EMERGENCE OF
ISLAMIC BUSINESSES IN THE POST-SOVIET ECONOMY**

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As I started graduate school, many of my friends and relatives in Bishkek asked me “How much longer will you study? How long must your dissertation be? When will you finish?” Little did I myself know that graduate school would be much more than taking classes and writing papers. It turned out to be a long and arduous journey, but also one where I met many wonderful people. As I look back, I am most grateful for this experience and for everyone who shared their wisdom, support, friendship and time with me – for everyone who shared with me their devotion to scholarship and their aspiration for change.

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advises graduate students and stands strongly on their side. He also facilitates labor unions and guides them in their search for justice. He pours his soul into his cooking and accompanies willing singers with guitar tunes. Thank you for showing us all what a rock-star academic is, Cedric.

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I trace my interest for constant intellectual stimulation back to my undergraduate alma mater, American University of Central Asia. I am indebted to Baliyar Sanghera, who was my senior thesis advisor and left a strong legacy at the Sociology department of AUCA. My first interest in economic sociology began in his class. My former teachers, and later colleagues Mehriyul Ablezova, Medina Aitieva Gulnara Ibraeva and Jamilia

Jeenbaeva have served as sounding boards of ideas. I am also always delighted to catch up with my friends from AUCA, Elena Kim and Olga Yarova, whenever I visit Bishkek. All of these people's warm welcome has always reassured my sense of belongingness back in my home country. Furthermore, I thank my dear childhood friends Djamilya Djarkynbaeva, Zarina Emilbekova, Aiday Ismailova, Elina Karakulova and Alina Sulaimanova for their encouragement. My friends, Abdujalil Abdurasulov, Aiday Ismailova and Dina Zhanibekova welcomed me to their homes while I did my research in Almaty and Astana in Kazakhstan.

Back in the US, it was once again thanks to a circle of friends that I remained grounded yet hopeful during my doctoral studies. My cohort members and friends, David Ciplet, Diana Graizbord, Yara Jarallah and Michael Rodriguez, stood in solidarity as we went from our first-year trials to the tribulations of the job market. I learned a lot from you all and I was so happy for your success upon graduation. I do look forward to our reunions, conference meetups, conversations and writing groups that are certainly bound to happen in the future! It is in the walls of Maxcy Hall, that my companionship with other graduate students began and was braced - Marcelo Bohrt, Sukriti Isaar, Jamie McPike, Mim Plavin – Masterman, Inku Subedi, Trina Vithayathil. I was also lucky to find friends within the broader Brown community, who have provided their support and love unconditionally – Karl Dominey and Heather Dominey, Jennet Toyjanova, Veronica Totos and David Simon. Thank you all for all the thoughtful conversations, writing groups, delicious meals and everything else that constitutes friendship.

My parents-in-law, Chaya Levy and Sanford Levy served as anchors for us in the journey from young professional life in Bishkek to graduate student life in Providence.

Their care and emotional support were invaluable. Meanwhile, despite being thousands of miles away, my parents, managed to do the same. My mother, Gulzhan Zhukushova baby sat for us for an entire academic year during our fieldwork in Bishkek and even traveled with me to Osh to take care of our daughter Nariste while I did my research. My father, Janybek Botoev, helped to arrange several interviews and shared his expertise of the mid-rank echelons of state official on so many occasions. My brother Kantemir Botoev also reached out to his contacts in helping me arrange interviews, and my nephew and niece looked after Nariste on so many occasions. Finally, my sister, Gulzat Botoeva is the one to blame for converting me to sociology in the first place. She has endlessly shared her knowledge and support with me in my academic endeavors, by reading drafts and commiserating as she went through the same process herself. I wish to express my appreciation for everything you have done for me: from the times when you took my primary education under your tutelage, to our recent collaboration on conference panels. Thank you for everything, sister.

Last but not least, I am so endlessly proud and happy to have a husband like David Levy, whose friendship I have been blessed to have for the last eight years. We started the graduate school journey together, and shared the ups and downs of it hand in hand. He is the solid rock upon which I stand, and he is the sea upon which I float. Not the least of all treasures we have discovered along the way in graduate school, is of course our daughter Nariste. With her birth, our small world, previously confined mostly to academia, has expanded tremendously. For always being there for me, and for never failing to point out that life has so many facets to it, thank you both.

Abstract of “Moral Futures: The Emergence of Islamic Businesses in the Post-Soviet Economy” by Aisalkyn Botoeva, Ph.D., Brown University, May 2017

My research addresses the fundamental question of why certain socio-economic development projects take hold in a given context among competing alternatives. The dissertation investigates the emergence and expansion of Islamic businesses, which represent one of the fastest growing moralized markets globally, along with Fair Trade and other secular analogues. Most scholarly (and public) attention has focused on the emergence of Islamist political projects, while far less attention has been devoted to the growing tendencies of Islamism in the economy. Whereas existing scholarship on Islamic business and finance in countries such as Turkey, Malaysia and the Gulf states depict the Islamic economy as a product of state-driven developmental projects, I argue that diverse sets of market actors articulate *competing* ideals of how Islam should inform economic action. I draw concepts from economic and political sociology to demonstrate that the Islamic economy is not merely a state-led development project, and instead that competing factions of entrepreneurs, certification agencies, and even religious authorities contest the state’s nation-centric discourse on Islam and development.

With the support of the Aga Khan Foundation and a Hazeltine fellowship from the Business, Entrepreneurship and Organizations Program at Brown University, I conducted over fifteen months of fieldwork in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 2012-2013 academic year. I examined why and how state officials in these former Soviet republics turned to the “alternative” model of socioeconomic development offered by Islamic business in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. In further addressing the gap in the existing research, my project examined how entrepreneurs and other market actors imagine better futures, and work to enact these cognitive frames, which I call *moral futures*, through legal and political means.

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Abbreviations

CRPA: Consumer Rights Protection Agency of Kazakhstan

IFI: See *Islamic Financial Institutions* below

HCA: Halal Certification Agency, based in Kyrgyzstan (see *halal* below)

HIA: Halal Industry Association, based in Kazakhstan (see *halal* below)

IHI Alliance: International Halal Integrity Alliance, based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

JIA: See *Young Entrepreneurs Association* below

KG: Kyrgyzstan

KZ: Kazakhstan

WHF: World Halal Forum

Glossary

Adal: Kyrgyz term equivalent to *halal*, or permissible in Arabic

Adep Bashaty: An association of progressive Muslims in Kyrgyzstan; many members of Adep Bashaty are associated with the Gülen movement and received their education from the Turkish boarding schools that Gülen sponsors, although the two associations are distinct.

Adep ahlak: Ways of being a good moral person, in contrast to *ibadat*, rules of Islamic piety.

Almaty: Former capital city of Kazakhstan, located in the south of the country.

Aji: Someone who has participated in the haj (see below)

Articulation: The process in which political parties and other key actors autonomously explicate “the preferences, social cleavages, or epochal socioeconomic transformations of a given community” (De Leon, Desai, and Tugal 2009:193)

Astana: Capital city of Kazakhstan, located in the south of the country. President Nazarbayev moved the capital to Astana after independence from the Soviet Union to prevent the heavily Russified north of the country from potentially seceding and joining the Russian Federation.

Bardak: “Chaos” in Russian

Bata: “Blessing” in Kyrgyz

Bishkek: Capital city of Kyrgyzstan, located in the north of the country

Caliphate: A single Islamic state incorporating all of the world’s Muslim nations, ruled by the Caliph. The Ottoman Empire was the last state to claim the status of the Caliphate.

Capitalist Islam: A moral future and orientation to Islamic business that presents moral entrepreneurship as a corrective to the purely self-interested dynamics of conventional markets.

Damla: “Teacher” in Kyrgyz

Dava’at: Proselytization and missionary trips around and beyond the country; *Dava’at* is primarily practiced by the Islamic missionary movement *Tablighi Jama’at*, whose members are expected to engage in short-term missionary trips on a regular basis, and one 40-day missionary trip annually if they have the means to do so.

Dava’atchi: A person who engages in *dava’at*

De-kulakization: The liquidation of small-scale land-owners and wealthy peasants under Lenin's and later Stalin's rule.

Dikiy kapitalizm: "Crazy" or "freewheeling capitalism;" in the 90s, there was a widespread sentiment across the post-Soviet space that capitalism had not produced the freedoms gains that had been promised, but rather had produced chaos, criminality, and moral decline.

Dua: "Prayer" in Kyrgyz

Fatwa: Religious-legal rulings and opinions issued by imams that apply to specific cases of contemporary life.

Fictionalities: In economic sociology, *fictionalities* represent stories that make certain routes seem natural, optimal, practical and otherwise conducive. The term is akin to the concept of "bounded rationality," which emphasizes the cognitive limitations of actors to access and analyze all the relevant information needed to invest in and run a business in an optimal and entirely rational manner. Whereas bounded rationality points to these limitations, however, *fictionalities* speaks to the narratives that we construct for ourselves to transcend these limitations in order to make action possible under conditions of uncertainty.

Fikh: The body of theological thought and commentary based on the Quran and sunnahs

Gharar: "Risk" in Arabic, a principle incorporated into Islamic Finance

Glasnost: "Openness" in Russian; Glasnost' was initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1990s as part of his efforts to reform the Soviet Union, which eventually lead to the state's disintegration.

Gülen Movement: A religious movement founded by Fethulla Gülen, one of the most widely known and controversial religious leaders in contemporary Turkey. The movement maintains a network of Turkish boarding schools in Kyrgyzstan, which promote progressive Islam and pan-Turkism.

Hadith: Parables recounting the words or deeds of the Prophet Muhammad; hadiths represent a secondary level of authority below the Quran.

Halal: "Permissible" in Arabic; halal conveys a series of rules about proper conduct, especially what foods are considered "clean" to consume. As the Islamic economy as expanded, halal principles have been applied to a wide range of goods and services that are increasingly distant from the original profile of halal principles. These goods and services are regulated by halal certification agencies, such as the *Halal Certification Agency* in Kyrgyzstan and the *Halal Industry Association* in Kazakhstan.

Haj: The pilgrimage to Mecca that is one of the basic requirements for all devout Muslims. The term is transliterated as хадж [*hadj*] into the Russian alphabet, the primary alphabet used for the Kyrgyz and Kazakh languages.

Haram: “Forbidden” in Arabic; *haram* indicates all those goods that are forbidden under the principles of *halal*, such as pork products and alcohol, as well as forbidden business practices such as usury.

Hizbut Tahrir: An pan-Islamic political organization imported to Central Asia from the Middle East. Hizbut Tahrir promotes the unification of the Muslim world in a renewed Caliphate. While the movement has seldom used extremist tactics, it is widely considered a radical and terrorist group because of its overtly Islamic ideology and rejection of sovereignty for individual Muslim nations.

Homo Sovieticus: A shorthand for the “ideal soviet man” that the Communist Party sought to create through Marxist-Leninist ideology. As with other ideological constructs, *homo sovieticus* entailed a radical rejection of prior-existing human ideals and characteristics.

Ibadat: Rules of Islamic piety, in contrast to *Adeph ahlak*, ways of being a good moral person.

Imam: A religious authority in Islam, often but not always serving as the head of a mosque. Imams also staff the administration of the *Muftiate*

Imaginarities: Mental representations of some future state of things that make objectives cognitively accessible for actors in the present. In conjunction with *fictionalities*, *imaginarities* help entrepreneurs to transcend uncertainty about the future and about the optimal means to achieve goals.

Islamic Financial Institutions: Financial institutions ranging from large banks to small micro-finance organizations that formally apply Islamic principles to their financial practices. There is considerable disagreement on these principles among different IFIs, as well as debate as to whether any form of finance can actually be considered compliant with the Islamic injunction against usury.

Jama'at: A community of Muslims

Kazakh: One of the major ethnic groups in Central Asia. Kazakhs are the titular nation of Kazakhstan. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz originally represented a dispersed collection of nomadic clans, with only a weak common linguistic and ethnic identity. Maps of Central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries broke down the ethnic territories in various ways, often referring to present-day Kazakhs as “Kyrgyz” and present-day Kyrgyz as “Karakhyrgyz.” The contemporary nations emerged as a result of Soviet economic and nationalities policies, which forcefully settled the nomadic peoples of the region and simplified the ethnic map with mutually-exclusive ethnonyms.

Kollektivnye khozyaistva: “Collective farming” in Russian; the system of communal farms instituted under Lenin’s *New Economic Policy*.

Korenizatsiya: “Indigenization” in Russian

Krysha: Literally “roof” in Russian, but figuratively denoting “protection” in the market; this protection can be provided either by powerful state officials, or by protection rackets, both of which usually extract payment or some other form of compensation for their protection.

Kybyla: “Mecca” in Kyrgyz

Kymys: A traditional drink in many Central Asian nations, made from fermented mare’s milk. *Kymys* is mildly alcoholic, but has been declared *halal* by religious authorities in Kyrgyzstan because of its traditional and revered status in the nation.

Kyrgyz: One of the major ethnic groups in Central Asia. Kyrgyz are the titular nation of Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz originally represented a dispersed collection of nomadic clans, with only a weak common linguistic and ethnic identity. Maps of Central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries broke down the ethnic territories in various ways, often referring to present-day Kazakhs as “Kyrgyz” and present-day Kyrgyz as “Karakyrgyz.” The contemporary nations emerged as a result of Soviet economic and nationalities policies, which forcefully settled the nomadic peoples of the region and simplified the ethnic map with mutually-exclusive ethnonyms.

Mashbooh: Grey areas in the principles of halal and Islamic-compliant business practices; *mashbooh* denotes a category of goods and services that are neither clearly lawful nor unlawful according to halal principles.

Medresseh: A school of Islamic study. Medressehs are roughly equivalent to seminaries in Christianity but not all students study with the goal of becoming imams. Students often enroll at a younger age simply to learn more about Islam alongside their secular education.

Moral future: Ideas of the future returns in both monetary and religiously-pertinent benefits that entrepreneurs can expect to gain through incorporation of morals in their market activities

Mudarabah: An Islamic financial product, structured as a profit-and loss-sharing agreement, where the bank provides financial capital, and the lender (here defined as a partner) implements a business.

Muftiate: As discussed in chapter two, the first four Muftiates were established in Central Asia, the Northern and Southern Caucuses, and in Russia under the Stalinist reforms, and were charged to oversee the work of mosques and shrines of their respective territories. In late 1980s and early 1990s, each Central Asian country installed its own “independent” Muftiate, whose work carried the institutional legacy of their predecessors. These organizations remain at least partially aligned with the state.

Murabaha: An Islamic financial product, structured as a kind of fiduciary sale involving three parties – the bank, a commodity seller and a client. The bank obtains a good from the seller and re-sells to the client with a profit. In this manner, the Islamic financial institution avoids “making money from money” by simply giving a loan to its client and charging interest.

Musharakah: An Islamic financial product, structured as a joint venture between borrower and lender. Both parties agree in advance to share profits or losses, which are divided proportionally to the shares of each party.

Namaz: The Persian word for *Salah*, the daily prayers that pious Muslims should perform facing Mecca. *Namaz* is commonly used throughout Central Asia because of the strong influence of Persian civilization in the region.

National Islam: A moral future and orientation to Islamic business that draws from a history of Soviet efforts to direct religious and national activity through the channels established by the ruling political order.

Nikke: A religious wedding ceremony; *nikke* often refers only to the actual saying of vows in the presence of a religious authority, cementing the union, rather than any wedding celebrations that might follow the ceremony.

Orozo: Kyrgyz name for the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year during which devout believers fast, engage in charity, and generally devote themselves to their faith.

Osh: Historic city in Southern Kyrgyzstan, and the second largest city in the country.

Qazi: Head of the *Qaziyat*, and highest religious authority in each region beneath the *Muftiate*.

Qaziyat: An organization that oversees the work of all mosques in one region of a country.

Riba: “Usury” in Arabic

Sadaqa: In the Kyrgyz language, a good or benevolent deed. Depending on the interpretation of Islam, engaging in good deeds can curry favor with God, to assure a better standing in the afterlife.

Sharia: Islamic law, derived from the Quran, Hadith, and sunnah.

Spiritual Islam: A moral future and orientation to Islamic business that subordinates mundane activities and concerns to salvation and divine purposes.

Sunnah: Passages of the Quran that contain the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, and serve as an authoritative source for rules and norms for pious Muslims across various spheres of life.

Tablighi Jama'at: An Islamic missionary movement with origins in Pakistan in the early 20th century. Members primarily engage in *dava'at*, recruiting men to attend mosque, especially for the Friday prayer. *Tablighi Jama'at* is formally apolitical, but is nevertheless seen by many in Central Asia as a political threat.

Umma: The global community of all Muslims

Ustaz: Teacher in Turkish

Uzbek: One of the major ethnic groups in Central Asia. Uzbeks are the titular nation of Uzbekistan, but also represent a large ethnic minority in southern Kyrgyzstan, and a smaller minority in southern Kazakhstan. Conventional histories of the region depict the Uzbeks as a traditionally settled and agrarian population, whereas the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz are depicted as nomadic or semi-nomadic. In reality, the boundaries of these different ethnic groups has been porous, and their lifestyles less distinct from one another.

Valuation Circuit: Networks of religious authority (often international) within the Islamic economy that provide local certification agencies and local entrepreneurs with the authority to deploy the halal “brand.”

Wahhabism: A fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and Sharia that Saudi Arabia enforces as its internal law and promotes abroad as a form of soft power. Funding from Saudi Arabian foundations for mosques, imams, and even average believers often come with the condition that recipients promote and implement the principles of Wahhabism in their community and daily lives. In Central Asia, Wahhabism has become a catch-all term for foreign extremist Islamic influences, which are feared to destabilize the region and undermine national sovereignty.

Young Entrepreneurs Association (Jash Ishkerler Associatsiyasy in Kyrgyz): An association of progressive Muslims entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan; many members of the JIA received their education from the Turkish boarding schools that the Gülen movement sponsors.

Zakyyat: Arabic term for the taxes that Muslims are meant to contribute to the *umma* or Muslim community, either through charitable giving or tithing to a mosque.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging from an extended period of economic turbulence and systemic uncertainty, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev declared in mid-2000s that the “Islamic financial and economic model is stable and viable.”¹ This statement was echoed by his administration and their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan who similarly claimed that “the development and spread of Islamic principles of finance would yield fast and effective returns, bearing a direct impact on economic development and social welfare.”² Under the guidance and support of state elites, the first Islamic banks emerged in the capital cities of both countries in the early to mid-2000s. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, proponents of the Islamic economy in these two post-Soviet Central Asian republics, as elsewhere in the “Muslim world,” have claimed that Islamic finance and business were less risky than conventional business models.

By the early 2000s, the landscapes of major cities in both of these countries reflected the growing social interest in merging Islamic tenets, pious sensibilities, and capitalist for-profit enterprise. One could see distinct rows in bazaars selling Muslim attire for men and women. Prayer beads and posters of Mecca became abundant in kiosks and sidewalks, as did books and DVDs that were meant to provide guidance for pious Muslims in their search for a moral lifestyle, the ideal marriage, and a successful trade. Upscale medium-sized enterprises in the service and hospitality sectors were quick to join

¹ From the speech of Nursultan Nazarbayev at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011. Source: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/382230> - last accessed June 1, 2016.

² Source: <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-61641.html> - last accessed June 1, 2016.

the trend as well, offering “Shariah-compliant” guest houses, spas and beauty salons, and Muslim daycare centers. A wider range of halal food, beauty care, and even pharmaceutical products were soon offered in street-stalls and cafes, upscale restaurants and medical centers.

Observers with a keen interest in global trends, particularly in counter-hegemonic movements, will rightly note that these tendencies in the region are reflections of processes that have been progressing globally in the past several decades. According to a report on the State of the Global Islamic Economy, global spending within the Islamic economy, including food, clothing, and other sectors providing for the halal lifestyle, surpassed two trillion USD in 2013.³ The report also estimated that total Islamic financial assets stood at 1.66 trillion USD in the same year. The message that such reports convey is that the Islamic economy is growing exponentially. Indeed, as many studies indicate, economic models that were characterized as distinctly “Islamic,” “Shariah-compliant,” or otherwise in line with religious and spiritual values came to dominate markets not only in the Gulf, but also in Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and Egypt. This upsurge in Islamic business has prompted comparisons to secular analogues such as the Fair Trade movement, organic markets, impact investment and others, which have all burgeoned in the past several decades. These market niches have been hailed as partial solutions to systemic problems of the dominant capitalist system, particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008.⁴

As the financial crisis began and unfolded, the most ardent critics of the Western

³ Dinar Standard makes the reports in conjunction with Reuters <http://www.dinarstandard.com/state-of-the-global-islamic-economy-report-2015/> - last accessed, March 21, 2016.

⁴ The International Monetary Fund for example, reported that the global losses in banking alone amasses to \$3.6 trillion (Stiglitz 2010:127).

blueprint of capitalism have lamented the world-wide reach of the crisis and inequalities. The widely-acclaimed Noble Laureate and economist, Joseph Stiglitz, highlighted the injustice of the US government heavy lifting \$700 billion to bailout large banks and corporations while at the same time “ignoring the millions of homes going into foreclosure” (2010:30). At the time, former UN secretary-general Ban-Ki Moon depicted the outcomes of the crisis in terms of global unemployment that grew to 34 million, leading to at least one billion people starving worldwide.⁵ Renown financier and a philanthropist George Soros criticized “market fundamentalism,” which has diverted societies to the path of self-interest, and away from the pursuit of morality and social good (Soros 1998). To address these issues, he established the “Initiative for New Economic Thinking,” whose primary goal was to support research on new approaches and techniques in economics that would prioritize justice and broader social well-being. Some of these new developments in the West and in the Global South demonstrate the push and urge for an alternative economic system that would contest the existing concepts and policy-prescriptions of neoliberal economics, conventional market mechanisms and the ethos of capitalism. In light of these trends, “moralized markets” including Islamic economy started to gain credibility.

The emergence of the Islamic economy in post-Soviet Central Asia, a context where both religion and free enterprise were circumscribed under the aegis of Bolshevik rule, resulted in part from these global tendencies. Explaining the growth of the Islamic economy in the region simply as part of globalization, however, overlooks the *diversity* of responses that practitioners and ardent advocates of the Islamic economy and Islamic

⁵ Source: <http://www.un.org/sg/articleFull.asp?TID=118&Type=Op-Ed> last accessed May 18, 2016.

business have developed on the ground. My initial exploratory research quickly demonstrated that the repertoire of beliefs and practices that market actors identified as Islamic varied widely. Hence, my research agenda aimed to explore the key question of why the concept of “Shariah-compliant business” gained traction both globally and in the Central Asian region. Furthermore, why do contending factions seek to be part of a single Islamic economy, despite their competing interpretations of how Islam should inform market practices? Given their different motivations and approaches, why should they all want to be involved in building this common moralized market? This puzzle is further complicated by the pervasive uncertainty around the validity and viability of products and services in the Islamic business field.

At the center of all the major schools of thought in Islam and its relation to economy is the question of fair exchange, something that capitalism rapidly undermined in the view of many contemporary thinkers. Some of the core principles of the Islamic economy touch upon spheres of lawful and forbidden means of livelihood, the accumulation of wealth, and ethical ways of disposing of money and contributing to the general public well-being. Proponents of the Islamic economy tend to point to three major factors that distinguish this economic field from conventional capitalism. First, they claim a distinct division between halal (lawful or permissible) and haram (unlawful or forbidden) ways of engaging in economic transactions. In Islamic finance, for example, economic transactions must be based on openly discussed terms and an equitable distribution of profit in order to be considered lawful. Within this principle, the Quran defines various transactions as unlawful, ranging from bribery, misappropriation of either private or public funds, theft, fraudulent transactions involving defective

weights and measures, making profit through immoral and illicit means such as by selling, transporting or distributing alcohol, guns, sexual services, gambling, lottery and betting (see more detailed discussions in Mawdudi 2011). One of the major prohibitions here is avoiding all forms of interest-based transactions such as *riba* [usury] or *gharar* [risk], which, as I will show, Islamic finance seeks to circumnavigate in several ways. Secondly, advocates of the Islamic economy assert that one should not let his or her wealth merely accumulate, but instead spend the money through lawful means. Finally, the Islamic tenet of *zakah* or charity prescribes active acts of giving to improve public welfare. Advocates of the Islamic economy point to these central tenets as a means of cleansing profits morally, often using the Quran, and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings as key sources of authority.

What the most ardent advocates do not address in depth, however, is the considerable ambiguity of the concept of the Islamic economy itself. Critics and practitioners of the Islamic economy alike often voice three major uncertainties when it comes to Islamic tenets and their implementation. First, there are uncertainties around applicability of religiously-informed tenets in practice within certain sectors. Second, there are uncertainties around the substantive difference between business practices, products, and services that are claimed as "Islamic" vs. their conventional analogues. And finally, there are uncertainties about the prospective profits that an Islamic model of running a business may yield.

To elaborate, critics often point out that there is no clear definition of what distinguishes Islamic commodities and services from their conventional counterparts.⁶

⁶ In her ethnographic study of a Jordanian bank, Sarah Tobin notes that "the indices of sufficient morality in Islamic banking and finance were not always or even oftentimes derived from Shariah, instead

For example, there is no one formula for how to interpret the tenets of *riba* [usury] or *gharar* [risk], nor is there one predominant definition of what constitutes Islamic finance or business (Maurer 2005; Pitluck 2012; Pollard and Samers 2007; Tobin 2014; Warde 2010). Moreover, the concept of *halal*⁷ is employed by a such wide variety of industries, ranging from food producers to the pharmaceutical and beauty care industries, that the field is rife with contentious debates over how far the religious tenet can be stretched. Instead of clear standards, the guidelines for *halal* compliance contain extensive moral grey zones, possibly even more than do other moralized markets such as organic food and Fair Trade (van Waarden and van Dalen 2013).

In addition, many observers are skeptical of the claims that the Islamic economy addresses the worst excesses and instabilities of traditional free market capitalism. Yet other analysts call for this assertion to be verified empirically, arguing that Islamic banks and their financial products are substantively the same as their secular analogues (El-Gamal 2006; Kuran 2004; Maurer 2005). Finally, as many of my own respondents pointed out, it was not necessarily clear to entrepreneurs themselves whether shifting to the Islamic business field would yield higher economic returns.

Standing at the intersection of the religious and economic spheres, the field of Islamic business incorporates a variety of actors into such debates, including religious authorities, entrepreneurs, and state officials tasked with managing their national economies. The overarching puzzle of my research is amplified considerably by this dissonance between what seems to be the exponential growth of the Islamic market niche

deriving from markers such as a sense of affect or feeling that bank is Islamic, liking “what the bank does” in its managerial or operational elements” (Tobin 2014: 129).

⁷ “Permissible” in Arabic, analogous to Kosher

on the one hand, and the uncertainties around the validity and viability of this field on the other. My research thus examines why the Islamic economy has attracted so many proponents and practitioners in the region (and, by extension, globally) as a moralized market, despite the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding it?

Addressing the above-stated questions will enable me to contribute to the broader theoretical interest in moralized markets and how they come into existence in new contexts. The concept of “moralized markets” is not new to economic sociology. Fourcade & Healy (2007) have recently branded the whole direction of analyzing markets within the discipline as such. The moralized markets approach sees any market, from major stock exchanges like those on Wall Street to economic exchange circles in the Trobriand Islands, as cultural and moral projects. Researchers within this school of thought commonly call for scholars to study markets as sites, spaces and means saturated by normativity and distinct moral values. I share this view that any market is informed by and also bolsters morality – “that involves more or less conscious efforts to categorize, normalize and naturalize behaviors and rules... whether in the name of economic principles (e.g., efficiency, productivity) or more social ones (e.g., justice, social responsibility)” (Fourcade & Healy 2007: 300). In the light of my project and its broader interest, however, I do also define “moralized markets” as a distinct subset of markets that crystalize around value-based approach to economic and political problems. In many cases, ranging from Islamic businesses to Fair Trade and impact investment, the proponents of this value-based approach emphasize (and struggle to define) *just* and socially responsible principles. Proponents of these moralized markets often frame them as anti-capitalist projects, which may help imbue both macro as well as micro everyday

economic transactions with principles of equity, social and environmental ethics, spirituality, and aspirations for benevolence and integrity. Whether moralized markets actually lead to these outcomes is an important question. I share Fourcade & Healy's view that if we are interested in markets, we need to study markets as "cultural phenomena and moral projects in their own right," thereby exploring the "mechanisms and techniques by which such projects are realized in practice" (2007: 285). In its broader disciplinary goals, therefore, this project aims to examine how moralized nascent fields or markets emerge in new contexts.

To explore the above-mentioned theoretical puzzle, requires me to be attentive to several empirical questions. Namely, I address several questions regarding the rapid and full government support of Islamic banks and broader Islamic economic projects by the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan –the two sites of my research. This support has puzzled scholars and policy analysts, in light of what we know about the state administrations' policies towards religious movements and religion more generally. Both state administrations are known for their heavy-handed tactics of intimidation when it comes to autonomous religious movements and "excessive" public demonstration of piety (Jones Luong 2004).

Many scholars see the revival of Muslim identity as "natural" and even "inevitable" with the collapse of Soviet secularism, regional integration and the global resurgence of Muslim communities (Louw 2007; McBrien 2008, 2009; Privratsky 2001). Yet others have depicted these tendencies as a rational effort to integrate with and capitalize on global economic tendencies. While insightful, these explanations that I will elaborate on in subsequent chapters do not answer the following empirical questions that

my study raises: Why would state officials in the Central Asian context endorse Islamic business as an alternative pathway for economic and social development, given their generally suspicious and hostile stance toward various Islamic movements in the religious sphere? Moreover, why would entrepreneurs⁸ and investors participate in the Islamic economy, given the numerous uncertainties they confess regarding the incorporation of religious tenets into their business practices and regarding the eventual returns of doing so?

Driven by these concerns and empirical questions, I expand upon existing scholarship in economic and political sociology in order to offer an alternative approach. My analysis draws on fifteen months of qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork, where I tracked the historically contingent political and socio-cultural processes through which the construction, validation, implementation and expansion of the Islamic economy happened. The objective is not only to develop an alternate account of the Islamic economy in Central Asia, but also to use the case of Islamic economic practices in the region to construct a broader sociological theory of moralized markets.

Debates on the Islamic Economy: A Resurgence of Identity or a Façade to Mask Wealth Maximizing Rationality?

⁸ Here, very similarly to what Patricia Sloane (1999) notes in her book “Islam, Modernity and Entrepreneurship Among the Malays,” both larger business owners and institutional investors, as well as the small business owners and managers and petty bazaar traders identified most often as entrepreneurs. The equivalent of the term “entrepreneurs” in Russian is *predprinimateli*, which connotes active search for resolution or resourcefulness. Similarly, the equivalent of the term “entrepreneurs” in Kyrgyz is *jekeshmerler*, which in turn has the root of “ish” meaning work and generally connoting someone who is actively doing work. This self-depiction was often used by my respondents themselves, and therefore I employ this term as opposed to a more generic “business people.” The latter term also has a negative connotation because of its association with “spekulyatsiya,” trading and any other form of private business that was criminalized during the Soviet period.

The global rise of the Islamic Economy has provoked significant debate within the sociological literature and the social sciences more broadly about the forces driving moralized markets. Three major theoretical approaches offer insight into this area of inquiry. Scholars who employ *identity-based* explanations of Islamism have focused on the global renewal of religion (Keyman and Koyuncu 2005; Mandaville 2001, 2005; Roy 2004). In the view of this camp, the Muslim community and its intrinsic identities pre-exist market interests, and subsequently come to determine economic choices (e.g., opening or investing in an Islamic business). Extending this line of thought scholars of Central Asia have attended to the aspirations of a growing numbers of locals to nurture their piety through veiling, mosque attendance, enrolling in *medressehs* [religious schools] and engaging in similar practices. As these examples show, however, scholars who search for explanations of the rise of Muslim identity tend to focus on practices that are marked as “religious,” (e.g., medressehs, mosques, veiling practices, etc.) and leave manifestation of piety in the market under-researched (Louw 2007; McBrien 2008, 2009; Privratsky 2001).

An alternate, *political economy* perspective views the Islamic economy as resulting from politically-charged anti-colonial motives, wherein states like Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan bolster their sense of national self-determination by emphasizing distinctions from the politics of Russia and the former Soviet Union (Imam and Kpodar 2010; Kuran 1995, 2004; Maududi 1975; Pollard and Samers 2007). This strand would suggest that state officials and even Islamic entrepreneurs may be driven to develop the Islamic economy primarily as a stance against their Soviet past. Easy access to the requisite financial resources to develop this sector may also play a role, as Gulf countries

greatly expanded the reach of Islamic finance in response to the boom in oil profits starting in the 1970s. The authors in this camp would largely agree that Islamic business is just a thin façade for otherwise rational calculations – either the calculations of politicians who use Islam instrumentally to drum up popular support, or the profit-driven motives of entrepreneurs.

Finally, a third strand of literature that I call *synergist*, views the Islamic economy as yet another instance in which neoliberalism finds a medium through which to establish itself (Atia 2012; Gokariksel and Secor 2015; Rudnycky and Richard 2009; Rudnycky 2013, 2014b). Instead of viewing the decisions and activities of market actors in this field solely in terms of identities and pious aspirations that the latter may have, the authors in this literature suggest that religious beliefs are brought in line with capitalist practices through the all-encompassing power of neoliberalism as an ideology. In the face of this ideology, contradictions between religious thought and practice and profit-orientated economic rationality gradually find resolution in popular understanding and fade away. Extending a Weberian analysis to the case of Islam, these authors often locate all market expressions of religiosity (e.g. commitments to do business in line with religion) under the broad category of pious neoliberalism. As I will show, however, pious neoliberalism represents only one variant of how Islamism can manifest itself in the economy. To tackle factors that have been left unexplored by these strands of research, sketched here only briefly, I explore the variety of configurations of religious belief and economic practice articulated by different kinds of market actors.

The Alternative Approach

The analysis presented in this dissertation is anchored in a conceptual and theoretical framework that draws upon several traditions and fields of inquiry. As described further in Chapter One, I synthesize concepts and analytical tools from economic sociology, political sociology, and contemporary studies of Islam. Three concepts in particular serve as building blocks for my analysis, which stands at the intersection of politics, piety movements and new moralized market formations. First, I posit the concept of “moral futures” markets, borrowing from Beckert’s (2011, 2013) study of imagined futures and fictionality in economic action. The key insight that economic sociology offers for my research is the subfield’s appreciation for the “imaginary” facets of economic life – mental representations of the future state of things. Even rational economic actors must coordinate their activities according to these envisioned and desired outcomes. The fictionalities approach to economic behavior helps us understand why market actors might perceive a certain business model as viable (e.g., Islamic banking as a less risk-averse model), even though they may lack corroborating empirical evidence.

To answer the questions of how these moral futures emerge, I employ the concept of “articulation” from political sociology. “Articulation” enables me to analyze how and why particular imagined moral futures emerge from among the myriad possibilities and receive validation. Building on recent interdisciplinary research on political parties (De Leon et al. 2009), I join efforts to reconceive action as coordinated around identities. Here, authors argue that social and political programs aimed at a desired future do not emerge spontaneously. Rather, political parties and other key actors tap into but also shape the sensibilities of the population, and articulate moral futures according to the perceived interests and grievances of a certain social group. Hence, ethnic, religious or

national identities are made even more visible, through the rhetoric of political actors who explicate social cleavages. I contend that explorations of Islamic businesses, as with the broader range of moralized markets, must be closely related to examinations of social identities that may be at the core of market actors' perceptions of who they are or who they aspire to be.

While these two interrelated concepts help in my explorations of how value-laden mental representations can inform actors decisions and activities, they do not entirely answer the question of how the quality and value of the products and services in the Islamic economy is established. To tackle this empirical puzzle, I introduce the concept of "valuation circuits," which draws from organizational studies (Meyer and Rowan 1977) and Zelizer's perspective of markets (2009, 2010). The concept facilitates explorations of how actors engage in market exchange under conditions of uncertainty about the quality of products, e.g. whether "halal" goods and services actually comply with the claimed religious tenets. As I elaborate below, valuation circuits refer to the notes of religious (often international) standards that provide local certification agencies and local entrepreneurs the authority to deploy the halal "brand." While the organizational studies literature is replete with examples of what I term valuation circuits, I contend that the emotions and sentiments involved in such circuits are under-theorized, such as anxiety about the authenticity of one's identity (i.e., am I being properly Muslim?) and the subsequent construction of mechanisms in the market that help to alleviate those feelings of uncertainty in economic transaction.

The kind of analytical approach that I propose corrects the limitations of identity-based explanations that essentialize Muslim identity, and presume that the notion of

umma – the global community of Muslims lies at the core of expanding Islamic economy. Instead of viewing Islam in terms of essential characteristics and values that it instills in societies, I intend to show throughout this dissertation that Islam can be articulated and enacted in different ways. Moreover, I share the view of economic sociologists who conceive of markets in general as saturated with moral ideas and normativity. All markets, be they Wall Street finance or small-scale artisanal craft production – are “cultural phenomena and moral projects in their own right” (Fourcade & Healy 2007: 285). Hence, my goal is to explore how processes and mechanisms through which these projects are realized in practice. Namely, I aim to trace the three interrelated processes – construction, interpretation and implementation – through which Islamic businesses can emerge as a case of moralized markets even in unexpected contexts.

Aims and Arguments

This dissertation investigates the political and socio-cultural processes through which a constellation of actors gives rise to moralized markets. I suggest that the Islamic economy, like any other developmental project, does not emerge through means-ends rational calculations alone. Nor is the expansion of this market driven by the “intrinsic” religious identity and “traditional” beliefs of the entrepreneurs and other grassroots actors who participate in the field. Certainly, diverse groups of entrepreneurs sought to capitalize on the “religious renaissance” occurring in the post-Soviet Central Asian region. If we were to explain the rapid growth in the field of Islamic, “halal,” or otherwise religiously-compliant businesses only in terms of market actors’ transaction costs, however, we would miss the much more complicated dynamic and political nature of this moralized market.

The key argument that I propose throughout this dissertation is that the diversity that has arisen in Islamic businesses is a direct result of *conflicting* interpretations of Islam and diverse social movements' aspirations to spearhead the process of "Islamization." Contestation among social movements, religious authorities and their followers has generated the institution-building projects that proved crucial to the rise of the Islamic business field. Adherents of competing Islamic social movements in Central Asia, such as the *Gülen* education movement and the *Tablighi Jama'at* missionary movement, have contested the attempts of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani state to define "authentic" Islam only in terms of national and ethnic identity. These movements and their adherents have ultimately contributed to the diverse interpretations and implementations of the Islamic economy in the region.

The Islamic economy has gained greater legitimacy in this context as a result of the competitive story-telling that the religious authorities, state officials and these members of diverse social movements engage in, emphasizing "what Islam can do for a person and the society." With increasingly mainstream legitimacy and acceptance for the Islamic economy, the choice for many entrepreneurs to pursue formally Islamic business models can represent a confluence of both rational calculations and personal ethics. Many entrepreneurs can yield better profits by tapping into this "religious renaissance" means through running a business in compliance with religious tenets. Perhaps more importantly, however, these new articulations have imbued "Islamic" economic activity with an aura of success and benevolence that may trump purely economic calculations for many entrepreneurs.

In this regard, my work diverges from the “institutionalist” approach, in which scholars often focus on the diffusion of well-established organizational models in new contexts (DiMaggio, Mizruchi & Fein 1999). My study is more in line with those scholars who have called for greater attention to the early stages of the institutionalization process and the emergence of nascent fields and institutional arrangements (Tolbert & Zucker 1994, Clemens and Cook 1999, Hechter 2000, Powell 1991). The Islamic business field in post-Soviet Central Asia serves as a useful and exciting terrain for extending these theories of nascent field and institutional formation for several reasons. First, the field presents an opportunity to reassess the state-driven approach to explaining Islamic economic projects, which has dominated scholarship on cases such as Malaysia or Iran (Nasr). Religiously-compliant businesses are a novelty in this region, where the states had been restrictive and cautious in relation to “foreign” religious influences and the potential “radicalization” of Islam. Second, the case of Islamic businesses in Central Asia contributes to the comparative spectrum of scholarship on the Islamic economy, which mostly focuses on Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, which have long historical legacies of Islamic institutions and schools of thought. Finally, several forms of Islamic business, that epitomize different political projects and articulations of Islam, allow for comparisons and explanations beyond the possible idiosyncrasies of a single case.

Using Cihan Tugal’s definition of Islamism as “a project that seeks to shape the state, economy and society along Islamic lines” (2009:267), I demonstrate that the merging of Islamism with the market does not simply represent the end product of an inevitable, global growth in religiosity. Instead, it represents an outcome of historically contingent processes, wherein each contending articulation of Islam has cultivated the

sensibilities of different social groups, and together enrolled the broadest range of otherwise ambivalent actors into the market. I investigate these issues by focusing on the emergence and expansion of the Islamic economy in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where such ambivalence is high, where the viability of Islamic businesses was initially low, and where proponents have had to articulate the field of Islamic business carefully in order to give it more mainstream credibility.

I contend that the Islamic economy is rather a product of active articulations by actors such as state officials, religious authorities, entrepreneurs and private regulators, all of whom are investing in *moral futures*. Drawing from Beckert (2011), I argue that Islamic business is driven by *imaginaries* of the future returns that entrepreneurs and other actors envision for their investment into this field. These returns are not limited to the material gains of profit, but also include ideal or even spiritual returns in the form of building through Islamic business the kind of moral society that entrepreneurs hope to occupy in the future.

Based on extensive research of business discourses and practices that are framed as Islamic by actors in the field, the subsequent chapters will demonstrate that state officials, religious authorities, entrepreneurs, and other actors articulate three major moral futures that incorporate Islam into economic life, namely: National Islam, Capitalist Islam and Spiritual Islam. These analytical categories demonstrate that Islamism can be interpreted and put to use in diverse frameworks that inform desirable end goals and the proper means to attain them, thereby shaping the decisions, strategies and practices of pious entrepreneurs and other actors involved in the field.

National Islam, is actively articulated by the government leaders of both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, as it is meant to inculcate a sense of national distinctiveness from both the former Russian colonizer, as well as from Muslim “new others” such as Arabs. Large faction of imams affiliated with the state extend this logic, by promoting the idea that the interests of the nation must be protected from the foreign influence. The view here is that Islamic business is a way to benefit national sovereignty, and particularly the prosperity and self-determination of the titular ethnic groups of each polity (Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, or Kazakhs in Kazakhstan).

Capitalist Islam, is most explicitly articulated by entrepreneurs themselves and by religious officials affiliated with the Gülen movement, who express their appreciation for the virtues of the free market. In the rhetoric of this market orientation, moral and ethical entrepreneurship can correct the purely self-interested tendencies of conventional business models. Unsurprisingly, Capitalist Islam has gained the widest acceptance among larger Islamic businesses and business networks. As I will show, however, we would be mistaken to write off this orientation as a mere façade for otherwise conventional, profit-driven business.

Finally, the *Spiritual Islamic* orientation has been articulated and promoted most explicitly by autonomous religious movements, which do not enjoy as much institutional support as the previous two factions. The future such groups promotes is one where ethical commercial activities represent one outlet for spirituality and piety in this world, which help secure a place in the afterlife. This moral future appeals mostly to smaller-scale entrepreneurs who, for a variety of reasons, frame their business activities less in

terms of profit than in terms of the autonomy and capacity that entrepreneurship provides them to engage in a pious lifestyle.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of six chapters. The first chapter lays the conceptual foundation, while the four subsequent chapters cover different empirical dimensions of the Islamic economy. The empirical chapters cover fifteen years of development, beginning from the emergence of first Islamic businesses in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in early and mid-2000s. In specific ways, each of these chapters broaches a major theme described above, and addresses the construction of the Islamic business field.

Individually and collectively, they provide insight into the ways in which moral futures are articulated, interpreted and enacted by different sets of actors.

Chapter One elaborates on the organizing concepts sketched above. This chapter locates the limitations of existing explanations of the Islamic economy, and offers an alternate explanation. The objective is not only to develop an alternate account of the Islamic economy in Central Asia, but also to use the case of Islamic economic practices in the region to construct a broader sociological theory of moralized markets. To repeat, the concepts that serve as building blocks for my analysis are moral futures, articulation and valuation circuits. I situate each of these concepts within their intellectual tradition and specify the particular use I will make of them in the empirical chapters that follow. In addition, I take this chapter as an opportunity to discuss some of the ontological assumptions that animate my analysis and sociological contribution. *Chapter Two*, discusses methodology of the study.

Chapter Three draws from historical analyses that suggest that the Soviet Union was not always hostile towards religious institutions as some have believed. This historically situated look at the contemporary state helps us better understand why upper-echelon state officials would endorse larger Islamic Financial Institutions and seek to project their “moderate Muslimness” at the local and international arenas. The state leadership and upper-level bureaucrats in the region have promoted Islamic business and financial models as stable, viable, and risk averse, despite the lack of empirically sound evidence to corroborate this view, primarily because those entrepreneurs who work under the banner of Capitalist Islam are viewed as apolitical and progressive.

Chapter Four analyzes how *imams* [the spiritual leaders of mosques] and theology experts have come to take on the role of business ethicists, propagating religiously informed knowledge among rural and urban communities of entrepreneurs. I discuss the growth of thousands of new mosques since the early 1990s, which needed to mobilize resources to sustain themselves. I demonstrate how religious authorities have actively articulated at least three distinct forms of Islamism in the market that revolve around 1) capitalist Islam or profitability, 2) nationalist Islam or local communal identity, and 3) spiritually-oriented Islam or a secure future in the hereafter.

Chapter Five attends to entrepreneurs, who run businesses that range from Islamic banks and microfinance companies, to Muslim daycares and *halal* food producers and caterers. The chapter compares the rhetoric, priorities, self-representation and practices of entrepreneurs that espouse different orientations of Islam. It shows that this variation is in part driven by the communities that sustained each orientation. Due to state concerns over radical forms of Islam, communities of entrepreneurs that prioritized salvation and stricter

norms for piety were pushed to the fringes of the field, while Capitalist Islam gained the greatest presence.

Chapter Six, the final empirical chapter, focuses on private *halal* certification agencies. I explain how these third-party institutions of economic governance became an inextricable part of the Islamic market, particularly due to their ability to sustain the emotive power of pious identities among entrepreneurs. I suggest that by constructing and reinforcing valuation circuits, much like political candidates trying to gather as many factions of constituents as possible, certifiers need to speak to different groups of entrepreneurs and their distinct sensibilities around both piety and leading an Islamic business.

The conclusion revisits the central puzzle of the study, namely, why has Islamic business gained traction despite official secularization, mass suspicion, and confusion over the very meaning and measurement of Islamic-ness in the business field? I will discuss and synthesize the major themes and arguments of the dissertation and reflect on some of the broader sociological implications of the analysis presented herein. I finalize the theorization of moral futures here, having devoted attention to the concept throughout the dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Building Blocks

Introduction

At least three theoretical approaches offer insights to understanding the Islamic economy. In what follows I first present the existing debate and discuss the limitations of the literatures. I then offer an alternative approach that is in a conceptual and theoretical infrastructure drawing on several traditions and fields of inquiry. Instead of enclosing my explorations within a single theoretical perspective, I draw concepts and analytical tools from economic sociology, political sociology, and contemporary studies of Islam. The goal is to contribute to the sociological theorization of moralized markets through articulations of moral futures.

Existing explanations

Identity and religious revivalism

Identity-based explanations of Islamism point out the significance of the the global renewal of religion in scaling up Muslim identity from the local to the global level

(Keyman and Koyuncu 2005; Mandaville 2001, 2005; Roy 2004). The authors make an important shift from the state-centric perspective on Islam to the one that positions “translocal” forces, such as diaspora communities, transnational social movements and global cities at the center of analyzing how the Muslim *umma* (the world community of devout believers) has been historically shaped and re-shaped. The globalization of Muslim identity refers both to the constant movement of people, ideas and material objects, as well as the stronger salience of Muslim identity. When applied to the formation of the Islamic economy this perspective, suggests that the commonly shared sense of solidarity among Muslim populations across different contexts paves the way for conducive economic cooperation and the creation of perpetual demand for investment and consumer practices that are distinctly Islamic. This perspective therefore assumes that the identity of those who relate to the broader Muslim community precedes market interests and determines economic choices (e.g., the choice of Islamic bank over conventional) by default.

Explanations along these lines have been offered by policy-makers in Central Asia, who attribute the rise of Islamic financial institutions and businesses to religious revival and recent political toleration of “Islamic activism” (Aliyev 2012). Among those who closely interrogate Islam in Central Asia, one prevalent trend has been to view vibrant religious formations in the post-Soviet period as a product of political dissent against the Bolshevik suppression of religion, or more recently against secular states that assault some forms of religious expression as “too radical” and “extremist.” This line of analysis, while insightful, tends to reduce religious expressions to reactive transnational formations, disregarding the accounts of devout Muslims as to what motivates their

religious zeal. Moreover, these explanations view the market for a pious Muslim lifestyle as an expected byproduct of the growing Muslim *umma*, without necessarily explaining how Muslims translate their piety into action on the ground, particularly in my case when it comes to their investment decisions and business strategies.

Scholars of Central Asia have also contributed to this strand of research, in particular through explorations of religious expression and piety. Studies have suggested that budding religious sensibilities in the post-Soviet context have merely added another layer to the moral grid, and that Muslimness is a “morality in the making” (Louw 2006). Informed by Talal Asad’s (1986) approach to Islam as a discursive tradition, scholars in this camp have emphasized the “struggles through which local actors themselves attempt to define what constitutes true Islam and a good Muslim” (Rasanayagam 2006). In this context, devotion to religious practice may be increasingly demonstrated through indicators such as the construction of mosques with local community fundraising activities (Rashid 1994), the proliferation of Muslim charity boxes installed in grocery and other retail outlets, and increasing pilgrimage trips to Mekka each year (Louw 2013; McBrien 2008; Privratsky 2001). Attending to the devotion of the growing numbers of locals to nurture their piety and to practice it outside of the confines of their households, some analysts have called them the “newly pious.”⁹ While insightful, these identity-driven have mostly focused on spaces that are marked as “religious” (e.g., medressas, mosques, veiling practices, etc.). They largely leave other spaces such as the market under-researched. Hence, they fall short of explaining how piety is actually translated

⁹ Julie McBrien’s in her ethnographic study of the rural South Kyrgyzstan (2008), uses the term “newly pious” drawing from Hefner’s work (2005).

into practice, if one assumes that piety is indeed what drives entrepreneurs' zeal within the Islamic business field.

In the last two decades, Central Asian countries have witnessed many changes that are typically included under the umbrella of globalization of Muslimness: significant increases in *haj* trips [pilgrimage trips to Mekka], local youth graduating from international Islamic institutions, and representatives of transnational religious movements opening their branches. Taken together, these translocal experiences certainly fuel aspirations and feelings of belonging to the broader Muslim *umma*. Accounts of globalized religious identity alone cannot, however, provide explanations of how Islamism gains political valence and becomes enacted in markets locally. My research reveals that the explanations offered by the "religious revivalist" perspective obscures the relationship between "ways of being Muslim" and economic practices. Rather than connecting an entrepreneur's decision to open a *halal* business or a state official's turn to their Muslim counterparts to secure investments as an indicator of his or her sense of belongingness to the global Islamic community, I suggest that we view the Islamic economy more broadly as a project oriented toward building appealing futures. What this requires then is asking: Who creates these visions of better futures and to whom do they appeal? Why do particular fictionalities gain valence, and how are they translated into practice? These questions require a more historically situated analysis that balances macro-level structural forces with the socio-political dynamics on the ground.

Political Economy

Other scholars have explained the emergence and expansion of Islamic markets through the lens of political economy (Imam and Kpodar 2010; Kuran 1995, 2004; Maududi

1975; Pollard and Samers 2007). Timur Kuran (1995, 2004) for example traces the origins of Islamic economics to 1930s late-colonial India, and views the critical support for Islamic financial institutions as a result of the oil boom in 1970s. We learn that Islamic modernists in their pursuit of anti-colonial project were involved in the construction of Islamic economic science (Maududi 1975). More recently, this perspective views the expansion of Islamic finance and other economic sectors as a consequence of rapidly rising oil prices after 9/11 (FSA 2007; Imam and Kpodar 2010). Excess liquidity in the Middle East combined with the inability of local financial markets to absorb that excess conditioned the creation of Islamic financial institutions that could accommodate the needs of larger markets (FSA 2007).

While studies steeped in political economy shed light on aspects of how the Islamic economy might have been promoted and validated, they still remain heavily focused on the question of how the Islamic model differs from the ‘conventional’ system (Henry 2004; Hesse, Jobst, and Sole 2008). In doing so, even those scholars that acknowledge the ideational core of faith-based economic practices still attempt to explore how Islamic businesses perform in comparison to their conventional counterparts when it comes to the material variables. For example, such analyses might try to evaluate Islamic banking practices such as evasion of interest-bearing debt and income (known as *riba*) solely according to their differences from traditional banks in terms of returns and risk-aversion (Kuran 1995, 2004). Hence, many studies suffer what Fang (2014) calls the ‘material bias,’ where individuals and organizations are assumed to be reacting in rational ways to variations in the geopolitical dynamics. If Islamic businesses are not found to differ on these material factors, or if their differences cannot be explained as rational

responses to geopolitical dynamics, then scholars in this perspective often dismiss the entire phenomenon as empty rhetoric and symbolisms.

There is much to learn from these accounts, nevertheless, as explanations rooted in the tradition of political economy provide ample tools for macro-analysis. These explanations do tend to demean the “importance of agency in the process of change,” however (Fang 2014:1185). As a consequence, they are limited in their ability to identify a constellation of actors who adopt, promote and contest different systems of knowledge, ideas and meanings around Islamic economy within historically situated contexts. To understand the circulation of knowledge, attribution of meanings, and enactment of practices, we need to supplement macro-analysis with accounts of actors who experiences this in their everyday. My project therefore seeks to attend to the narratives and rationales of “key economic agents” (Blyth 1997) and “norm entrepreneurs” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) who interpret and negotiate interpretations of religiously-informed economic system for the local context. This approach shares more in common with economic sociologists who focus on the micro and meso-levels, as well as with constructivist approaches within political economy. The value of both of these approaches for my project is particularly in their recognition of times of uncertainty, when old conventions may need to be redefined and new models of running a business or engaging in the market broadly must be defined “in the parameters of legitimate practices” (Fang 2014:1185). If it was not for this work of local-level articulation of desired futures and plausible pathways, along with the work of negotiating what new abstract values mean on the practical level, we would be hard-pressed to explain how

broader geopolitical forces translate into the shared understandings of market actors, or how those understandings center on the envisioned benefits of new economic systems.

Neoliberalism

Other scholars have interpreted Islamic economy as yet another instance when neoliberalism finds a medium through which to establish itself (Atia 2012; Atia 2013; Gokariksel and Secor 2015; Rudnyckyj and Richard 2009; Rudnyckyj 2013, 2014b).

According to the authors, neoliberalism is not entirely a monolithic or Western-directed project, but rather works through other ideological projects, including religion. The key insight of these studies is that religious thought and practice can be reconfigured to be compatible with principles of economic rationality, productivity and privatization.

Scholars of Turkish emergent economies view faith-based tenets and practices in the market as expanding through an “Islamic neoliberal ethic” (Gokariksel and Secor 2015). They interpret the merger of neoliberalism and Islam in this case as a result of state secularism that was widely enforced under the Kemalist regime that also pioneered rapid neoliberal reforms. In Indonesia, a similar convergence of Islamic tenets and marketization produced “spiritual economies” or “market Islam” (Rudnyckyj 2009, 2013, 2014a). In his study of the Krakatau Steel factory, Rudnyckyj (Rudnyckyj 2013, 2014b) demonstrates how state-owned enterprises came to use spirituality and capitalist managerial practices to increase the compliance of employees, who would work towards the common goal of globally competitive Indonesian steel.

Extending this line of inquiry, Mona Atia (2012, 2013) argues that pious neoliberalism, or the convergence of Islamism and neoliberalism is what drives the ever-growing demand and supply of Islamic economic practices. She defines Islamism in line

with Tugal's conception – as “a project that seeks to shape the state, economy and society along Islamic lines,” and neoliberalism as a policy enforcing “deregulation, privatization, and marketization (inspired by laissez-faire economics) that promoted the advancement of economic growth without regard for social equity” (Atia 2013:xvii). Focusing on three faith-based development organizations and their leaders in Cairo, Atia demonstrates how these actors adapted a specific iteration of neoliberal Islam. While some enjoyed financial support from upper middle class Egyptians and the volunteerism of youth movements, others promoted the importance of worshipping Allah and seeking benefaction in the present life. Yet another set of actors, however, sought to pave a way for religiously-informed economic development by facilitating entrepreneurship in the knowledge economy.

The key take-away point of these studies is that the merger of pious and capitalist sensibilities is not unique to Islam or Christianity, nor is it context specific. As Atia (2012) states, this notion can often be seen through the globalized religious discourse of volunteerism and faith that yet emphasizes economic rationality. Arguably, the same sensibilities of volunteerism, altruism and philanthropy have been central in the work of “impact investment” or socially responsible for-profit companies. According to the authors in this camp, this is due to the malleability of the neoliberal project, and its flexible adaptation to various cultural contexts.

While I am indebted to this strand of research in my understanding of how religious motivations and materialist aspirations can come together, they tend to over-emphasize intentionality and clarity in actors' recognition of an optimal pathway. Be it state-owned enterprises, faith-based charity organizations, or spiritual reformers – all

these actors are depicted as intentionally rational. My approach instead has a different departure point – drawing from my empirical data, and informed by economic and political sociology, I suggest that even actors who attempt to attain a utilitarian goal, may not necessarily know how to strategically attain that end. Their strategies, decisions and practices are then driven by fictions, or imaginaries of some future state of things, that may seem plausible or desirable.

Toward an Alternative Account

Each strand of research discussed above contributes to our understanding of Islamic economy. To move beyond the limitations of each literature, however, it is important to see how a faith-based market becomes something imaginable, thinkable and plausible through the dynamic interaction of the state, religious institutions and authorities, entrepreneurs and private regulators. This is possible only if we look at the work of these various sets of actors, who may be far from forming a “natural alliance” (Wolters 2013) initially, but nevertheless come to interact in the same field.

Fictionalities and Moral Futures

How do actors make decisions in economic contexts? Much of economic theory explains that actors heavily rely on rational calculations of the outcomes, as well as on practical calculations of the best means to attain desired goals. Economic sociologists have long debated this explanation, arguing instead that actors make decisions based on their culturally defined perceptions that are also shaped by institutions and networks. This debate goes back to the classical social theorists, and I therefore trace the lineage of my research project to Max Weber and his methods of economic inquiry.

I conceive of the Islamic economy broadly as an imagined framework that enables market actors to envision the desired end-goals as accomplishable as well as the means for attaining these goals as available to them. I contend that expectations of the future value are based on these imagined frameworks. This formulation is in line with a plethora of social studies that object to the assumptions of conventional economic theories about actors making choices solely based on rational calculations in order to optimize their chances of achieving higher return. To be sure, this assumption has been problematized even within economics, where authors like Keynes have pointed out that expectations “cannot be uniquely correct, since our existing knowledge does not provide a sufficient basis for a calculated mathematical expectation” (Keynes 1964:152). Theories of bounded rationality have later contributed to the idea that actors lack complete information that enables them to calculate the optimal means to aspired ends (Simon 1957). Behavioral economics and organizational studies also followed suit and initiated explorations of various cognitive biases, such as stereotypes, over-confidence, and group think, which skew actors’ perceptions of optimal choices. This push for the recognition that the decision-making process is actually driven by actors, who are not cognitively capable of making perfect choices. Weber’s classification of instrumental vs. value-rationality has also famously driven scholars to acknowledge that end-goals can also be shaped by actors’ religiously-informed values. Taking this as a departure point of my study, I extend Weber’s take on value-rationality using contemporary studies within economic sociology.

The concept of “moral futures” is based on the supposition that most of the decisions relating to economic transactions are made in conditions of uncertainty. Rather,

the decision-making of “intentionally rational actors is anchored in fictions” (Beckert 2013:220). By fictions, Beckert refers to actors’ aspirations to attain a utilitarian goal, but their incapacity to know how to strategically attain that end. Fictions are then imaginaries of some future state of things that are cognitively accessible for actors in the present through mental representation. Actors coordinate their present activities, drawing from these imagined and desired futures, as well as from a repertoire of strategies immediately accessible to them. Despite the high uncertainty of the actual attainment of these imagined futures, what Beckert calls “fictional expectations,” they motivate and direct actors.

Market actors in the field of Islamic businesses, for example, coordinate their present activities according to the desired expectations of the future value that those activities will produce. While the future values may involve both desires for higher profit, they also include desires for a secure life in the hereafter. Such faith might seem irrational, unless we consider that business strategies cannot be based purely on rational calculation, as the information available to the market actors is not perfect. Fictionalities and some of the calculations they engender therefore play a key role in mitigating uncertainty. Although akin to the concept of “bounded rationality,” which emphasizes the cognitive limitations of actors to access and analyze all the relevant data in the world, fictionalities represent more stories that make certain routes seem natural, optimal, practical and otherwise conducive. In other words, business strategies are shaped by the “articulation of stories about possible developments” (Sabel and Zeitlin 2002:15).

Financial markets are especially predisposed to future-oriented narratives, as was the case in the global financial crisis of 2008. Emphasizing the unjustified nature of

certain decisions, behavioral economists suggested that “high confidence tends to be associated with inspirational stories, stories about new business initiatives, tales of how others are getting rich” (Akerlof and Shiller 2009:55). More recent studies in economic sociology have alluded to a similar point on the level of confidence and good faith that key market players can construct. Mackenzie (2011) and Sinclair (2014), among others, have argued that credit rating agencies arose because of the collective belief among government organizations, investors, banks and customers in the technical possibility of managing the risks associated with credit. Exploring ABS and CDOs in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, Mackenzie (2011, p. 1830) contends that an analysis of the rise of credit-rating agencies would be incomplete if they did not include interpretations of shared belief “either in evaluation practices or in the ratings that were their products.” These studies remind us that certifiers and rating agencies, more than transparent measurements and evaluations, produce the shared sentiment of contained risks and the accountability of firms.

Finally, economic theories in general can be viewed as a form of storytelling in the economy (McCloskey 1990). These theories provide cause-effect explanations, as well as narratives about the motivations of actors and the future possibilities of present action. What is presented as “rational expectations” are in fact “fictional expectations,” for they are based on interpretations *as if* certain conditions were already present in the future.

In the present research, I emphasize the role of fictionalities in the rise of Islamic businesses locally and globally. I extend this view to business reports and policy papers that promote “Islamic finance” and “Islamic businesses” as “stable, viable and risk-

averse.” While some observers find claims about Islamic financial institutions’ cost-effectiveness and capacity to avert financial crises to be without basis (Beck, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Merrouche 2013), others in the Central Asian region and globally continue to propagate these imaginaries of the “Islamic” model of doing business as more beneficial in the long-run. Beckert and other authors who have employed the concept of fictionality in economic behaviors have neglected questions of why these fictions actually emerge, who catalyzes them, and to what end. I believe that these limitation can be overcome by incorporating insights from political sociology, namely the concept of “articulation.”

Articulation

Extending the studies of imaginaries in the economy, I argue that representations of what the future holds are the products of active articulation. Moral futures are not mere by-products of actors’ intrinsic religious identity and beliefs, but rather imaginative frameworks about what awaits one in the future based on present activities in the market and elsewhere. The concept helps us move away from synergist interpretations, that suggest that Islam and capitalism inevitably converge and manifest in “pious neoliberalism” (Atia 2012) or “market Islam” (Rudnickyj 2009). Recent interdisciplinary studies on “stories” and “narratives” in economic sociology (White 1992), economics (Akerlof and Shiller 2009; McCloskey 1990) and organization studies (Brown 2005) emphasize the central role of narratives and manner of their production in driving decision-making and economic practices of actors.

The concept of “articulation” helps us to shift analytically from the phase of understanding imaginative frameworks to the phase of how they are produced and acted upon. “Political articulation” in recent political sociology, refers to the process in which

political parties and other key actors autonomously explicate “the preferences, social cleavages, or epochal socioeconomic transformations of a given community” (De Leon, Desai, and Tugal 2009:193). According to these authors, Islamic mobilization in Turkey or Hindu nationalism in India should not be seen as mere reflections of existing social cleavages or reactionary social movements responding to economic uncertainties (Carter 1995) or rapid socioeconomic change (Chibber 1997; Kohli 1990). Instead, they contend that political practices contribute to the emergence of social formations (distinguished along class, ethnicity or religious affiliation), as political figures “naturalize some identities and collectivities and suppress others” (De Leon et al. 2009:194). The work of articulation helps explain how moral futures – imaginative frameworks of the future – come into being, incite market actors, and direct their investments of time and effort into certain paths.

The concept of articulation is helpful in three ways with regards to the emergence of the field of Islamic business. First, studies of political articulation promote the idea that imaginaries – ranging from policy regimes, developmental projects or popular demand for a certain desired futures – do not just happen spontaneously. Key actors do the work of integration – the activity that unites collectivities around certain identities. According to this perspective, we would be mistaken to view the Islamic economy as a by-product of the revived Muslim consciousness of the Central Asian population, who naturally aspire to express their belongingness to the global *umma*. Instead, we should take seriously the assertions of those in the articulation literature that “neither class, nor religious communities, nor ethnic groups have self-reproducing logics that bind them together” (De Leon et al. 2009:199, c.f., Brubaker 2004).

Key actors with vested interests perform the work of integration or articulation (Omi and Winant 1994). In that regard, the Islamic model of doing business, particularly in contexts such as post-Soviet Central Asia, was conceived as desirable and plausible by the upper echelon state officials and other “carrier” groups such as religious authorities and business associations. This dynamic did not go unnoticed by the scholars of Central Asia, who have attended to how ideas about Islam are “being augmented and channeled by post-Soviet state information apparatuses that articulate nationalist ideologies with a supposedly pre-Soviet, native, authentic ‘Islam of our forefathers’” (Liu forthcoming:5). Outside of the state apparatus, discourses about Muslimness are also “cultivating senses of national distinctiveness and pride, and of taking agency back from a colonial Russification and atheism” (Liu n.d.:5). Without this active process of articulation, which makes actual grievances and lived experiences more coherent and visible in the public space, an imaginary identification would not necessarily emerge, along with its mental representations of the alternative models for economic and social development.

Second, the concept of articulation accounts for the limitation of the “identity and religious revivalism” perspective by enabling explorations of the process through which otherwise similar groups that mobilize around seemingly the same identity may recognize and interpret political and economic opportunities differently. For example, Tugal demonstrates how Islamism in Turkey is not simply about ‘petty bourgeois populism.’ Rather, an Islamist stances are formed and acted upon differently as they become articulated by various groups who mobilized “different class interests and religious cravings” (2002:86). He identifies three categories, those who are proponents of *moral capitalism*, proponents of *alternative capitalism* and *moral anti-capitalism*. Moral

capitalism, is the most dominant ideology in Turkey according to Tugal, and is promoted by groups who believe in the virtues of the free market, yet are troubled by the social problems and anomie that it entails. These groups therefore attempt to recover social order by bringing in religiously-informed morality. The alternative capitalist stance, in contrast, aspires towards a socially just form of capitalism, where the political and economic resources are not consolidated in the hands of the few. Finally, moral anti-capitalists conceive of capitalism as a system that is “incapable of fulfilling the basic human needs” (Tugal 2002:101) and that weakens the collective sense of local communities.

The importance of these three typologies is in the drastic differences in which issues of morality, justice and better future are situated at the intersection of religion and economy. Borrowing from this conceptualization of articulation, I contend that the Islamic economy as a religious-moral project, is constituted as a multivalent framework, orienting diverse decisions, strategies and practices towards different moral futures. By turning to different articulations of moral futures, I am able to overcome the shortcoming of synergist perspective, by paying close attention to the co-existence of different and at times conflicting expressions of Islamism in the economy. Although religion informs economic action, it is far from leading to only one pathway.

The third way in which concept of articulation informs my research is the literature’s requirement that we position agents within structural conditions that either open possibilities or impose constraints. Desai (2001) for example, shows how the same leftist party in the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal, which ruled intermittently since India gained independence in 1947, differed drastically in their vision and and

practices of implementing policies that would eradicate poverty. She demonstrates the divergent success of the Communist Party in India in these two states in mobilizing sociopolitical blocs and implementing diverse policies. Desai attributes this divergence in part to different “social structure and the levels of organization of contending political actors” (Desai 2001:39). While this point is based on the well-established insight in the social sciences of considering both structure *and* agency, analysts of political articulation are particularly keen on positioning their actors within “concrete, historically specific setting” (Desai 2001:39).

Drawing from this insight and prompted by the formulations of my respondents, I pay particular attention to the structural changes of the post-Soviet period when examining the work of actors in constructing the Islamic economy in the Central Asian context. The very idea of “doing business,” and even more so of “doing business the Muslim way,” were politically prohibitive and inaccessible as cultural repertoires within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Such suspicions for autonomous enterprises and religious practices continue to this day, inhibiting the development of the Islamic economy, while other structural constraints actually facilitate the expansion of Islamic enterprise. For example, many of the upper-echelon state officials I interviewed spoke of the need to seek alternative sources of finance and investments in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008, which led to a push toward finding unconventional economic partners beyond the West, including Islamic financial institutions. Similarly, mosque imams referred to the expansion of mosques and the economic pressures of sustaining these organizations through private donations. Finally, entrepreneurs directly involved in Islamic business also spoke of their activities as something that was once unimaginable in

the past, and enabled only under the conditions of the shift from planned to market economy.

The conceptualization of moral futures that are sought as a result of the work of articulation, enables me to move away from essentialist interpretations that tend to boil down myriads of visions, expressions and practices into one unifying characteristic. Even just among the community of entrepreneurs, I demonstrate a range of reasons for running one's business in an "Islamic" manner. Some estimate that this model offers potentially higher margins of profit in the future; others genuinely believe in the inherent good of leading a "different and honest" business even in the context where uncertainty is usually dealt with through patronage and bribery; finally, a third group of entrepreneurs may see Islamic business as a form of livelihood that creates sustainable communities and contributes to the goal of building a moral future. Regardless of their stance, however, I argue that these entrepreneurs all choose to be in this market niche because they view it as a "moral futures" market.

Valuation circuits

Both economists and economic sociologists share the consensus that for market transactions to happen, there must be a shared understanding of the type of goods and services that are being sold and purchased, and that their quality is compliant with expectations. But what happens when "the quality of the goods we want to acquire is unknown, invisible, or uncertain" (Beckert and Musselin 2013:1)? How do producers, sellers and other market actors interact under such circumstances? Economists and economic sociologists have offered competing explanations for economic behavior under conditions of uncertainty. For my research, I use the term *valuation circuits* to describe

the means by which economic actors mitigate uncertainty as to the material and spiritual quality of “Islamic” products. I draw this term from Zelizer’s concept of “economic circuits,” which fits within a broader strand of thought within economic sociology that attends to the entangled interaction of sentiments and economic practices. Speaking specifically of valuation circuits integrates this strand economic sociology with other literatures that continue to investigate how moral authority is accumulated and exerted in various social fields.

The authenticity of Islamic financial products, *halal* commodities, and other goods and services that constitute the Islamic economy is far from uncontested. This sector generates considerable ambiguity and uncertainty over how to judge whether those goods actually comply with the claimed religious tenets. How can one be sure that the poultry sold in a supermarket, for example, was killed according to halal rules (Waarden and Dalen 2011; 2013)? Or how do you as a business owner know whether an Islamic bank from which you took out a loan is compliant with all of the religious tenets that you deem important? Such questions were ubiquitous in different sites of my fieldwork,¹⁰ as was the tacit recognition by my respondents that what is being judged is not just the material quality of products, but also the moral character of those involved in producing, distributing and offering those goods and services in the market.

In the field of Islamic businesses, actors invoke ideals of what constitutes “good Muslim behavior” or “clean business” in myriads of micro-activities and transactions. Such ideals manifest themselves when customers approach bazaar sellers with skullcaps

¹⁰ In my interviews I often asked my respondents to elaborate on which particular religious tenets they regarded important, and how that informed their choices in suppliers, ways in which they organized their production, their approach to hiring and retaining workers, and techniques of communicating their distinction to the broader audience?

on the assumption that they would have honest prices and not manipulate their scales, when a business owner decides to properly register her business with the state tax agency once she shifts to the “Islamic” model, or when producers and sellers alike share their insecurities over whether their commodities and services are in line with religious tenets. To understand how standards of quality for Islamic and halal goods and services are produced in conjunction with ideals of a Muslim lifestyle, we require an analytical apparatus that can account for the construction of the moral authority needed to evaluate, judge, measure, and validate both the consumer and the products consumed.

In this pursuit, I first turn to the strand in economic sociology that attends to the entangled interaction of sentiments and economic practices. At the core of these studies is the idea that economic activities are not merely lubricated by the social, but are informed by processes through which actors attempt to create, maintain and renegotiate their identities, intimate ties, and social order (Zelizer 2010). In this perspective, economic transactions not only involve an exchange of material resources, but also an exchange of “emotional resources” (Bandelj 2012) and “collective representations” (Wherry 2012). Adopting the concept from Alexander (2004), Wherry notes that the collective representations that are produced in economic transactions help members to then perform as “buyers and sellers, as givers and takers, as producers and consumers who deal with the sacred versus the profane, the magical versus the scientific, the passionate versus the methodical” (2012, p. 208).

Zelizer’s concept of economic circuits plays a central role in this literature. It refers to a certain type of interaction that occurs particularly when market actors face “significant collective problems of trust in the absence of central authorities that could enforce

agreements” (Zelizer 2010:307). Economic circuits are most likely to occur “when the costs of defection and misbehavior for long-term collective welfare rise” (Zelizer 2010:307). Distinct from networks, circuits have well-defined boundaries that the members themselves construct as they carry out a set of economic exchanges of goods, services, or claims. Zelizer’s “circuits” oppose Granovetter's (1983) concept of networks, the followers of which have largely neglected the content of social ties, i.e., how market actors negotiate, contest and enact the roles that they play (Wherry 2012). The relational approach that Zelizer promotes is more attuned to exploring shared meanings that market actors come to develop. In other words, circuits are about distinctive social relations among individuals, who carry out their economic activities by means of those social relations.

Zelizer’s “economic circuits” has served as the basis of a plethora of studies. Extending this line of research, other scholars have explored various circuits, including those among corporate managers (Morrill 1996), French factories with their circuits of concealed production and distribution (Anteby 2003), art dealers in Amsterdam and New York (Velthuis 2003), and contemporary global finance (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002). What unites these different circuits of commerce is their particular focus on the problem of collective action under uncertain or opaque official rules, and how social ties facilitate meanings to guide the actors. Thus, Anteby (2003, p. 234) uncovers circuits of clandestine production and distribution among workers in a French aerospace factory. Relations among workers produce tacit agreements of what are morally acceptable practices on the shop floor, such as understandings of what category of poaching is acceptable and unacceptable depending on the position of a worker in the official hierarchy. Velthuis (2003) demonstrates how the worth and market value of art pieces are created within specific

circuits. Immersed in these circuits, dealers, artists and buyers negotiate and share understandings about what is good quality art and how that intrinsic value should be translated into market price. Besides facilitating economic transactions, however, members of the circuit construct collective understandings of what distinguishes artists genuinely concerned “doing art for art’s sake” from those less concerned with the purity of art.

This example of “true art” demonstrates the link between producer, consumer, product, and ethic or lifestyle that similarly obtains in my cases, revolving around understandings and sentiments of proper ways of being Muslim. To expand this aspect of *valuation circuits*, I draw from the studies that view Muslim identities as constantly evolving rather than stable. The Islamic economy is just one among many sites in which Islam and Muslim practices represent an ongoing dialogue between different social fields – the key texts and authorized interpreters of those sources in one field, and practitioners of an “Islamic” lifestyle in other fields with their own logics. This perspective is in line with the studies of Muslimness as “a morality in the making” (Louw 2006) and *Islam as a discursive tradition*, an approach that was pioneered by Talal Asad (1986) and has since inspired a stream of insightful studies on Islam (see Moumtaz 2015 for review).

This approach is in direct contrast to the synergist interpretations, where Muslim identities and values are viewed as a stable condition or prism, which publicly inform economic practices once established and given freedom of expression. Instead of focusing on geo-political dynamics that shape debates about Islam, the scholars within this strand attend to “embodied individuals with dispositions and habits that are formed according to certain virtues via regular disciplines that are simultaneously mental and bodily” (Moumtaz 2015:128–129). This approach allows for the recognition of the broader fictionalities that

actors articulated around Islamic economy, as well as of the “struggles through which local actors themselves attempt to define what constitutes true Islam and a good Muslim” (Rasanayagam 2006).

Informed by economic sociology and these studies of Islam as a discursive tradition, I use the term of valuation circuits to explain how actors within the field of Islamic business mitigate the uncertainty around the material and spiritual quality of Islamic products, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the construction of Muslim lifestyles in the post-Soviet context. Valuation circuits, similar to Zelizer’s circuits of commerce, denote a circular flow of resources, where shared meanings and understandings of what constitutes “Islamic” goods and services are co-produced together with sentiments of what defines different forms and degrees of Muslimness. While the economic sociology literature is replete with examples of what I term valuation circuits, I contend that the the role of emotions and sentiments within these circuits is under-theorized, such as anxiety about the authenticity of one’s identity or the appropriateness of particular business activities. Valuation circuits help to explain the construction of mechanisms in the market that help to alleviate those feelings of uncertainty in economic transaction, but do so specifically through the creation of circuits that “outsource” the construction and enforcement of these standards to key actors that are viewed as having the requisite moral authority.

The concept of valuation circuits places emphasis on the difficulty of maintaining fictions without the reinforcement of other people acting plausibly. Producers and sellers alike in this moralized market attempt to perform sincerity and commitment in the market (according to organizational studies happens in many market and institutional settings,

(Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zelizer 2009, 2010). This point is akin to the “logic of confidence,” as articulated by Meyer & Rowan (1977), but it differs in that it emphasizes the emotive power of identities and how market activities can reinforce or dilute the sense of being a certain type of Muslim. In addition to facilitating shared understandings, valuation circuits also alleviate feelings of doubt and uncertainty around actual compliance with religiously informed tenets. In Chapter Five, I will examine how entrepreneurs in the market engage in the construction of shared meanings about carrying out “morally pure,” “appropriate” or “honorable” business practices as they aspire towards particular forms of moral futures. In Chapter Six, I will then turn to private halal certifiers, who ease the anxieties of producers and sellers with the authenticity and appropriateness of their business practices by taking on the moral responsibility of backing them. Hence, the certification process is facilitated by the valuation circuit of certification agencies, their accreditors and certified companies, but is also laden by emotions and generates a set of collective sentiments and representations. As a result, these market actors gain feelings of confidence about producing “halal” compliant goods and being “sufficiently good Muslims” in line with their envisioned moral future.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Methodology

Research Design

The goal of this dissertation is to study how a variety of market actors articulate, validate, and implement contending moral futures in the economy. These actors include not only entrepreneurs, but also state and religious authorities with interests in the nascent field of Islamic businesses. In line with these goals, I have focused on both the narratives and practices of market actors as they engaged in this moralized market niche. Given these research objectives, my methodology has been anchored in the qualitative approach to social inquiry. Two main methods in particular informed my study: the field-analysis approach found in organizational studies, and the extended case study method broadly employed in the social sciences.

The organizational field as a methodological approach has been popular within neo-institutional theory. Organizational theorists such as DiMaggio adopted and translated Bourdieu's work to demonstrate how organizations create and reproduce fields through their activities (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). As defined by DiMaggio and Powell, the concept of an "organizational field" refers to a set of organizations that are not only cognizant of each other, but also actively engage in "a recognized area of institutional life" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:64). Organizational fields are not simply constituted by horizontal linkages between similar organizations (e.g., all food caterers in one niche), but include a wider range of organizations that may be involved in a field in a

certain capacity (e.g., food caterers and their investors, contractors, suppliers and regulators).

In my research, I explored the dynamics of the field of Islamic businesses by attending to four important sets of actors: state officials, religious authorities, entrepreneurs/enterprises, and private certification agencies. The first two sets of actors perform most of the intellectual labor involved in articulating the moral futures that define the field, while entrepreneurs serve as carriers of those *imaginaries*, who implement religiously-informed business ethics in practice. Finally, private certification agencies act as “institutional entrepreneurs,” who seek to demonstrate their value to the field as a link or gatekeeper between theory and practice. They cannot usurp the authority of state officials, who have ultimate jurisdiction in regulating the market, but seek to gain popularity with entrepreneurs and draw from the expertise of religious authorities.

I must note, however, that I trace field interactions not from a bird’s eye view, but rather through the perspectives of people who are actively engaged in the field and make up the social fabric of these organizations. In this manner, my approach resonates with what Caroline Lee (2014) called the “inhabited institutions” approach, which emphasizes the ways in which ideas and morals are both created by people, and at the same time influence their thinking, decisions, and actions. I weave this approach into a historically-grounded analysis that treats larger economic processes as both orienting individual action, but also unfolding through individual experience, narratives and rhetoric. The field provides models of ethical and moral economic behavior on which individual actors draw, but is also composed of the personal and professional trajectories that these actors pursue while they are engaged in the Islamic economy. In this way, my methodological

approach is informed by what Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) suggest to be the full potential of Bourdieusian field analysis: I attend to individual lived experiences and trajectories (habitus), elucidate the resources and strategies which individuals utilize (different forms of capital), and finally, link individual decision-making and action to the macro-structural interactions that constitute the field.

The potential of the extended case study method informed my choice of qualitative methods over a large-N quantitative study, and inspired my epistemological stance. While a large-N approach would have ensured more generalizability of my data, the choice of focusing on fewer cases enabled me to engage in theory reconstruction. This method, most explicitly defined by Burawoy (1998), prioritizes 1) researcher engagement in the communities that one studies over “objective” detachment, 2) attention to process over attention to replicability, and finally 3) theory-building over generalizability of data. It teaches researchers to be sensitive to how micro-level experiences extend to the macro-level, and the other way around. In my cases, this approach requires attention to how localized understandings of Islam inform the decisions of social groups, and also how global and transnational forces come to shape local lived experiences. The extended case method thus fits well with my goal to reconstruct sociological theories of moralized markets through empirical cases.

My research primarily focused on Kyrgyzstan, and the bulk of the data was collected in its capital city of Bishkek, as well as the city of Osh in the Southern part of the country. After numerous respondents referred me to their colleagues and counterparts in Kazakhstan, however, I decided to act upon my own interest in researching the country as a second case. Thus, Kazakhstan’s capital city of Astana became an additional research

site, along with the former capital city of Almaty. Instead of treating these four cities in two neighboring nations as separate national cases as in a cross-national comparative analysis, I view them as a sample of the many integrated sites that together constitute one field. I draw from the narratives of my respondents in both sites, who consistently referred to each other as interlocutors in the expansion of Islamic business in the region. Most of this project is based on fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan from 2012 to 2015. The bulk of data was collected during my initial eleven-month fieldwork, from September 2012 to August 2013. I supplemented this data with a three-month follow-up research in the summer 2014, followed by a shorter one-month trip in 2015.

Access to and Navigation of the Field Site

This research provides an account from the standpoint of an “insider” – someone who was born and raised in Kyrgyzstan, who speaks both Kyrgyz and Russian natively, and to whom various respondents could relate to as “one of ours.”¹¹ My respondents frequently used Kyrgyz colloquialisms that indicate inclusion, referring to me as *karyndash* [younger sister, but in this context designating a friendly acquaintance], or making comments such as *bizdin ele kyz turbaisyngby* [it turns out you’re just one of us]. These colloquialisms were matched by efforts from respondents to assure me that they were comfortable opening their doors to me and talking about their experiences.

Access was more difficult to obtain at larger enterprises and bureaucratic organizations such as Islamic banks, microfinance companies, and government agencies,

¹¹ “*Nash*” [ours, in Russian] is a widely used shorthand across the post-Soviet space that refers to a common, transnational experience of post-Socialism. It has a connotation in this context similar to the phrase “one of us.”

and not all of organizations immediately welcomed my research. Employees in large, formal organizations often needed authorization from their department or company head to grant permission for interview, and bureaucracy in the region is famous for having an unspoken rule that anything unusual is prohibited unless specifically approved from above. Moreover, just as I began my fieldwork the government of the Russian Federation launched a new law on “foreign agents” in November 2012. According to the law, any organization that received foreign funding from abroad and engages in “political activity” must be registered as a “foreign agent,” a catchall term that would enable the government to stigmatize and criminalize the activities of various NGOs and academic institutes that had proliferated in the region with actual or alleged Western backing. The law was largely condemned by international observers and locals alike as a crackdown on civil society.¹² Such is the influence of Russia in the region that authorities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan immediately took note of the law, despite having no equivalent in their own countries, and began treating the work of NGOs and researchers from foreign institutions with greater suspicion. Legislators in Kyrgyzstan initially attempted to replicate the same law, but were eventually voted down in the Parliament in May, 2016. Nevertheless, the Russian law has had a cooling effect on independent research in the region, and fueled suspicions among local officials. I was cognizant, therefore, that some respondents could read my status as a US-based researcher as a sign of “otherness,” causing them to hesitate to share sensitive (or even banal) information.

¹² Source: <http://www.rferl.org/section/crackdown-on-ngos-in-russia/3272.html> - last accessed May 31, 2016.

As a result of these concerns, in many cases, I had to use my personal kinship, friendship and professional ties to establish my first connection with respondents. A phone call from such intermediaries tended to open doors for me, more easily than for some of my foreign colleagues doing research in the same context. I was also able to obtain institutional affiliation with the Central Asian Studies Institute of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) as well as the Economics department of the Kazakh Institute of Management, Economics and Policy (KIMEP). These formal affiliations with local institutions made it easier to reach out to potential respondents.

Bourdieu famously warned researchers in his study of French academics, that “by taking as our object of study the world in which we are implicated, we are forced to encounter a certain number of fundamental epistemological problems” (as cited in Anteby 2013:7). Many researchers, especially those who conduct their studies on their “home turf,” struggle as they try to balance between being engaged and local among the communities that they study, but at the same time distanced and objective. I faced similar challenges during my fieldwork, and balanced my engagement by alternately conducting interviews and engaging in participant observations, all the while reviewing my notes and revisiting theories that informed my project. In this manner, I strove to avoid reifying concepts or taking observations in the field for granted, and remain constantly engaging in theoretical reflexivity as a scholar. In this sense, being based outside of the region gave me the necessary distance to be able to view the familiar from an “outsider” perspective when necessary.

I interviewed various groups on similar themes to ensure that I incorporated multiple perspectives of the field and the individual and organizational trajectories that

contributed to its dynamics. I moved continually between different contexts, from Islamic banks whose offices were located on the top-floor of high-rise buildings in Almaty, to groups of small entrepreneurs at bazaars in Bishkek. I attempted to keep the balance between “engagement” and “distance” in mind in every setting, even as I accumulated a core group of respondents who made accessing new organizations and receiving their consent for interview became easier. I sought at all times to negotiate the challenges of these different research sites with a reflexive awareness of my positionality as a young, female scholar who could easily navigate the social terrain in Central Asia, but who also obtained most of her post-graduate degrees abroad.

While my ethnicity, upbringing, and fluency in local languages were beneficial, my gender, age, and style of dress made some interviewees take me less seriously. This was particularly true in male-dominated contexts and in meetings with imams and their assistants. Religiously conservative respondents, for example, did not feel comfortable being interviewed by a young woman, despite my efforts to dress in “modest” clothing. To gain access to such respondents and facilitate interviews, therefore, I hired two male research assistants who were also fluent in both Russian and Kyrgyz to accompany me on some of my trips. While these assistants did not serve as interpreters, I found that some respondents would speak more openly and with ease in the presence of another man. Additionally, research assistants were able to give me feedback after our interviews on the wording of questions and the overall reception of the questionnaire by our respondents. After our interviews were done, some of the respondents invited my assistants to come join them in more casual settings, such as soccer matches that were organized by informal networks of like-minded entrepreneurs. Similar follow-up

invitations were extended to me as well, but mostly in my meetings with women, who would consider it important for me to meet their religious teacher or their community over dinner. Hence, having male research assistants helped me to move beyond the front stage of an often male-dominated field, and gather extended information about the informal gatherings and communities of male respondents.

Sampling Method

I utilized a combination of sampling methods in this research, namely haphazard, snowball and purposive. The choice of sampling method changed over time as the research progressed. I initially approached respondents without knowing what categories or narratives of Islamic business would emerge out of interviews. The major criterion that I had initially was respondents who owned, managed or had similar experience running a for-profit company that was identified as Shariah-compliant, halal or otherwise Islamic. I especially relied on the business networks of entrepreneurs themselves to recruit new respondents through snowball sampling.

The map of the field became clearer half a year into my fieldwork, and I gradually shifted to purposive sampling that coincided with the themes that were emerging from my interviews. Informed by theoretical discussion, I discerned that my respondents employed three broad orientations to the field of Islamic business – Capitalist Islam, National Islam or Spiritual-Islam. These orientations were not mutually-exclusive, in that respondents drew off of them in combination depending on the topic of discussion, but different categories of market actors tended to rely more heavily on one orientation or the other.

To achieve more equal representation of these orientations, I began employing purposive sampling, according to which selection happens “on the basis of [one’s own]

judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative” (Babbie 2004:183). Hence, I used the full registry of five hundred companies that *Jash Ishkerler Associatsiyasy* [Young Entrepreneurs Association in Kyrgyz, JIA hereafter] generously shared with me to access entrepreneurs who more widely employ discourses of Capitalist Islamic. In contrast, I relied on of my contacts in the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement to find entrepreneurs who espoused a more Spiritual orientation to Islamic entrepreneurship. I also made use of online resources such as the forum www.muslimbiz.kg, which serves as a platform for pious Muslims and advertises the services of various “Shariah-compliant” businesses. Finally, I mostly relied on snowball sampling and official channels to access state and religious officials who promote a more nation-centric orientation to Islam in the market.

Imams were easier to access, because they are mostly associated with registered mosques. In this case, the sample frame was constituted by the registry of mosques, which I obtained from the State Agency on Religious Affairs in Kyrgyzstan. Within purposive sampling, a sample frame represents a “list or quasi list of elements from which a sample [was] selected” (Babbie 2004:199). The same was true of government agencies. I relied on interviews as well as media accounts to make a list of all relevant agencies that were engaged in the Islamic business field, such as the National Bank, Ministry of Economic Development, Sanitary-Epidemiological Station and others. These sampling techniques were most appropriate for the goals of the research, which were not to draw causal links between individual experiences and independent variables that might have determined them, but rather to explore in-depth the meaning-making processes

among actors who stood at the intersection religious-tenets, piety and profit-seeking in post-Soviet realities.

Data Collection

Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with over 130 respondents in my two national cases. These respondents included the representatives of government agencies, imams, entrepreneurs, and representatives of private halal certification agencies. As a data-collecting tool, semi-structured interviews are considered particularly effective when researchers seek to understand “perceptions of participants, or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events” (Berg and Lune 2012:19). As the questions and problems raised in this project were multi-dimensional, they presupposed gaining diverse attitudes from respondents. This method therefore allowed me to ask questions “in a systematic and consistent order,” while at the same time leaving “sufficient freedom to digress” that is to “probe far beyond the answers to [my] prepared and standardized questions” (Berg and Lune 2012:17). Interviews, on average lasted between fifty and seventy minutes. Out of 130, approximately 90 were recorded to an audio-recorder with the permission of respondents, and later transcribed. The remaining interviews were transcribed directly while conducting the interview, either when respondents did not consent to be recorded, or in the case of opportunistic interviews, which I happened to conduct “on-the go,” without anticipation or previous preparation. In such instances, I relied on my notebook and took notes.

Participant observation

The goal of the participant observations in which I engaged was to get a sense of the particular internal etiquette and dynamics which bind owners/managers and employees of Islamic businesses together. Paying particular attention to how people dressed, how they referred to each other, in which language they conversed, and what the recurring problems they seemed to be concerned about, I was better able to capture how broader moral commitments and pursuits came to be emphasized or silenced at various stages.

Thanks to the invitation of the director of Kompanion Invest, an Islamic microfinance company in Osh, I spent about a month in their main office. In addition to observing how employees held meetings with customers, I shadowed teams on trips outside of the office, through which they recruited customers and made assessments of potential customers' property to decide their creditworthiness. I similarly shadowed the employees of the private halal certification agencies as they inspected the companies that they had certified. Furthermore, I also engaged in participant observation in various Quran study groups, informal meetings and dinners, and sermons, to which I was invited by some of my respondents. Finally, when I returned to some of my respondents' work places after initial interviews, I was able to make additional observations of the work setting and relations among the owners/managers and employees.

The use of secondary materials

The most common and recurring question that I receive when presenting my research, was "whether one should take the words of respondents at face value." It is true that social researchers face difficulties and dilemma when it comes to respondents' words vs. their actions. For this reason, my research design did not simply rely on interviews, but

actively sought to triangulate between interviews, observations of practices, and secondary sources for corroboration. This triangulation, incorporating media accounts and public relations materials, also allowed for a more complete depiction of organizational and field-level dynamics. These materials represented companies in various lights, from official publicity to the comments of concerned critics about religious radicalization in public life. I also drew important figures and details from secondary sources such as policy reports and newspaper articles, including the dates of certain laws passed that involved the field of Islamic business, or estimations and projections of the growth of the Islamic economy locally and globally.

I accessed these sources using two databases that store government documents and media, *Toktom* in Kyrgyzstan and *Paragraf* in Kazakhstan. Using key words such as “halal Bishkek,” “halal Almaty,” “halal Astana,” “Islamic business Kyrgyzstan” and “Islamic business Kazakhstan” I was able to collect 253 news articles and policy reports for Kyrgyzstan, and 458 similar items for Kazakhstan. These data served as an important counter-balance in my analysis to the interviews that I gathered, for they reflected the general tenor in public discourses around the emergence and establishment of Islamic businesses. I must emphasize that I did not treat media sources as authoritative or objective sources of factual data. Rather, they served as artefacts of the public image of Islamic businesses constructed by the mass media. My research never sought to study public opinion about the Islamic economy directly, and thus I do not use these sources to establish causal links between media and public opinion. The public is inevitably implicated by the sheer growth of this economy and the moral futures it has come to propagate in society over the past decade, and various segments of the public greet these

developments differently. I therefore treat media and policy sources as elements of interpretive work, through which the actors involved in the nascent field actively produce the very conditions of the Islamic economy in which they participate. Secondary sources, I believe, provide “social facts” through which “local realities are accomplished” (Strauss and Corbin 1998:143).

Ethical issues

At the stage of data collection, I was sure to involve participants only with their informed consent and on a voluntary basis. Thus, I made sure to explain to participants their rights as well as responsibilities linked to me as a researcher, and to them as participants.

Moreover, I made sure that respondents had a full understanding of the potential risks involved (Babbie 2004:64) by informing them of the research goals and objectives, as well as some of the sensitive interview questions. Respondents were told that participation is fully their own choice and that they could interrupt me for clarification if interview questions were not clear to them; that they could choose not to answer questions that they felt were too sensitive; that their names and other identifiers would be changed to guarantee their confidentiality, and finally, that the data would be used only for the purposes of my research.

After obtaining the data, to ensure the confidentiality promised to my respondents, I kept all audio and transcribed versions of interviews securely stored on my personal, password-protected notebook computer. Moreover, I ensured that transcriptions of interviews did not contain any identifiers that would reveal the identity of respondents. All crucial identifiers such as names and work places were changed when presented in the report, while real identifiers were kept in a separate file. I use the real names of

respondents only in those instances when they specifically asked me to do so, or when respondents were well-known public figures who have also agreed to go by their real name.

Limitations of the research project

Due to its design, this project does not represent the voices of all the actors involved in the field of Islamic business. Furthermore, as I sought to understand the interpretations and experiences of those who are engaged in the process of constructing, interpreting and implementing Islamic tenets in the economy, the research leans towards those who are proponents rather than opponents of this moralized market. Given a chance to extend the project, I would focus on each subset of actors in more depth. One potential direction for new research therefore is exploring how mosques subsist themselves, and how and by whom financial resources get distributed and earmarked for different activities within the national Muftiate structure. Alternatively, another direction would be to study those who seeks exit strategies from the field of Islamic business, and shifts back to the “conventional” mode of running their business after growing disenchanted with the Islamic business model. This dimension would reveal how articulations of Islamism in the market fail to enroll some entrepreneurs fully, and for what reason.

Finally, the research does not adequately address the negotiations between the different levels of state officials, who often have divergent interests in relation to the field of Islamic business. Upper-level state officials may promote and legitimate Islamic finance and commerce, for example, because they represent sources of revenue for the central government, while mid-rank state officials who must enforce order in the market continue to treat certain entrepreneurial practices in the Islamic business field with

suspicion (e.g. the rejection of immunizations by some Muslim daycare centers). Despite these limitations, however, I believe that the research project provides a self-contained picture of the Islamic economy, for in the end, all social studies are “intrinsically incomplete” (Geertz 1973:29).

A Final Note

In his recent ethnographic book “Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh” (2012), Morgan Liu has rightly noted that the social analyses of post-Soviet Central Asia have been skewed by the macro-scale approaches. Post-Soviet transformations are often broadly explained through grand narratives of “the Great Game” or transition to Western-ideals of democracy and the free market amidst corruption and nepotism. I fully agree with Liu’s contention that macro-level analyses tend to neglect the actual processes through which change occurs among individuals and in organizational and communal aspirations. Though this research aims to depict the larger story of how Islamic economies can emerge and gain traction even in unexpected contexts, I do so by paying attention to how local actors themselves have imagined “alternative possibilities” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:6–7). Although I start this dissertation from the accounts of those who sit at the commanding heights of their countries, I move to the level of business associations, formal and informal alliances and communities, and individual entrepreneurs. In other words, the bulk of the research addresses the realm where parsimonious and clean-cut theories cannot always generate easy answers.

CHAPTER THREE

Articulating National Islam: State Officials

Introduction

The Islamic economy represents a confluence of two spheres toward which the Soviet Union and many of its successor states have had an ambivalent relationship: free enterprise and religious freedom. The conventional view of Soviet governance remains that of strict, totalitarian control of all spheres of life, both public and private. Scholars continue to reduce the relationship between the Soviet state and religion to one of persistent antagonism and hostility, focusing on the antireligious campaigns that were central to the early Bolshevik party. In economic life, meanwhile, the Soviet Union's state-planned economy is thought to have left little to no room for private businesses.

Given this background, observers of contemporary Central Asian states tend to interpret these states' policies as continuations of the Soviet legacy of central control. Many scholars and analysts assume that these governments generally seek to retain their strong-secularist hold over public life and suppress activity in the religious domain. In the economic sphere, observers note the seeming lack of free enterprise, with the economies of all Central Asian states dependent mostly on resource extraction, migrant remittances, and loans from the IMF and other Western sources of capital.

Neither of these depictions are completely misguided, yet they offer a picture painted in such broad strokes that it conceals more than it reveals. These perceptions of the Soviet past result in no small part from the Soviet state's own claims to greater

control than it actually exerted over private life. Scholarship that looks beyond the rhetoric of the Soviet state and its many detractors, however, presents a far more dynamic relationship between the Communist Party and its putative nemeses – religion and free enterprise.

In my analysis of public policy in the spheres of Islamic business, I draw from an extensive interdisciplinary body of research that challenges these prevailing perceptions of both the Soviet period and contemporary governance. Recent scholarship on the Soviet period in Central Asia suggests that Soviet state policies were far from uniformly antagonistic toward Islam (or any other religion for that matter). Instead, this scholarship suggests that top-down regulation of religion oscillated between antagonism and partnership throughout the Soviet period. Within the planned economy, five and ten year planning cycles presented similar oscillation between greater and lesser degrees of central control, as the Central Planning Committee sought to strike a balance between encouraging dynamism and containing autonomy. Taken together, these analyses of the Soviet Union's religious and economic policies allows us to examine religious regulation as part of a broader, value-laden developmental project. Investigating these variations in central control also helps to make better sense of the post-Soviet Central Asian states' "sudden turn" to Islamic markets in early and mid-2000s.

The newly emerging literature that explores Islamic economy in Central Asia tends to focus primarily on the "puzzle" of why these states would embrace the Islamic economy, particularly Islamic finance and investment, given their Soviet background. The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan first obtained their membership with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB hereafter) in 1993 and 1995, respectively, and by 2003

the IDB provided investments of \$65 million and \$76 million to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, respectively, (Gresh 2007, 3–4).¹³ While inflow of capital from IDB was primarily designated for the construction of roads, dams and other forms of physical infrastructure, starting from early-2000s these Central Asian states also welcomed Islamic banks, such as *Al-Hilal* in Almaty, Kazakhstan and EcoIslamic Bank in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. At the same time as these governments were courting Islamic sources of finance, however, they were also engaging in the systematic oppression and exclusion of certain Islamic movements and groups that were not aligned with the state’s vision of “moderate” Islam, that brand of nationally-inflected Hanafi Islam that is broadly designed and promoted by the state apparatus (Jones Luong 2004; Khalid 2007; Naumkin 2005). Why would these governments turn to Islamic investors and “Islamic money,” while being so cautious and stringent about Islamic religious movements and organizations?

Scholars and policy analysts have suggested two major explanations. Some analysts have argued that the policies on Islamic financial institutions and businesses speak to an openness toward “Islamic activism in general” (Aliyev 2012:4), concluding that this openness to Islamic finance results from a higher tolerance of activism in religious sphere generally. In contrast, others have contended that the Central Asian states’ seeming “openness” to Islamic finance and business is in fact driven by its utility as a viable alternative source of cash flows and tools for diversifying investment portfolios (Wolters 2013). Neither explanation is far from what various state officials themselves have voiced in the media, and both are correct in focusing on Islamic finance as a locus of the state’s efforts. State leaders have primarily focused on this subsector as a

¹³ Kyrgyzstan became an IDB member in 1993 and Kazakhstan became an IDB member in 1995. Kazakhstan also hosts the IDB’s regional office in Almaty (Gresh 2007:3-4).

means to govern the broader Islamic economy. Other subsectors, such as halal food production or Shariah-compliant hotels for example, have also received some state attention, but they are on the margins of official state rhetoric. It is for this reason, that I focus on Islamic finance in this chapter.

These existing explanations tend to focus only on the contemporary state discourse and policies, however. Again, this openness to Islamic finance is only puzzling if we imagine a uniformly antagonistic history between the Soviet past and religion. My approach instead is informed by close attention to the historical trajectory of Central Asian states' policies towards both religion and economy throughout the Soviet period. Only in the light of their historical paths are we better able to understand why both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's leadership have shown their favoritism toward Islamic finance and businesses starting from mid-2000s. This context also helps to explain why this support prioritized larger banks and economic projects, and constrained or neglected the many smaller and medium-sized private businesses with a distinct "Islamic" identity that have mushroomed in the Central Asian market during the same period.

In what follows, I first trace the historical background of state policies within the fields of religion and the economy, starting from the early Soviet period and progressing through independence in the 1990s. Drawing from historical accounts, I demonstrate that the Soviet state, including the Central Asian Soviet Republics, neither had a uniformly antagonistic relationship with organized religion, nor succeeded in eradicating religious institutions and carriers over the course of its seventy year rule (Tasar 2012). I then move to discuss how state officials in independent Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan strove to project and control their nations' Muslim identity in both local and international arenas

(Bissenova 2016; Huskey 2003). I show that policies within both economy and the religious sphere are best understood as facets of these state officials “identity projects” as scholars of nationalism would say (Abdelal 2001:152). Finally, I discuss how the state’s efforts to promote a national Islamic orientation found an affinity with “capitalist Islam,” which frames the Islamic economy as an alternative model of development to liberal democracy and Western capitalism. In the eyes of state bureaucrats, Malaysia, Qatar and other states in the Gulf present examples of progressive economic agendas that are apolitical, neutral on issues of authoritarian politics, and explicitly articulated as “non-Western.”

The analysis in this chapter is facilitated by the conceptual tools of “moral futures” and “articulation.” As discussed in the previous chapter, moral futures are “fictions in practice” - particularly in economic action. According to (Beckert 2011), fictions are not simply things that are not meant to come true, but rather mental representations of certain desired outcomes that coordinate present activities accordingly. This concept is particularly helpful in explaining why upper-echelon state officials promoted an “Islamic” model in the economy, without necessarily having empirical evidence that Islamic financial institutions performed better than conventional financial institutions or that Islamic businesses were more profitable.

This chapter is not intended to suggest that the Islamic economy in Central Asia was merely a top-down state project. Neither do I wish to leave the readers with the understanding that the state’s activities were so successful in establishing the “fiction” of Islamic economy that the remaining market actors simply “bought into it.” Instead, I aim to show why and how state officials have contributed to the articulation of Islamism in

the market domain, to the benefit of various business cliques and religious authorities that I will discuss more extensively in subsequent chapters. I will conclude the chapter with observations on how the state rhetoric and policies have diminished spiritually oriented Islam, consigning this orientation to the margins of the political field. For the community of entrepreneurs who express their affinity for more spiritually-oriented Islam, emphasizing the centrality of their Muslim identity and ethical values in their businesses, the states' policies have had divisive effects, tilting the playing field in favor of the larger Islamic banks and projects.

Historical Background: State Policies towards Religion and Enterprise, 1900-1990

Islamic knowledge and practice in Central Asia goes back to the 13th century, when the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara (in the territory of contemporary Uzbekistan) were recognized as historical centers of Islamic civilization in the region¹⁴. The influence of these regional centers on the territories of contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan can be traced to the 19th century, when nomadic tribes fell under the control of the Kokand khanate and its Muslim influence. Even as mosques started appearing in these territories, however, the penetration of Islam was surface-level according to historians (Dorobekova, Mokrynin, and Ploskikh 1993), with the southern, agricultural regions of contemporary Kyrgyzstan more committed to religious practices than most of the nomadic populations of the North. Ironically, the next great push for the establishment of Islam in the region was propagated by Tsarist Russia, which defeated the Kokand khanate

¹⁴ The cities of Bukhara and Samarqand had been conquered by Alexander the Great in 329 BCE, and Sassanians around 260 CE and later by Mongol empire in 1220. In 1370, the founder of the Timurid Empire, Timur (or Tamerlane) conquered and turned Samarqand into the capital of his empire.

in 1876. Russia sought to establish loyalty to its rule through linkages with the local Central Asian elite, whose territories were incorporated into the Russian Empire (Anderson 1999). From St. Petersburg, the Imperial government gave local Muslim authorities permission to establish mosques across the region, and to promote Shariah-law courts over traditional courts of elders that held customary authority and were deeply embedded within kinship networks.

The economy of late Tsarist Russia tends to be characterized as capitalist market economy (within which the state played a major role, however), where peasant households were expected both to pay taxes, and to subsist independently (Davies, Harrison, and Wheatcroft 1994). With the 1917 revolution, however, these territories were gradually incorporated into Soviet economic planning and statecraft. What is now known as Kyrgyz Republic or Kyrgyzstan, for example, was gradually incorporated into the USSR as the Red Army overcame the resistance of the White Army that was loyal to Tsarist Rule. The territory was granted autonomous status in the 1920s as a federated territory of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, and then attained the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR, the highest level of autonomy within the Soviet Union) in 1936 (Brower and Lazzerini 1997; Martin 2001).

The Bolsheviks had an ambitious developmental mission that included both economic and social objectives. Economic planning presented aspirations for rapid industrialization and increased agricultural output, while social policies outlined goals for enlightening the population and providing near universal welfare. Initially, this Soviet project closely fit the totalitarian characterization that scholars to this day attribute to the Soviet Union. Under the umbrella of these overarching goals, the Bolsheviks established

a highly centralized planned economic system in the first two decades of their rule (1917-1936), wherein the state formally owned most industry and aimed to have total control over all economic activities. In practice however, this planned economy reinforced an emerging illicit market, which facilitated the circulation of a wide variety of goods (Davies et al. 1994). The Soviet state nationalized industry, forced peasants into collective farms (*kollektivnye khozyaistva*) and pursued an aggressive campaign aimed at eradicating religion, which represented competition to the hegemony of the Communist ideology (Kalinovsky 2015). Religion, in the view of orthodox communists, would only obstruct the accomplishment of this dual economic and social mission. Lenin and the leadership of the Bolsheviks believed that weakening religious institutions, or “freeing” the Soviet subjects from the weight of their past, would ensure the successful implementation of their economic goals (Kalinovsky 2015). Subsequently, the institutional basis of religion was battered through the destruction of mosques, churches, prayer houses and religious schools, and the dissemination of propaganda that religion was a relic of backwardness (Tasar 2012).

These campaigns took on a distinctively anti-Islamic character in Central Asia, which was among the five geographic areas within the Soviet Union that had a high concentration of Muslims.¹⁵ Islamic institutions and practices varied greatly within the region, however, with the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara serving as historical centers of Islamic civilization on the one hand, and extensive nomadic communities of Kazakhs

¹⁵ The other four regions included what later became Tatarstan, with its urban center of Kazan purged by the Ivan the Terrible in mid-16th century; Siberia and its Muslim communities; the Northern Caucasus (including modern republics of Chechnya and Dagestan within the Russian Federation) that were heavily influenced by the Arab Middle East; and the Southern Caucasus (including Azerbaijan) with its predominantly Shiite Muslims influenced by the Iran and Iraq’s brand of Islam (King 2008).

and Kyrgyz practicing a more nominal brand of Islam mixed with their own animistic customs on the other. Without much regard for the diversity of Islamic culture, the Communist leadership launched an indiscriminate attack on religious leaders and institutions. Starting in 1917, this attack moved from more moderate forms under the guidance of Lenin, who believed religious authorities could be coopted,¹⁶ to increasingly aggressive approaches in in the late 1920s, when Stalin came to power. However, as I will discuss later, even Stalin's approach fluctuated from stringent to official toleration of moderate forms of Islam in the region.

Starting from 1920s, the Soviet leaders mainstreamed the repression of religion, tearing down mosques or repurposing them for other needs, and assaulting religious authorities (Khalid 2007). This general attempt to weaken institutions of religion went in hand with other policies however, where the state still tried to co-opt Muslim religious scholars, rather than merely eradicating them. Shoshanna Keller (2001) notes for example, that in early 1920s religious authorities were invited to work with the Soviet bureaucrats on new codes of civil law, and were also permitted to run a certain number of mosques and schools. Towards late 1920s however the state officials had a stronger strike. As Marian Kamp reminds us, "Party activists eliminated Islam's built spaces in villages [and cities alike], by putting mosques to new use as storehouses, or by tearing them down" (2010:511). Through her oral history with older generations who lived to see the rapid transformations imposed by the Bolsheviks, Kamp highlights that the most common recollection, particularly among village residents in Uzbekistan, was that their mosques were closed in early 1930s. Some of the mosques, especially larger ones located

¹⁶ Due to Lenin's caution of not ostracizing ethnic minority groups, Islam is believed to have fared better than Orthodox churches in this period (Greene 2009).

in city centers, survived the purge, but nevertheless, the “institutional bases for Islamic practice were severely damaged” (Kamp 2010:506).

Imams faced various fates. Some were arrested, some were shot or exiled, and others succeeded in moving to other places and reinventing themselves as collective farm workers. Keller (2001), who studied Muslim functionaries in Uzbekistan, suggests that an estimated 14,000 Muslim religious authorities disappeared in one way or another. Such estimations have not been offered for Kyrgyzstan, the country of focus for this project, but it is reasonable to believe that the pattern was consistent with what was happening in its neighboring countries. Kamp, proposes that in some places imams remained or returned to their communities. She concludes that it is difficult to make any “definitive statements about how many really were exiled to other parts of the USSR, or were sent to prison camps, or were shot, and how many remained” (Kamp 2010:524). While the old imams faced a variety of fates, some of them managed to escape a tragic ending to their careers and lives, and even continued their work, passing on religious education to younger generations.

Stalin’s New Economic Policy (NEP) emphasized *de-kulakization* (eradicating wealthy peasants) and increasing the speed of industrialization. Throughout the 1920s, the state continued to manage practically all aspects of the industry, but the state-owned industrial giants also traded with the 25 million private peasant households through a market, which was a hybrid of private and state-owned enterprises (Davies et al. 1994). Starting from the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s however, processes of industrialization went hand-in-hand with forcibly combining individual peasant households into collective farms. Within these Union-wide processes, extensive

communities of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples were forced to settle, and were arranged by Soviet anthropologists into mutually-exclusive nations whose boundaries had less to do with ethnic composition than with strategies of divide and rule (Cummings 2013; Levy 2016). The Kazakh and Kyrgyz nations emerged as distinct entities only in this period, to a great degree as products of Soviet Nationalities Policy (Martin 2001).

The policy of forcing a sedentary lifestyle instead on nomadic pastoralists produced a massive famine in 1932-33, which wiped out at least one quarter of the Kazakh population and affected Kyrgyz nomadic communities as well. Once collective farms became established, however, the Central Asian region became a crucial source of agricultural products for the entire Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and the other Central Asian Republics became the largest suppliers of certain key crops for the Soviet economy, providing close to 90% of the USSR's cotton, 47% of its rice, and 35% of its fruits and vegetables (Craumer 2003). The state began investing in large infrastructure projects in 1930s, such as building hydro-electric dams in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These projects were aimed in part to address the irrigation needs of the growing agricultural sector and the uneven distribution of water resources in Central Asia, but also made electricity accessible even in remote parts of the region (Feaux de la Croix and Suyarkulova 2015). In short, the state envisaged and implemented grand modernization projects in all corners of Central Asia during the early days of Soviet rule. The spiritual constitution of society was no exception to these projects.

In the name of modernization and civilization, the Communist Party attacked the symbolic and institutional core of organized religion throughout the early period of Soviet rule. The Party demolished or repurposed mosques, attacked Muslim practices

such as veiling, disbanded religious courts, and assaulted religious authorities. While many of the imams and other religious authorities were targeted primarily as carriers of values and ideals incompatible with the Soviet ideology, others were blamed outright for attempts to mobilize anti-Soviet rebellion.¹⁷ This period represents the high point of the Soviet project to transform society according to “revolutionary” values and “scientific socialism.” By the end of the 1930s, a more conservative cadre of Party elite was coming into power, confident in the security of Soviet rule and willing to make deals with less enthusiastic Soviet citizens.

During the Second World War, the Communist Party had to revise their economic and religious policies under Stalin’s guidance. A large share of resources was devoted primarily to the war effort, and hence away from public welfare. Historians suggest that Stalin turned to religion to bolster the Party’s popularity, as he had to find an ideological force that would amplify the Communist call to fight for the fatherland. In his work “Stalin’s Holy War,” the historian Miner cites Solzhenitsyn, who stated, “from the very first days of the war Stalin refused to rely on the putrid decaying prop of [Marxist-Leninist] ideology. He wisely discarded it...and unfurled instead the standard of Orthodoxy – and we conquered” (Miner 2003:7). Once state’s the grip on the Russian Orthodox Church loosened, greater freedoms followed for the institutional basis of Islam as well. Stalin implemented religious reforms that facilitated the establishment of officially legitimized religious organizations, which were incorporated into the Soviet governing bureaucratic apparatus (Tasar 2012). One of them was the Russian Orthodox

¹⁷ Ismailis for example, a Muslim community that resided in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, with their spiritual leader the Agha Khan based in India, were blamed in aiming to mobilize anti-Soviet rebellious forces, even though there was little evidence that actually validated such suspicions (Tasar 2012).

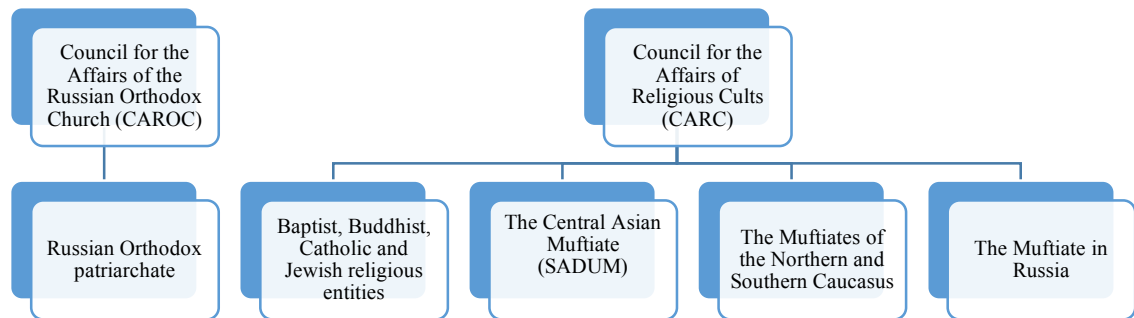
patriarchate in Moscow. In regard to Islam, four organizations, colloquially called *Muftiates*, were established under these reforms to oversee the work of mosques and shrines on their territories (Tasar 2010, 2012). These Muftiates were founded on territories of Central Asia, the northern and southern Caucasus, and Russia. The Central Asian Muftiate was referred to by the Russian acronym SADUM,¹⁸ and was the largest within the entire Soviet Union. SADUM was also granted permission by Stalin to run the sole legally recognized Islamic educational school – a central medresseh in Bukhara that continues to function to this day (Tasar 2012). Aside from these officially condoned and controlled religious organizations, however, other Muslim practices and associations that were outside of the Muftiates’ surveillance were abolished, including independent Quran study and prayer groups, religious activities such as engaging in Islamic charity or travelling for the *haj*. Mosques, imams and theology experts had to be “registered” with Muftiates to be considered legal. While there’s a discord in historical analysis over how much officially recognized religious institutions such as SADUM had control over registered versus unregistered mosques and schools, some like Eren Tasar suggest that the boundaries between them were not as distinct, and they worked in “a complementary rather than competitive manner” (Tasar 2016a:10).

In parallel to these developments, Stalin’s religious reforms established two major organizations to keep the above-mentioned entities in line – the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (CAROC), and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC). The latter was tasked with overseeing all four Muftiates and their respective registered entities, as well as monitoring and regulating Baptism, Buddhism,

¹⁸ SADUM – *Sredne-Aziatskoe Duhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man* in Russian, or Central Asian Spiritual Administration of Muslims.

Catholicism, and Judaism. The bureaucrats that took positions within CAROC and CARC were state officials; yet they promoted religious affairs within the Soviet Union. The most commonly shared view among these bureaucrats was that antireligious state policies only exacerbated contention between religious authorities, Muftiates and the state bureaucracies in charge of overseeing them (Tasar 2012)

Figure 1: Reformed Organizational Structure of Religious Organizations under Stalin



As a result, thousands of mosques that had been shut down by the authorities in the 1920-30s were re-opened following the Second World War. The majority of these mosques were technically illegal, since the Muftiates were only authorized to register around several hundred mosques throughout the Soviet Union, (Tasar 2012, 2016b). There was no systematic dismantling of these mosques as in previous decades, however. In line with these developments, CARC increasingly called for greater autonomy for the Muftiates. These calls were approved in 1954, securing the position of illegal mosques and prayer groups. Autonomy also meant that the Muftiates had the right to make decisions independent of CARC. Given CARC's already lenient position in this period, autonomy allowed the Central Asian Muftiate to run hundreds, if not thousands of unregistered mosques. Despite the now moderate state policies, however, certain state officials still viewed the existence of any religious practice or institutions as a defeat of the Bolshevik ideology.

The decade after the Second World War was marked by unprecedented economic growth. Under Khrushchev's leadership from 1953 to 1964, Soviet officials aimed to increase the output of agricultural and consumer goods (Kalinovsky 2015). It was in this decade that grain production was extended to large areas of Central Asia. Khrushchev's administration tailored socio-economic policies to deliver on earlier promises of extending welfare to remote areas of the Soviet Union. At this time, rural residents were migrating *en masse* to urban areas, facilitated by mechanization in the agricultural sector which freed laborers to search for opportunities elsewhere (Kalinovsky 2015). While Central Asia had the lowest rate of rural to urban migration (Kandiyoti 2007), state officials in the region nevertheless began promoting ideals of progress – the idea that they were building a new Soviet society where there was little space for “backward” religious beliefs. Under the guidance of Khrushchev's policies, state officials envisioned pushed for the emancipation of women, the education of agricultural workers, and equity in living standards throughout the Soviet Union. Such progressive policies were also designed to enhance Moscow's power in the region at the expense of religious institutions. Khrushchev was hostile toward religion, and attempted to weaken the leverage that had been granted to religious institutions during Stalin's rule.

Khrushchev initiated a number of antireligious policies that targeted mosques, prayer houses, religious leaders, and holy sites. By the late 1950s, there were around eighty officially registered religious organizations in the Kyrgyz SSR, out of which thirty-two were Russian Orthodox, thirty-four were Muslim, and the rest belonged to Baptist, Jewish and other religious communities (Anderson 1999). All of these organizations were influenced by renewed censorship under the Khrushchev

administration. Around twenty religious organizations lost their registration, and at least fourteen religious leaders were sent to prison (mostly Baptist). Some mosques were harassed for violating legal rules or even minor codes, such as sanitation or fire safety. Archival documents indicate that the forced exile of unregistered religious figures also became commonplace at this time, as did the condemnation of shrines and holy sites. During this period, the Communist Party in Kazakhstan voiced its plans to turn the mausoleum of the religious figure Qoja Akhmat Yassawi into a museum, and the authorities of the Kyrgyz SSR in the city of Osh bulldozed a religious landmark located at the holy Solomon mountain. The mosque affiliated with this sacred site was transformed into a university lecture hall, then into residential property, and later into an athletic facility (Tasar 2012). These hardline policies persisted throughout 1965.

The new leadership under Leonid Brezhnev (who served as the party secretary during 1964 and 1982) blended the moderate and hardline approaches to religion. This moderation resulted in part from the greater challenges that the Party leadership faced during this period in reaching economic goals and staying true to the promises of social welfare. The institutional capacity of the state, however great, could not extend schools, healthcare services and other public goods to all areas of the countryside. Hence, “officials preferred to move people to modernity than bring modernity to the people” (Kalinovsky 2015:584). In other words, the most remote agricultural populations of Central Asia became targets of forced resettlement, which also accomplished the goal of bringing the necessary labor force to more developed agricultural areas. In addition, however, Soviet policy makers also committed to investing in the less developed rural agricultural areas. Among other means, they cancelled close to 40% of the collective

farm debt to the state and created a pension system for collective farm workers (Gleason 1990). As historians have highlighted, this was a period of heightened awareness and expectation of state services. Kalinovsky (2015) notes in his study of mechanization and welfare in Tajikistan, that when the state failed to meet people's expectations of clean water, schools, medical services and so forth, they reached out to formal institutions including the Supreme Soviet, mobilizing and organizing meetings with district and party officials voicing their demands.

During Brezhnev's rule, the Soviet administration revoked most of the restrictive measures applied to the Muftiates under Khrushchev. The Muftiates regained control over the finances and activities of the mosques under their purview. However, they did not achieve the level of autonomy they had enjoyed during the Stalin's later rule. Rather, throughout the late period of Soviet rule (under Brezhnev, Andropov and Gorbachev) the Muftiates promoted Islam as a medium of facilitating the Soviet ideology. Most of the Islamic religious authorities throughout Soviet territory continued to obtain their education in the two medresseh in Uzbekistan run by SADUM. It also became possible once again during this period to hold the study circles in the private homes of certain imams. Historical documentation of religious practice at the time suggests that prominent scholars of Islamic thought managed to form groups of scholars in the 1970s and 80s. Unregistered educational circles became more active and elementary Islamic education was made available through two major circles – Quran study groups (*tajwid*), where students learn how to properly recite Quran and Arabic language study groups (Tasar 2014). Self-appointed teachers would lead these small groups (*hujra*), that would consist

of their neighbors, kin and acquaintances. Those who qualified to apply for the Mir-i-Arab medresseh would typically have background in such types of informal studies. (Tasar 2010) also notes that those who wished to continue their knowledge beyond medresseh could do so with educators who were highly regarded, such as for example Muhammadjon al-Hindustoniy in Dushanbe, capital city of Tajikistan. Such religious scholars were not always workers of SADUM. Many participants in these groups later became revered authorities and teachers of wider circles of imams throughout Central Asia (Tasar 2012).

It is worth noting that the Soviet Union was not the only state that tried to bring Islam and other religions in line with their secularist ideology. Many states that implemented modernizing, secular projects sought to bring all religious institutions under state control so that carriers of religious thought would facilitate the legitimacy of state policies and the new social order (Starett 2009). Mustafa Kemal, the first President of post-imperial Turkey, implemented similar reforms in the 1920s, which deprived religious authorities of their former privileges, negated the applicability of Shariah law, and introduced criminal and civil codes that were based on the European model. Kemal, whose popular title *Ata Turk* literally means *the father of Turks* and figuratively established him as the founder of the modern Turkish nation, was against “primitive” religious practices and customs, and imposed his vision that there was no place for them in a modern, secular society (Yavuz 2003). Similar processes occurred in Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia, where heads of state sought to “nationalize” Islam.

Beyond bringing religion in line with state ideology however, the Soviet state played a decisive role in bringing the Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Uzbek and other Central Asian

nations into being, and assigning them to autonomous republics.¹⁹ Soviet nationalities policy subsequently shaped local understandings of the titular ethnic group's traditions within each republic, based on the essentialist notion that each nation had a distinct culture and identity. There is extensive body of literature on territorial boundary making of the Soviet Union that was driven along "national" lines (Haugen 2003; Hirsch 2000, 2014; Martin 2001). The main insight from this literature that must be highlighted here is that the modernization project of the Soviet conceived ethnic identities as part and parcel of the Soviet nation. This meant that alongside a construction of a modern Soviet nation, there was a paradoxical push for *korenizatsiya* [indigenization] – an affirmative-action policy in support of titular and minority ethnic groups.

As historian Adeeb Khalid (2007) notes, these policies ensured that the local regional elite – who was educated and cultivated by the Soviet state and held higher-up administrative positions in each of the republics – articulated their distinct identities as they propagated the Soviet ideology locally. State consent to cultivate national identities meant that religion was inevitably intertwined with the ethnic identities of Soviet citizens. Titular ethnic groups in each autonomous SSR, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs in my cases, were marked by their association with nominal belongingness to the Muslim category. In other words, Islam came to be seen as an inseparable part of ethnic identity, and some of the religiously informed rituals from the past were intertwined with officially condoned "national" traditions, rituals and customs (e.g. circumcision of boys, reciting Quran at funerals and other life-cycle events). Soviet ethnic groups who had prevalently identified themselves as Muslims, including but not limited to Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uighurs,

¹⁹ Their territories were delimited and put on the map between 1924 and 1927 (Reeves 2014).

Tatars, Chechens, and Bashkirs, observed some of their religiously-informed rituals in the confines of their households or smaller communities, not necessarily concerning themselves about what the tenets of Islam might dictate in terms of broader life-style (c.f., Privratsky 2001)

Table 1: Soviet State Policies within the Economic and Religious Spheres

Early Soviet Rule, 1917-late 1930s Lenin, Stalin	World War II, 1940-1950s Stalin	Post WWII, 1950-60 Khrushchev	The height of welfarism 1970-1980s Brezhnev	Glasnost' 1980-1990 Gorbachev
Rapid industrialization, forced collective farms, assaulting wealthy peasants, New Economic Policy	War Economy	Extending welfare, modernization in full force	The Soviet planners continued delivering their promises of the welfare state	Perestroika, crumbling economic institutions
Bolsheviks assaulted religious institutions	Stalin recognizes the capacity of religious institutions to promote the Soviet ideology, more lax policies	Khrushchev's administration adopts the hardline approach, renewed assault on religion	Brezhnev's administration loosens restrictive policies	Gorbachev's policies paved a pathway for new mosques and establishment of other religious institutions

Toward the beginning of the 1990s, Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost'* or policies of openness precipitated the so-called religious renaissance in Central Asia. In this period, new mosques opened their doors and old ones were renovated; thousands of pilgrims from the region started going on annual *haj* trips to Mecca; and public expressions of piety became more visible (Khalid 2007). It was during this time that various informal Muslim association set up more formal organizations, as the state policies toward their activities were sufficiently lax. Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian republic that stopped recognizing SADUM's authority, and set up its own independent Muftiate in

1990, prior the dissolution of the Soviet regime. Eventually, all Central Asian countries, established their own Muftiates, which were extensions of the state or closely collaborate with the state. These developments did, however, alarm Western observers and local state officials, who often interpreted religious revival as an “Islamic threat” that was potential source of “extremism” and “destabilization of the region” (Khalid 2007). Such rhetoric continued into the period of independence, as state officials in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan launched new nation-building projects. Islam had to be factored into these projects, for it had already been closely intertwined with the Kyrgyz and Kazakh sense of ethnic distinction cultivated by Soviet nationalities policy. These historical pathways help us understand why the leaders of the newly independent Central Asian states sought to demonstrate their approval of Islam in early 1990s. Islam was part of the ethnic and national identities of their constituencies, and yet these leaders sought to suppress certain religious expressions, organizations, and movements that they deemed “foreign,” “extreme,” and “radical.”

Articulating National Islam

Having gained independence in early 1990s, the post-Soviet Central Asian states embarked on the path of building distinctive approaches to nationhood and developing new economic strategies. Competing narratives on this period of independence in Central Asia and other former socialist states emphasize either great departures from the Soviet past, or deep continuities in politics and policy. In the religious sphere, some scholars celebrate the end of communism and the emergence of religious freedom, while others point to the heavy-handed defense of secular politics as a *de facto* continuity of the USSR’s atheist regime. In regard to the economy, some scholars examine the shocks that

people endured from the rapid adoption of a market economy, while others highlight the uneven pace of privatization and rise of a politically-connected oligarchy.

As we have seen, however, Soviet history itself presents a complex record of relations between the state, religion, and economic enterprise. As I will demonstrate in this section, the policy approaches of contemporary state officials in the spheres of religion and the economy are no less complex. As in the Soviet past, the ruling elite wish to mobilize patriotism and promote economic dynamism, but without encouraging such autonomy and volition in the population as to lose control over society. State officials have sought to articulate trajectories of national development that prioritize the distinctiveness and solidarity of Kyrgyz and Kazakh nationality, but also tap into the popular enthusiasm over national integration into the global community – by way of the global market or the global *umma*. This balancing act means that the administrations of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have both shown a degree of tolerance for capitalist and spiritual Islamic orientations, but are ultimately interested in promoting the primacy of national Islam.

In the first decade of independence, the Central Asian states joined the other former Soviet republics in shifting to a market economy with varying degrees of speed. Kyrgyzstan and neighboring Kazakhstan initially chose the “Western” blueprint for building capitalism and democracy. Between 1993 and 1998, Kyrgyzstan implemented trade liberalization and privatization reforms most zealously of all the Central Asian states (Pomfret 2012). These rapid economic reforms, in conjunction with President Askar Akaev’s, formal endorsement of democracy, earned Kyrgyzstan a reputation of “the Switzerland of Central Asia” and “an island of democracy.” It became one of the

first Soviet successor states to join the WTO in 1998, which reflected the generally open-door policies that Kyrgyzstan maintained for foreign investors and trade. These reforms facilitated the rise of small and medium businesses, particularly in trade, where many entrepreneurs found niches either re-exporting Chinese goods to other Central Asian markets as well as to Russia, or importing foreign commodities and selling them in domestic markets. Its neighbor Kazakhstan, in contrast, was much slower in its economic reforms, and relied on its vast oil fields to spur state-led development. The growth of oil prices between 1998 and 2008 turned Kazakhstan into one of the world's fastest growing economies (Pomfret 2012), but also gave President Nazarbayev's administration sufficient resources to buy social docility and sideline political and economic reforms.

Toward late 1990s and early 2000s however, the state officials in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan started voicing support for alternate socioeconomic developmental paths. This alternative route was closely aligned with the models presented by certain developing Muslim countries – United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Malaysia and others. These nations featured rapidly growing economies and proudly touted Muslim identities, a combination that gave them great symbolic power as representatives of a distinct, “non-Western” politico-economic model. Drawing from the example of these countries, the leadership of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan sought to mold Islamization in line with the national ideologies that they had laid out, and to project their Muslimness both in the local and international arenas. This period is often called the period of “religious revival” or “religious renaissance” in Central Asia (McGlinchey 2009).

State officials who were tasked with regulating the religious field were challenged to formally approve the elements of Islamic heritage that had managed to withstand the

Communist atheism on the one hand, and to keep a tight lid on the Islamization of the population on the other. The latter charge was deemed particularly important, as state officials did not want to alienate the segments of their constituencies that did not subscribe to Islam (Huskey 2003). The leaderships of both states pursued a clear agenda of keeping “radical” and “fundamentalist” religious movements at bay, while launching several initiatives that supported “moderate” Islam as compatible with the modernizing nation-state project. The first and most notable step that the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan took was identifying Hanafi Islam as the legitimate school of Islamic thought and practice (McGlinchey 2009). Hanafi Islam is one of the four schools within Sunni Islam, and is often referred to as the most tolerant of diverse theological, philosophical and mystical positions (Nasr 1996:114). Second, both presidents sought to demonstrate their approval of their citizens seeking connections with Muslims beyond the region, in certain major centers of Islamic civilization. President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan made his first *hajj* to Mecca in 1994, following a lesser pilgrimage (*umra*) in 1992 (Huskey 2003). Similarly, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan visited Mecca and Medina in 1994. Both presidents also supported the establishment of Islamic educational institutions, which resulted in the Islamic Institute in Kyrgyzstan and Nurmubarak Islamic University in Kazakhstan. The latter was affiliated with the Egyptian Al-Azhar Islamic University, one of the largest and most reputable Islamic educational institutions worldwide (Achilov 2015). These gestures were meant to communicate that Islam had become a key part of the new national identity of both countries.

The construction of mosques – often ostentatious – provided another venue through which upper-echelon state officials could project national Muslimness, both to

the local population as well as to international observers. While the grassroots initiatives drove the rise of mosques in rural areas and on the fringes of cities (as I discuss more extensively in Chapter Four), the larger mosques in city centers could not have been erected without the approval of top officials. In Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, the Hazret Sultan Mosque was commissioned by the state and designed by a collaboration between Turkish and Kazakh architects. This grand mosque, which houses a praying space for 5000 people, was opened in July 2012, coinciding with the Day of Astana and the birthday of President Nazarbayev (Bissenova 2016). In Kyrgyzstan meanwhile, the Muftiate announced in 2012 plans to build the largest mosque in Central Asia, which would provide praying space for 15,000 visitors. The press secretary of the Muftiate, Maksat Mambetaliev, estimated the cost of this large-scale construction, designed after the well-known Sultan Akhmet mosque in Istanbul, to reach twelve million USD, eight million of which would be covered by the Turkish Spiritual Administration and two million by Jordanian sponsors. Kyrgyzstan's government provided close to 300,000 square feet of land for the mosque's construction, and pledged to cover the rest of the expenses and to ensure the building would be complete in timely manner.²⁰ The construction of such grand mosques, either by the direct commission or by approval of the state, served as a sign of the reconciliation between the state and Islam. Far from being completely autonomous, newer mosques (particularly those commissioned by the government) often served as extensions of the state apparatus, providing space for the state leaders to promote their national ideology (Bissenova 2016). The same can be said

²⁰Source: <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/01/mechet-site-anons.html> and <http://rus.azattyk.org/media/photogallery/26639912.html> - May 6, 2016

of the Muftiates themselves and the central mosques affiliated with their administrative headquarters in both countries.

The national Islamic orientation described above represents just one facet of a broader social reorientation toward an imagined moral future. The people who articulate these “imaginaries” or “fictionalities” envisage a near future in which the members of society will prioritize their faith and orient their mundane, worldly activities to religious beliefs and principles. As with other “futures markets,” moral futures represent an investment, but one which can have both instrumentally rational and value-rational motives. Various sets of actors articulate competing versions of this pathway to piety, especially religious leaders, government officials, and key entrepreneurs who stand to gain from harnessing this increased religiosity. Average believers also invest in and articulating moral futures, however, both for the sake of building a more pious society in which they want to live here and now, and to secure their place in the hereafter.

The increasing appeal of a spiritual and capitalist Islamic orientations, which I address in more detail below, has become a source of disjuncture between grassroots piety and the upper echelon of state officials that wish to retain top-down control over the articulation of moral futures. For the most part, however, state officials do not fully acknowledge or participate in the articulation of spiritual Islamic orientations. To be sure, some well-known public figures have endorsed more spiritually-oriented Islam, supporting religious groups and expressions that align with this more zealous orientation at the expense of the mainstream national Islam that the state generally promotes. One of the most vocal politicians in Kyrgyzstan, for example, is Tursunbai Bakir uulu, a member of Parliament, who is from the south of the country.

Bakir uulu was first elected as a member of the legislative assembly in 1995, and later as Kyrgyzstan's first Ombudsman – a position he held until 2008, when he returned to the parliament. Taking on an explicit public personae of a pious and devout Muslim, Tursunbai Bakir uulu was one of the fiercest defenders of the controversial movement Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan. Hizb ut-Tahrir originated in Palestine in 1953, with the goal of establishing Chaliphate in place of secular governments (Babajanov 2001). The leaders of the movement refuse violent techniques, and mostly rely on spreading religious literature and organizing informal groups that study Quran and conduct other religious rituals. Banned as an anti-government movement and often labelled a terrorist organization, Hizb ut-Tahrir found supporters in parts of Southern Kyrgyzstan, and has enjoyed the consistent support of Bakir uulu, who also expressed his interest in merging the secular laws of the country with those of the Quran and Shariah law (Karahiannis 2012). This rhetoric has not guaranteed him the support of all religious authorities, however, nor of all constituents who identify themselves as devout Muslims.

Despite the support and participation of some political figures in articulating spiritual Islam, as a moral future, however, such rhetoric remains marginal in the political field. Among religious leaders, those imams who most closely align themselves with this vision tend to articulate moral futures in terms of a better life in the hereafter. Their underlying belief is that all concerns of this world, such as economic practices, should be secondary to the other-worldly concerns of devout Muslims. These stances of the political and religious establishment separate them from a growing band of devout Muslims, especially pious entrepreneurs, who seek to integrate spiritual Islam into their enterprises and other activities as a means of expanding their autonomy and self-

determination. This disjuncture is particularly expressed in the Islamic economy, where, as in the Soviet past, the ruling elite wish to encourage economic dynamism without relinquishing their command over enterprise.

Finding Affinities with the Capitalist Islamic Orientation: Foreign Investors and the State

Scholarship on “identity politics” in Central Asia – religious and national – tends to conclude with the recognition that this project of constructing national Islam has gained the largest influence of any religious orientation in the region. If state leadership mostly focused on articulating national Islam in the first decade of independence, however, starting from the early 2000s they also actively articulated what I call a “capitalist Islamic” orientation. This ideal is closely aligned with what Atia (2012), Rudnyckyj (2014a) and others have called “pious neoliberalism” – an *ethic* in the Weberian sense that combines pious sensibilities with a for-profit economic orientation. If the political project of “national Islam” was articulated as a means of retaining social control in the face of growing public religiosity, government officials seized on pious neoliberalism or capitalist Islam as a means of harnessing this Islamic “renaissance” for the sake of economic growth.

Driven by this interest to capitalize on religiosity, the upper-echelon of state officials in several Central Asian states sought to promote the Islamic economy, mostly through the sub-sector of Islamic finance. Composed mostly of large banks that target large projects, the Islamic financial sector was expected to be uncontroversial and politically neutral. Envision of Islamic finance as an alternate, non-Western sources of capital, the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have altered their legislation to

attract international investors from the Muslim world. State regulators speak of Islamic Financial Institutions (IFIs) as *apolitical* and distant from any taboo issues of religion in the public sphere. This apolitical stance, combined with the interest of state officials in large capital inflows, explains why the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan favored large Islamic banks. As I discuss below, this push for “alternative” sources of capital accelerated after many Western banks constricted their lending in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008. Suffice to say that larger Islamic banks such as EcoIslamic Bank in Kyrgyzstan and *Al-Hilal* Bank in Kazakhstan were established as a result of cooperation among upper-echelon state officials and well-connected local and foreign entrepreneurs.

According to state officials in both countries, the emergence of IFIs followed a linear process (often traced only to the early and mid 2000s), and their gradual expansion is mostly due to their economic utility. The following excerpt from an interview exemplifies a common narrative among state officials in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan:

Kazakhstan views Islamic finance as an alternative source of investment. At the time of the financial crises, you may recall that Western cash flows drastically shrank, and at one point became completely inaccessible to Kazakh banks, making the major ‘cash pillow’ absent. Our banking sector had not developed [local] deposits, because it was easier for them to attract foreign investments with lower interest rates, and then to give out loans here like hot cakes. Without Western cash flows, the National Bank started looking for other options.²¹

In his push for Kazakhstan to become a regional hub of Islamic financial, President Nursultan Nazarbayev stated that the “global economic crisis has shown that the Islamic

²¹ Timur Omarov, Head of the Islamic Finance development, department of regional financial development center in Almaty and Islamic Finance, National Bank of Republic of Kazakhstan. Almaty, Kazakhstan. June 13, 2013

financial and economic model is stable and viable.”²² Under the guidance of his administration, upper echelon political elite started to sing the chorus regarding the economic benefits of Islamic finance. This narrative is pervasive in such circles in both countries. Regulators in Kazakhstan, for example, frequently make statements along the lines that “the development of Islamic finance...will put [our country] in a favorable light for foreign investors, who prefer to operate in accordance with Shariah Law. Such investors are widely represented in the Middle East, Malaysia and even Europe.”²³ Echoing this sentiment, Omurbek Babanov, then the vice-prime minister of Kyrgyzstan, expressed his interest in creating centers of Islamic financial services in the capital city. According to Babanov, “the development and spread of Islamic principles of finance would yield fast and effective returns, bearing a direct impact on economic development and social welfare.”²⁴ This conceptualization of IFIs – as models of economic development first and foremost – consistently lay at the core of state regulators’ discourses.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented historical aspect of Soviet state policies in religious and economic fields. Contrary to perceptions that the Soviet state had always been hostile towards religious institutions, I drew from historical analyses that suggest that their relationship was instead in flux and oscillated between hostility and partnership. This

²² From the speech of Nursultan Nazarbayev at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011. Source: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/382230> - last accessed 20 October, 2014.

²³ Aibek Bekzhanov, a specialist in Islamic financing from the Almaty Regional Finance Center. Source: http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2012/05/11/feature-01 - last accessed 20 October, 2014.

²⁴ Source: <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-61641.html> - last accessed 20 October, 2014.

historically situated look at the contemporary state of religious and economic affairs, indicates that indeed Western blueprint of neoliberal economic model could have been the most prevalent if not the only approach to development. Moreover, it helps to understand better why upper-echelon state officials would endorse larger Islamic Financial Institutions and seek to project their “moderate Muslimness” at the local and international arenas.

Diverting from explanations that view Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan interested in promoting Islamic Financial Institutions merely as an alternative source of cash flows, I argue that the decisions and rhetoric of the upper-echelon state officials in relation to Islamic economy are best understood through their affinity to two major orientations of Islamism in the market, namely, capitalist Islam and national Islam.

CHAPTER FOUR

Articulating Competing Moral Futures: Imams as Business Ethicists

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how state officials and other public figures in the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan articulated a nationality-centered moral future. They were not alone in such efforts, however. Imams, particularly those closely aligned with the Muftiate,²⁵ have contributed to the articulation of *National Islam*, emphasizing that Muslimness is mostly a natural extension of ethnic, regional and national belongingness. At the same time however, this dominant articulation of national Islam was challenged by diverse factions of religious authorities, who produced and distributed (c.f., Bourdieu 1977) competing articulations, especially a more spiritually-oriented brand of Islam that rejected such a central role for national customs in religious belief.

These debates between religious authorities are important to explore, if we are to fully understand how certain ideas of business ethics and practices take hold among entrepreneurs engaged in the Islamic economy in the region. Numerous entrepreneurs acknowledged that they consulted with the spiritual leaders of their communities on issues related to their business, and referred me to particular imams. I quickly came to

²⁵ As discussed in chapter two, the first four Muftiates were established in Central Asia, the Northern and Southern Caucuses, and in Russia under the Stalinist reforms, and were charged to oversee the work of mosques and shrines of their respective territories. In late 1980s and early 1990s, each Central Asian country installed its own “independent” Muftiate, whose work carried the institutional legacy of their predecessors. These organizations remain at least partially aligned with the state.

realize that imams have gained an independent role as *business ethicists*, or those whose job is “to increase the frequency of moral behavior in business – either in a business community as a whole, or within one or more particular companies” (Abend 2014:5)

How exactly did religious authorities who had previously been largely involved in interpreting and promoting textual knowledge, now come to translate Islamic tenets into market practices? Imams in the Central Asian context, traditionally limited their consultant roles to issues related to “private” matters – carrying out rituals around lifecycle events such as weddings and funerals. Why would entrepreneurs attribute such market authority to these spiritual leaders at this historical juncture? Finally, why did different factions of imams articulate different market orientations for Islam?

Existing studies of religious authorities in the Central Asian context shed light on how the imams can alternatively align with or oppose the state’s efforts to regulate religion in public life. Alima Bissenova (2016) demonstrates in her illuminating ethnographic work on imams in the newly built Hazret Sultan mosque in the capital of Kazakhstan that religious authorities do not simply work on extending state rhetoric, but actively engage in moulding their public into “good Muslims” as well as into a loyal “nation.” Arguing against a monolithic view of Islam, Sergey Abashin also contends that religious authorities in Central Asia are fragmented, and therefore tend to offer competing interpretations of similar issues. These differences result not so much from their schools of thought and theological approaches, but are instead “bound up in local politics, with competition over control over symbolic and material resources, and with the re-distribution of financial resources” (Abashin 2006:268).

While these studies shed light on the local dynamics among religious authorities, they have largely ignored the role of imams in engaging with communities of entrepreneurs. This oversight is understandable, as religion's role in the post-Soviet market was minimal until recently, leading scholars generally to reproduce conventional distinctions between the spheres of religious and economic activity – between past-oriented faith and future oriented-commerce. Recent developments require us to abandon these conventional distinctions, however. Owners and managers of a variety of private ventures, small and medium-sized, seek the advice and recommendations of imams as they work to bring their businesses in line with religious tenets. The latter provide advice and expertise to other market actors, by turning the Islamic tenets related to the finance and commerce into objects of reflection. To address the questions posed above fully, however, we need to contextualize our analysis further.

Drawing from economic sociology, and aiming to further bolster the concepts of articulated moral futures that I offered in the previous chapter, I argue that imams gained their reputation as business ethicists under three political and economic conditions that defined economic life in the region after independence. First, as I will discuss more extensively later, there was a common public sense that the market economy entailed social disorder. This sense of moral disintegration led to a widespread desire for an ethical alternative to free-wheeling capitalism – a demand which some entrepreneurs seek to address. Second, and more importantly however, it was not necessarily clear for entrepreneurs how to begin translating religious precepts into business practices. They require religious expertise in determining the very value of their commitments to offering goods and services in compliance with Islamic tenets. Finally, as many of my

interlocutors pointed out, entrepreneurs at the executive end of the Islamic economy face considerable uncertainty as to the potential profitability of their moral commitments. As Beckert (2011) points out, “imaginaries” of the future, such as those propagated by imams, play a crucial role in helping entrepreneurs transcend the incalculable risks of their businesses. Even the most instrumentally-rational business models involve elements of doubt, and religious authority provides a ready source of faith for entrepreneurs who choose to orient their businesses to Islamic tenets.

These conditions of uncertainty, which I suggest are pervasive in the Islamic economy in Central Asia and in other moralized markets more broadly, point to the way my analysis departs from other conceptualizations of uncertainty and morals in economic sociology. Beckert (2011) key argument is that markets are more *uncertain* than economists want to admit, while Zelizer (2010) approach makes the case that markets are more *moralized* than economists recognize. I bridge these two traditions, by pointing out that (at least in the Central Asian context) market “morality” is every bit as uncertain as market “economics.” The significance of this point is that it enables us to understand why entrepreneurs may want to defer to opinion leaders such as imams who construct moral futures – ideas of the future returns in both monetary and religiously-pertinent benefits that entrepreneurs can expect to gain through incorporation of morals in their market activities.

In the following sections, I first offer a historically-informed account of how imams came to serve as business ethicists, and investigate some of the contemporary arenas in which they articulate competing moral futures. I map divergent factions of religious authorities, where some are more centrally positioned within the religious field,

pushing others to the fringes. Those who are aligned with the Muftiate, I suggest, are more likely to articulate National Islam, but also serve on the boards of large Islamic banks and thereby valorize Capitalist Islam. Also well-positioned within this field are Imams affiliated with the Gülen Movement, who are closely connected to foreign (mostly Turkish) educated entrepreneurs and strongly articulate Capitalist Islam. Religious authorities who are aligned with the *Tablighi Jama'at*, a peaceful missionary Islamic movement on the margins of the field, tend to articulate Spiritually-Oriented Islam, in contrast. Finally, I move to mapping the normative claims that imams in these factions put forth, which form distinct moral futures as imaginative framework for ethical and specifically Islamic business.

Contemporary Sources of Religious Authority in the Market

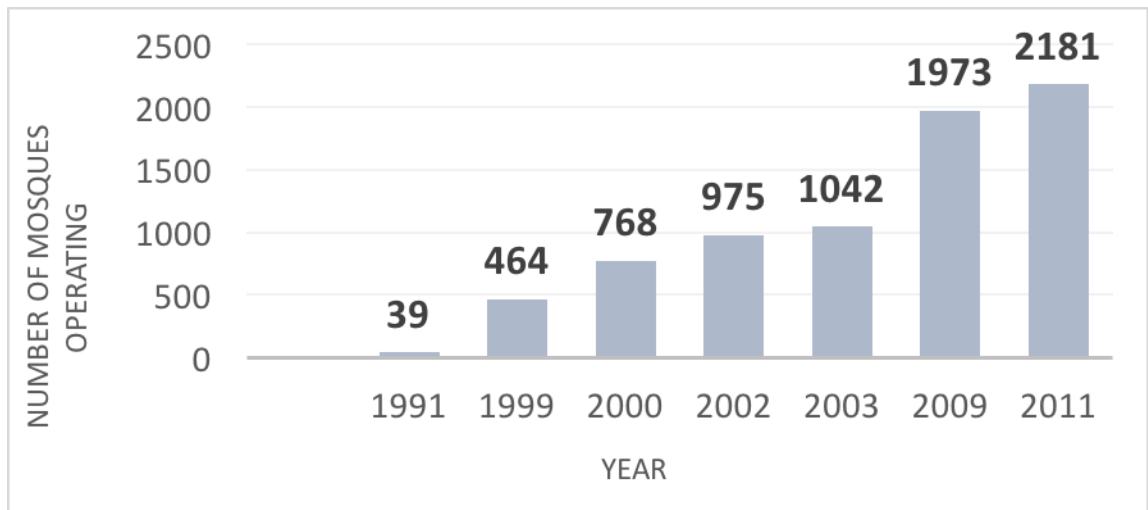
In the early 1990s, religious education became accessible outside of the boundaries of Soviet countries. A remarkable number of young people obtained education abroad, contributing to the plurality and strength of religious schools in the region. Manja Stephan's study (2016) of youth in Tajikistan details how many obtained Muslim education at institutions in Pakistan, Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, a pattern which can be extrapolated to the entire Central Asian region (Abramson 2010:36). The former colonizing power could no longer keep the Central Asian Muslim population intellectually and geographically isolated from their broader Muslim counterpart (Bissenova 2005:261). With communication, travel and trade now possible across borders, a "revival" of religious identities took force. The expansion of mosques as

material artefacts and social spaces also attest to these amalgamations of religious thought and practice.

New mosques erected since 1990 are stark landmarks, whose architecture indicates multiple sources of political and cultural influence on religion in Central Asia. Some of the buildings, particularly those in the outskirts of Bishkek and Osh, are simple structures that look like residential houses with a dome on top. Other mosques have intricate facades of red brick, minarets in their courtyards, and welcome visitors with plaques at their entrance indicating donors (most often Saudi Arabian foundations). One of the recently built mosques in the capital city of Bishkek, the largest in the country, replicates a Turkish design. As mosques started mushrooming in the across Kyrgyzstan and neighboring countries, they transformed the landscape, as if reclaiming the space that was denied under Soviet rule and contending for recognition that Islam has a privileged place in these post-Soviet societies.

As the *Figure 1* illustrates, the number of registered mosques in independent Kyrgyzstan grew exponentially, reaching more than 2,000 from a mere 39 in a matter of two decades.

Figure 2: Officially Registered Mosques in Kyrgyzstan 1991-2013



One should not assume that this rise in religious observance – evidenced by the growth of mosques – can alone explain the authority of imams in the market, however. The rise of mosques, although a proxy for increasing religiosity, must be viewed as part of a dynamic field “where a wide range of religious as well as secular players, ideologies and discourses are competing for normative power” (Stephan 2016). In addition to religiosity, many new forms of social mobility and dynamism contribute to translocal spaces and experiences, including education abroad, transnational trade, and flows of new ideas and consumer goods into the region of Central Asian.

Furthermore, the authority of contemporary imams is in no way undisputed in the eyes of the local public. Many politicians and citizens alike are alarmed at the fact that mosques have grown to outnumber secondary schools in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. In a speech to Parliament in July 2015, prime-minister Temir Sariiev spoke of a “dangerous tendency,”²⁶ referring to the 2,669 mosques and 67 *medresseh* operating in Kyrgyzstan, in comparison to 2,027 secular schools (elementary through high-school combined) and

²⁶ Source: <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/8693> - last accessed November 25, 2015.

52 universities in the country. This tendency of cautioning against “too much religion” is common among state officials.

Finally, public criticism has been aimed directly at the religious leadership as well. The Muftiate has faced criticism over its administration of visas for the *hajj* [pilgrimage] trips to Mekkah in the past decade. Since each country receives a certain quota of visas for the annual *hajj* from Saudi Arabia, the Muftiate has the authority to issue those visas to individuals. The head Mufti and other officials of this central spiritual administration were accused of corruption and receiving bribes from people who wished to get on the list.²⁷ Eventually, this led the administration of the Muftiate to institute a lottery-system, which would be overseen by external organizations to ensure a more transparent process of allocating the limited number of spots.²⁸ These kinds of cases, remind us of the competitive character of the religious field, and that it is shaped by religious vs. secular tensions (Epkenhans 2016), as well as by the obvious fragmentation of religious authority that had different local and translocal points of reference (Abashin 2006; Stephan 2016). Before delving into the rift that exists between imams directly working within Muftiate and other factions, I address the conditions that have given rise to their authority in more detail.

The first dimension, perhaps the broadest in scope and the most documented by ethnographers and other social scientists of the post-Soviet milieu, was the shift to a market economy. Market transition in the post-Soviet space was perceived by many, even those who were relatively economically secure, as *bardak* - chaos. Market reforms and

²⁷ Source: http://rus.azattyk.org/content/kyrgyzstan_hajj_religion_corruption/24973690.html - last accessed November 25, 2015.

²⁸ Source: <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/8130> - last accessed November 25, 2015.

trade brought a surge of “uncontrolled movement” (Humphrey 2002:72) that alarmed many people who were used to the regimented and predictable nature of life under the Soviet regime. Enterprising individuals and insurgent businesses profited from the gaps in supply left by the collapsed central economy; shuttle traders engaged in cross-border trade that exploited deficits; and bazaars appeared “as an alarming tumor that burgeoned even as the rest of the societal body atrophied, at least in its Soviet incarnation” (Liu 2012:31). These concerns lie at the core of the incentives for Islamic business, and explain why piety began to bud in the private sector despite the widely-perceived tendencies toward profiteering and dishonesty in the market more broadly. In this way, religious authorities were drawn into tackling what was seen as a “crisis of values,” and addressing the probability “that business and entrepreneurship have produced a totally new kind of person” (Humphrey 2002:42).

Expressions of chaos, disruption and disorder were all too common throughout the entire post-Soviet region in the first decade of independence. In his book “Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan” Joma Nazpary (2002) explores how the new economic and political reforms left large groups of the population in Kazakhstan dispossessed, feeling economically and socially vulnerable. Even two decades later, sentiments that the market economy has inflicted societal and moral disintegration are widespread. In my interviews with imams, this theme of “spiritual hunger” [*ruhaniy achkachylyk* in Kyrgyz] was central in their explanations of how the new political and

economic conditions necessitated their expertise. One of my respondents, Nimatilla imam,²⁹ explained it in the following terms:

When I first joined the central mosque in Bishkek in 1992, there were only 137 men that would come every Friday for prayers, and those were mostly old Tatar and Uzbek men who lived in the neighborhood. Now, there are 13,000 people that attend that mosque every Friday. Do you see the difference? Most of the visitors are young. And another thing is, during the Soviet times all those who would come for prayer would line up to get beer right after mosque. Now, you won't see such a thing.³⁰

While he commended the new wave of piety as constituted by more “*yimanduu*” [conscientious or faithful followers], Nimatilla imam was also quick to admit that the budding piety, particularly among business people, was a reflection of their search for moral order, which in his mind presented a paradox. As many in the post-Soviet space do, Nimatilla imam saw the market as chaotic, not entirely “clean,” and antithetical to moral order. Many respondents similarly combined nostalgia for the social and economic order of the Soviet period with regret over the loss of religious identity during that period, and, conversely, combined enthusiasm for religious freedoms in the post-Soviet period with unease over the chaotic social and economic change that is frequently attributed to markets and freewheeling business practices.

The second dimension is entrepreneurial uncertainty around how to interpret Islamic tenets. In regards to financial transactions, for example, there is no single theory or formula for how to interpret the tenets of *riba* [usury] or *gharar* [risk], nor is there one dominant definition of what constitutes Islamic finance or business (Maurer 2005; Pitluck 2012; Pollard and Samers 2007; Tobin 2014; Warde 2010). For this reason, new market

²⁹ In Kyrgyz and Kazakh alike, it is conventional to address figures such as imams by their first name and title. I employ this honorific convention throughout the chapter when referring to respondents such as imams, *ustaz* [teachers], *aji* [those who have gone on the hajj] and other religious figures.

³⁰ Nimatilla imam, a leader of the “Yiman” mosque. Interview conducted July 1, 2014.

niches and institutions such as Islamic financial institutions required the expertise and authority of religious figures, if for no other reason than popular legitimacy. All established Islamic Financial Institutions (IFIs), including banks and microfinance companies, are expected to have Shariah boards that can issue *fatwa* [legal opinions]. The board members are in charge of interpreting and applying Shariah tenets to finance, and serve as arbiters of what does and does not count as compliance with religious precepts. Products such as *musharakah* and *mudarabah* that IFIs deliver to their customers cannot gain popularity among customers through mere commodification in the financial market. They require validation and promotion by recognized religious authorities.

Thirdly, new businesses within the Islamic market face a wide range of uncertainties that go beyond ethical questions. For example, they face great uncertainty in the viability of their businesses. As I will discuss more extensively in Chapter Four, a plethora of entrepreneurs, ranging from bazaar traders and restaurateurs, to owners of medium-sized companies such as tourist agencies, construction companies and daycare centers, were all dubious about the profitability of a “halal” or “Islamic” business when they decided to shift from a conventional model. Many still wondered if their businesses were going to pick up at the time that I interviewed them, and wondered openly as to how long it would take them to establish the reputation of a business genuinely committed to the values that are presumably at the core of the religiously-informed label. Others spoke of the difficulties they faced discerning out how to obtain the “right” raw materials for halal production, which they regarded as a process of trial and error. In other words, like any other new market niche, Islamic businesses presented many uncertainties to those involved in developing the niche.

If they hope to run their businesses successfully despite all these unknowables, owners and managers of small and medium enterprises must formulate expectations of what the future will hold for them and what “the likely decisions of relevant other actors” will be (Beckert 2011:5). On what basis can such expectations be formed, if not through rational calculation alone? As Beckert puts the question, “what are expectations under conditions of uncertainty?” (Beckert 2011:5). Economic sociologists who have closely attended to the micro-foundations of economic decision-making and action (Barbalet 2009; Beckert and Musselin 2013; Storper and Salais 1997) have long suggested that decisions are acted upon under conditions of greater uncertainty than economists and lay persons like to admit. According to Beckert, “instead of paralysis, uncertainty is ‘overcome’ by suspending the disbelief in the calculability of future states, and by acting based on fictional depictions which are handled by the actors *as if* they were true representations of the future” (Beckert 2011:7). In what follows, I demonstrate that imams make such leaps of faith possible by taking an active role in making these “representations of the future” legible for the entrepreneurs and the broader public under their sway.

Religious authorities as business ethicists

From Weber and other classical theorists, we know that entire economic systems can have roots in the interaction between religiously-informed ethics and economic behavior. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001 [1948]), Weber famously claimed that the religious ideas of Calvinists catalyzed the emergence of a distinct ethos of entrepreneurship that was anchored in ideas of frugality, discipline, and vocation. This ethos, although not a direct cause of capitalism, informed and coordinated the activities

of entrepreneurs, tying profit and material success to proper ethical practices that God was thought to favor. For Weber, the incipient American bourgeoisie were driven by the Calvinist claim that, despite the unknowability of God's plan, evidence that one was among the elect could be found in the relentless pursuit of one's earthly calling. Broadly speaking, I find that the participation of divergent groups of Muslims in the market is driven by similar uncertainty surrounding proper piety.

Scholars such as Gabriel Abend have continued this line of inquiry to show how economic ethics have developed beyond the initial formulations of religious authorities such as Calvin and Baxter. In his work "The moral background," Abend (2014) explores ways in which Christian religious authorities of the nineteenth century U.S. attended to the question of why businessmen and women were supposed to be ethical. Among other cases, he explores the work of Charles Rhoads, a successful businessman in mid-nineteenth century Philadelphia as well as an active member of the Religious Society of Friends. He also examined Henry Augustus Boardman, a reputed Presbyterian pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church in 1833-1876. Through these cases, Abend narrates a story of how religious authorities of the 19th century US acted as business ethicists, who "protested against improper, unworthy, or ungodly motives" (2014:126). He explains how such ethicists, including government policy-makers, religious leaders, and academics, contributed to a "moral background," identifying theories and normative values that center around what constitutes morality and ethics. The moral judgments and beliefs that these business ethicists agreed upon and promoted constitute a second-order morality – judgments that then enable first-order morality, i.e, behavior and practices.

We learn from Abend's study that the consensus among ethicists and practitioners of business was that moral practices was good for the market. Yet, this type of reasoning served the interests of entrepreneurs in keeping unions and government incursions out of the market. This study is informative of the ways in which religious authorities become "carriers," in a Weberian sense, of the normative ideas that promote business ethics (Kalberg 1994). Despite being rooted in the sacred and religious domain, these norms also serve the interests of business practitioners. Abend's concept of the moral background also reminds us to be attentive to the causal mechanisms that religious authorities may identify as they vocalize consequences of piety and morality in business.

When analyzing the work of religious authorities in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia, we must acknowledge at the outset the challenges that they face themselves. Imams in particular face challenges in maintaining the organizational base of their mosques, ensuring regular attendance and sustaining themselves financially. Religious authorities who work in newly established mosques and without the strong support of an already formed community, face various challenges in legitimizing their independent authority and maintaining networks of like-minded believers. Many religious authorities are not strangers to business themselves, as well. In the course of interviews, I was surprised to learn that many imams are involved in private business in one way or another. Some of them devote a share of land that they lease for cultivating crops or raising cattle for sale. Others have small businesses such as apparel workshops producing clothes for pious customers. Still others sell goods in bazaars and markets, and one group of partners even had their own entrepreneurial circle that resold used cars from South Korea.

It is with this recognition of the need for religious authorities to mobilize resources and their own constituents that I delve into the repertoires that imams employ as they articulate distinct moral futures. Imams and religious authorities more broadly have come to play a central role in validating and enforcing knowledge, theories and principles of “moral” and “ethical” business. When I spoke to the *qazi* of Osh oblast - the head of Qaziyat, an organization that oversees the work of all mosques in one region - he spoke of the wide range of questions that religious authorities field from entrepreneurs:

Yes, we get many questions from those in the financial sector. People have been asking us whether their work in conventional banks, where profit is made based on interest, is acceptable. There’s another group, however, those who work in trade. They ask “I imported such and such goods; now how much of a markup is considered appropriate?” I also generally observe another tendency, particularly among younger entrepreneurs, who ask about ways of doing *zakyat* [charity]: they ask “should I better give money towards mosque construction, or children’s education?” Besides that, I see a rising number of entrepreneurs who want to sponsor dinners for mosque visitors during Orozo [the Kyrgyz word for the month of Ramadan]. All of these are great, in my opinion. Today, entrepreneurs pay closer attention to charitable giving in comparison to what we used to see in the past.

In this way, imams and religious authorities facilitate the process through which new forms of institutions and organizations in the Islamic business field are imbued with moral legitimacy or “positive normative evaluation” (Suchman 1995:579). Yet, from my interviews, it was evident that various religious factions articulated Islamism and its role in the market differently. So what principles and prescriptions related to business ethics do religious authorities identify, and what are the moral futures that they articulate?

Competing Orientations among Religious Authorities

Drawing from my interviews, I assert that competing factions of imams and other religious authorities articulate all three of the moral futures that I outlined above when

serving in their emerging capacities as business ethicists. Unlike state officials, who focus on bolstering their control of the religious field by promoting National Islam, religious authorities articulate a greater diversity of moral futures, a result of the division among authorities who align with the state and those that seek greater autonomy from state authority. These different orientations toward the Islamic economy may intertwine in the discourse of any particular figure, as religious authorities address the many vagaries surrounding ethical behavior in a competitive and market-driven society. Nevertheless, each moral future has a distinct logic and repertoire, and the different factions of religious authorities that I will discuss tend to gravitate to one or the other orientation.

While this chapter focuses on only a few representatives of all the religious factions within Islam, I believe that these cases nevertheless depict major cleavages that exist more broadly among establishment imams and other religious authorities such as Islamic missionaries. Imams who articulate Islamism as a means for constructing strong nations may have an elective affinity with those who see Islamism as a means for saving the disintegrating morality under the market economy. Both, however, stand in a degree of tension salvation-oriented Islam, which, possibly truer to Weber's understanding of Calvin, see Islamism as providing means for securing one's space in the afterlife. To this latter faction, any privileged place for the nation in Islamic teaching, and any focus on earthly pursuits as an end-in-themselves, constitutes a subversion of the true goals of Islam, the literal meaning of which is "submission" to God's will.

To make the analysis consistent across different articulatory projects, I first focus on imams' concerns related to business activities, and then shift to their rhetoric surrounding social aid. The first arena stems from the ethical questions and concerns

raised by entrepreneurs who wish to run their businesses in a morally upright manner according to Islamic precepts. The second involves the means of turning worldly success into moral virtue.

National Islam: Promoting Localization of Markets and Protection of National Character

As I discussed in the previous chapter, National Islam was actively articulated by the leadership of Central Asian governments, as it was meant to inculcate a sense of national distinctiveness and pride for “taking agency back from a colonial Russification and atheism” (Liu n.d.:5). In her study of ethnic Kazakh students obtaining religious education at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Bissenova (2005) notes a common tendency among students to aspire toward “authentic” spiritual experience that would set them apart from the previous Russian “other.” At the same time however, she observes that Kazakh and other Central Asian students studying religion abroad encountered a “new other” in Arabs, who they would quickly construe as more foreign than Muslims from across the post-Soviet space. Subsequently, many of students would re-evaluate their position towards *homo Sovieticus*, whom they had previously associated with atheism and communism.

A large faction of imams, particularly those connected to the Muftiate and central mosques in the capital city of Bishkek and Osh in Kyrgyzstan, employ a very similar rhetoric that extends state officials’ discourse of National Islam. The first Muftiates were established in Central Asia, the Northern and Southern Caucuses, and in Russia under the Stalinist reforms as part of the Communist Party’s attempt to consolidate power. They were charged with the task of overseeing the work of local mosques and shrines. Even after the Soviet administration was long gone however, the newly independent Central

Asian countries replicated the structure and institutionalized their own Muftiates with similar roles and similar affiliations between Muftiate and state.

National Islam, as it is articulated primarily by Muftiate-aligned imams, prioritizes normative claims related to civic and public life, and seeks to ensure that the interests of “the nation” are kept intact and undisrupted by foreign influence. This includes both broadly “Kyrgyzstani” and “Kazakhstani” national character, as well as regional and local identities. As they engage in this work, I found that imams tend to focus on issues of social aid. This stance has been especially successful in motivating communities in rural areas and settlements around major cities to mobilize around the construction of their “own” mosque. The national Islamic orientation is also frequently espoused by entrepreneurs who seek to build “natural alliances” with those who share the same ethnic or regional affiliation, and has been invoked to protect lucrative market niches from foreign influence.

Echoing these sentiments, an imam of the newly built mosque under the foothills of Suleiman [or Solomon] mountain in the city of Osh, juxtaposed local pious entrepreneurs to foreign foundations. Upon entering through the main doors, our feet sank into thick red carpet, and we were welcomed with inscriptions in Arabic on the major wall facing *kybyla* [Mekka]. Near this wall stood a beautifully carved wooden podium, for an imam to ascend when facing the audience. The ceiling of this prayer hall was embroidered with ornaments, and a large crystal-like chandelier hung low, adding to the ostentatious feel of the mosque’s interior.



Figure 3: Sulaiman Too mosque, in Osh city. Summer 2014.

The imam of the mosque, Kambaraly imam³¹, spoke of how the construction of the building was funded. The construction work went on for four years, and was completed in 2012. The costs of building the mosque amassed to 1.3 million USD. He emphasized that an Arab foundation invested about 600,000 USD and the rest was raised within the country from donations by local authorities, including the president and prime-minister, customs officers, and even the poorer residents of the city. No funding was made available from the government budget, he emphasized. Kambaraly imam noted that he himself earns money from carrying out *nikke* [Muslim marriage ceremonies] and other rituals. People eagerly pay for his services, although there are no official rates for imams' work. He also has his own plot of land, and notes that provides a substantial boost to his family's income. When discussing the origins of resources for the mosque, Kambaraly imam sought to impress upon me the ability of local pious groups to form "natural alliances" and to promote Islamism that would be considerate of both ethnic and national interests.

Kambaraly imam's personal narrative presents elements that were common to many religious leaders. Other imams placed similar emphasis on contributions by

³¹ Kambaraly imam, a leader of the Sulaiman Too mosque, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Interview conducted on July 11, 2014.

growing communities of pious Muslims, particularly by local Muslim entrepreneurs. Imams shared abundant stories of Kyrgyz businessmen big and small, who aspired to build upon their sentiments of pride as both Kyrgyz and Muslims through donations to charities and *medresseh*, and through the construction of mosques. Nor was Kambaraly the only imam who noted his own entrepreneurial activities. While the actual sources of income for mosques may still be under scrutiny, I am mostly concerned about what these narratives of generous local sponsors accomplish by portraying Muslim entrepreneurs as a moral and benevolent group, but also one that has the best interests of the nation in mind. Imams discussed the rise of mosques and the growing visibility of piety among ethnically Kyrgyz entrepreneurs as indicators of the improving moral character of the society, as well as the strengthening of Kyrgyz values. This particular rhetoric is quite pervasive, and is widely employed by authorities ranging from the central administration of the Muftiate to those who are on the fringes of the religious field.

Imams affiliated with the Muftiate were the first to be recruited to serve in Shariah boards of new Islamic banks, in part because of their central position in the religious field backed by the state, and also importantly because of the state officials' support for Islamic finance. The Quran includes over one hundred verses that deal with spending of money, which are then interpreted by Islamic jurists and imams who issue *fatwas* [religious opinions] around issues related to money and disposal of excess wealth. Imams of the Muftiate, who have the highest authority to issue *fatwas*, have come to promote the “non-quantifiable element” (Maurer 2005) of Islamic finance actively, with the ethical principles of risk-evasion and fair treatment of the borrower at the center of their vision. The imam of the central mosque in Bishkek, who at the time also sat on the

Shariah board of EcoIslamic bank, condemned conventional banks for their ‘forceful’ and ‘confusing’ methods:

If people ask me, I tell them that it’s not permissible in Islam to force someone into a transaction with unclear terms, and then strip them of their property when they are unable to pay back their debt. People call me constantly, asking “Can I take a loan here? Should I lend on these or those terms?”

In addition to the moral credentials of Islamic financial products and institutions, however, imams’ authority gives them a central role in promoting the field of Islamic finance as a whole. In the language of marketing, these religious officials (both those who are on Shariah boards of local IFIs and those who are not) have played a crucial role in making ‘sales pitches’ to the population of devout believers. In the words of the same imam:

The number of people newly entering Islam are growing. There are more people giving *sadaqa* [alms], going on *haj* trips [pilgrimage], and engaging in *dava’at* [proselytizing]. They are also finding out more and more that taking credit with interest rates is forbidden. We’ve got many people these days – entrepreneurs – and the majority of them are not taking credits from conventional banks these days. They ask their *jama’ats* [communities], if they can take credits and so on. The majority of them are intentionally not using conventional banks, not because there’s any kind of propaganda against banks, but because they’re listening to their heart. Everyone trusts their *Jigitaaly damla* [teacher], *Maksat damla* and *Mahmud damla*, and these people approve of EcoIslamic bank whenever people ask. They used to be in the Shariah board [of EcoIslamic bank], if you didn’t know.

It is through such discourses, that imams contribute to a value system that gradually promotes IFIs as reinforcing life projects, ensuring the welfare of individuals (c.f., Zorn et al. 2004), and contributing to a moral future. The epistemic knowledge structures offered by imams and theology experts (at least nominally and cognitively) facilitate the conceptualization of Islamic Finance as constitutive of principles and practices that are antithetical to those of conventional financial institutions.

Despite the affinity between the National Islamic orientation and Capitalist Islam that I have highlighted here and in Chapter Three, however, imams affiliated with the Muftiate still tend to emphasize the role of religion in the public life of the nation over the role it can play in the market. Capitalist Islam is of secondary importance to them in comparison to the goal of institutionalizing a privileged place for Islam in the popular understanding of national character, and, conversely, a privileged place for national customs and identity in the popular understanding of Islam. There is one faction of Imams, however, that articulate a more explicitly Capitalist orientation of Islamism. This orientation featured more prominently in my discussions with the imams associated with the Gülen movement that has widely spread in the region.

Capitalist Islam: Promoting an Orderly Market

In contrast to the mainstream Islamic orientation promoted by the Muftiate, which emphasizes deference to national custom and central authority, imams affiliated with the Gülen movement tend to express appreciation for the virtues of the free market and lax state policies in the religious field. Though affiliated and registered with the Muftiate, these imams bear the marks of a more progressive and globally-oriented religious education, and benefit from the more liberal religious climate in Kyrgyzstan (and to a lesser degree Kazakhstan) in comparison to neighboring countries. While they praised the market economy for opening new pathways for development, they were nevertheless concerned about tendencies for greed, dishonesty and opportunism that it catalyzed. In this way, this particular stance of Islamism falls in line with Cihan Tugal's "moral capitalists" – or those who "do not challenge the market, but are disturbed by the type of society and personality created by the market" (Tugal 2002:99). In their understanding, a

better society can be built through the incorporation of Islam in civic and public life, whereby religious tenets can and should be merged with orientations towards profit and efficiency. The means for building a better future typically include discipline, industriousness, and ethical practices that can be forged by Islam.

As we sat in his Bishkek office, Shahimardan ustaz [teacher in Turkish] stated, “look, Islam is adaptable to whichever work, if a person is a farmer or a trader. Regardless of occupation, our religion can show the way.”³² One of the youngest imams that I spoke with, Shahimardan ustaz wore business-like attire and was cleanly shaved. He leads a mosque that also houses a religious boarding school for children from all regions of the country. He represents one of the growing ranks of imams that see a strong compatibility between the goals of strengthening the local economy and reconnecting with the broader Muslim world. Such imams increasingly see an outward-looking Islamic economy as playing a crucial role in this trajectory of development.

Importantly, imams in this camp, similarly to those who articulate National Islam, seek to inculcate distinct normative claims around *sadaqa* [benevolence, or good deeds]. While *sadaqa* is a broader umbrella term for charity, which encompasses *zakat* [alms] and *qard hasan* [benevolent loans] among other forms, imams have gone beyond canonical usages and promoted idea that disposable wealth can be directed towards mobilizing resources and building a better society.

Nimatilla imam, who leads a mosque called “Yiman” located in the northern part of Bishkek, similarly depicted entrepreneurs as moral actors who contribute to the greater good of the public. He promoted social aid in terms of a public good, but saw private

³² Shahimardan ustaz, a leader of Kok-Jar mosque, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Interview conducted, June 30, 2014.

actors as both bearing the primary responsibility for contributing this public good, and having the greatest means to do so. When asked why he thinks his mosque receives material support from entrepreneurs, Nimatilla imam explained it in terms of benefaction and God's mercy that people seek. He explained the need to be ethical in the following terms:

There are more people these days who are seeking God's benefaction and blessings [soopchuluk in Kyrgyz]. One of the *hadiths* of the Prophet, is about the three things that a person is evaluated upon after death – the first one is related to that person's charitable giving, the second one is related to the knowledge that a person might have left after himself, and the third is whether that person left a child behind. A person who donates to a mosque, let's say helps to buy a carpet to be used in a mosque, and that carpet is used by visitors to prey on – that will affect the amount of mercy and blessings that person receives in the hereafter. The same is true with people who choose to cover the costs of *ooz achar* [dinners in the end of the day during Ramadan fasting]. Our mosque hosts dinners for 200 people, and that costs around 22,000 som [~385 USD]. All of our sponsors do it for blessings and to improve the morals of our people³³.

Both Shahimardan ustaz and Nimatilla imam, the mosque leader and part-time teacher at the Islamic Institute, are connected to a network of mosques that is partially funded by the local organization *Adep Bashaty*. This organization defines itself as an association of progressive Muslims, and is in turn connected to the *Jash Ishkerler Associatsiyasy* in Kyrgyz [Young Entrepreneurs' Association in Kyrgyz]. Nimatilla imam echoed the sentiments of Shahimardan ustaz, asserting that Islam can show the right way of doing business for entrepreneurs of various walks of life. Both respondents reiterated a number of times that the market economy can lead to a prosperous and moral society, so long as it is coupled with Islamic tenets.

³³ Nimatilla imam, a leader of the "Yiman" mosque, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Interview conducted July 1, 2014.

The entrepreneurs' association with which these leaders are connected incorporates over five hundred small to large businesses working in Kyrgyzstan. Most of the entrepreneurs are alumni of Turkish boarding schools that were established in the country by the followers of the Gülen Movement (Balci 2003), that I will discuss more extensively in Chapter Four. Starting from primary and secondary education, these semi-religious schools and the Turkish social movement with which they are associated represent one of the most visible moral capitalist networks in the region. The movement's network now includes business associations, an independent radio station, numerous mosques and *medresseh*, and religious associations.

Despite the success of these progressive networks, however, there is much at stake for imams who promote a moral capitalist orientation. These imams promote their progressive message as a counterweight to "radical" forms of Islamism that are often said to have made similar headway in the region. The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan often point to movements such as Wahhabism and Hizbut Tahrir as dogmatic imports from abroad that seek to undermine the sovereignty of Central Asian states by "brain-washing" their citizens and building a Caliphate – a single Islamic state incorporating all of the world's Muslim nations. The extent to which such movements have actually established themselves is unclear, and the regimes often use such terms to invoke vague external threats that justify heavy-handed regulation of the religious sphere. In contrast to these movements, the Gülen movement valorizes a "moderate" and even "progressive" form of Islam, which instills the idea that market actors can both reap the personal benefits from their effort and build a better society, so long as they commit to hard work, discipline, well-rounded education, and explicit intentions to be ethical and

honest in their business dealings. Nevertheless, association with other foreign Islamic movements such as Wahhabism threatens to undermine the position of the Gülen movement and its associated networks, even though they present themselves as a response to such “backward-looking” forms of Islam.

As I have attempted to show above, these imams promote the idea that Islamism can facilitate the knowledge and means to build modern societies. Less in friction with the National Islamic rhetoric, imams in this faction still emphasize the idea that a “good Muslim” is someone who is both committed to piety and forward-looking. These themes were brought out explicitly in one of the newspaper articles that was recommended to me by a member of the above-mentioned business association. The article presented an interview with Jakshylyk Bochorov, a theologian by training who had in the past also worked as a teacher in local Gülen-movement schools. Excerpts from the article attest to this enthusiasm for the expansion of both capitalism and Islam in moderation – still novel assertions in the post-Soviet space, where both Islam and unruly markets are common “boogeymen” for media outlets:

We should not be afraid of Islamization, if it works for the benefit of our society. They do not teach bad things in mosques after all. They call on us to work hard for the benefit of families and one’s country; they teach [you] to be a law-abiding citizen, to pay taxes, to engage in charity, to take care of elderly and those in need, and to educate children.

Life in Turkey opened my eyes to the fact that religion does not merely exist in the walls of the mosque and in rituals around funerals and other events. Turkey is a modern country, but the principles of Islam are omnipresent in all spheres of life – in family, in education, and in business. At the same time, they are not concerned about proving their religiosity by their clothes. They dress in a modern manner [*po sovremennomu*]. In contrast, our people [in Kyrgyzstan] tend to think that they need to show their piety only in the vicinity of mosques, or during prayers. The major requirements that people

think prove one's piety is to have a long beard or to wear 'Muslim' outfit. This view prevails in our day.³⁴

This progressive agenda generally coexists with the National Islam promoted by the Muftiate, but nevertheless creates tensions with the reverence reserved for the nation and localism in popular, mainstream expressions of Islam. *Adep Bashaty*, which explicitly identifies itself as an association of progressive Muslims, has been often criticized by other factions in the country as too "foreign." This may be in part due to the fact that the imams and their mosques affiliated with *Adep Bashaty* are among the most self-sufficient, due to their sponsorship by the business association like JIA. This relative autonomy from the Muftiate structure, at least financially, can therefore be seen as protecting the interests of an oligarchic, capitalist system.

Capitalist Islam is not limited to the Gülen movement and its associated networks, however. Other imams, particularly those whose mosques were closely connected to petty bourgeoisie entrepreneurs, such as small and medium business owners and bazaar traders, similarly described entrepreneurs as aspiring to be moral in every step of their daily business dealings and other day-to-day activities. They also repeated the belief that honest entrepreneurs are deserving of wealth and opportunities. After all, pious entrepreneurs have connected Kyrgyzstan to regional and international markets, provided access to new consumer goods that were previously unavailable, and made possible the expansion of mosques and of a generally pious life-styles that could only be fantasize about in the past.

Eager to demonstrate that the moral character of pious Muslim entrepreneurs has truly improved, imams frequently offered anecdotal evidence of the many good deeds

³⁴ Source: <http://members.vb.kg/2016/02/26/stil/1.html> - last checked May 25, 2016.

that they have observed. Such anecdotes were offered by Karim imam³⁵, who leads one of the five mosques located on the territory of Dordoi Bazaar, one of the largest wholesale markets in all of Central Asia. He recounted a situation in which one of the traders in the bazaar came to consult him about a purse left behind by a customer. Upon checking the contents of the purse, the trader found 10,000 som [~150 USD]. Karim imam suggested that the trader wait for three days, and if the owner did not return, then give the money away to charity.

Another bazaar seller, who specialized in locally produced apparel, approached Karim imam asking what he should do with 2,000-3000 USD, that he calculated to be his *zakyat* obligation. Karim told him “give in Allah’s name, and he’ll multiply it and give it back to you.” The trader agreed and asked for advice on how to best donate the money. “Is it ok to give it to one person, or to several people?” The imam recommended that he give it to several people, and the trader divided the amount into four parts and gave it to two of his relatives and two poor people that he found through his network. Karim seemed pleased with his ability to encourage charitable giving from the trader, who was otherwise on the fence about his supposed obligation as a pious man. He smiled as he came to the conclusion of his story. The trader paid his *zakyat* on the last day of Ramadan, and a month later, he returned to the imam with good news: “I now believe in what you said. In the following month after paying my *zakyat*, I got a profit of 30,000 USD.” The imam responded “see, Allah showed you how merciful he is!”

In the words of Karim imam, any outlet for charity serves as a form of *sadaqa*. As I mentioned above, however, many imams must combine ethical guidance with pragmatic

³⁵ Karim imam, a leader of one of the mosques at Dordoi bazaar. Interview conducted on July 3, 2014.

concerns for the sustainability of their mosques. For example, Karim imam explained to me that every mosque must pay 2,500 som (~40 USD) of taxes to the Muftiate, and has to cover utility fees including electricity, water and trash disposal. In addition, as most of the imams that I spoke to confirmed, they do not receive any salary from the Muftiate. Most of their direct income that helps to sustain mosques comes from donations that visitors drop in a tithe box. Imams often encourage donation directly to their mosques, therefore, and can benefit greatly from linkages to wealthy local entrepreneurs, who they validate as the appropriate kind of Muslims based on their charitability.

Spiritual Islam: Paving the Way to Heaven

Whereas state officials have largely sought to suppress the rhetoric that falls under what I call the “spiritual Islamic” orientation, certain factions of religious authorities in Kyrgyzstan have channeled their efforts in articulating this distinct moral future. This orientation has most credence among imams who favor relatively autonomous religious movements, such as the missionaries of *Tablighi Jama'at*. Among entrepreneurs, this orientation resonates with those who prioritize ethical business as a way of ensuring their place in the afterlife by prioritizing piety and Islamic values over profit.

Religious authorities in this faction are far more critical than the previous two factions discussed of the role that enterprise can play in engendering strong and desirable moral values. I sat with Muhammad Sharif one afternoon in the summer of 2014 in a small café next to the central mosque in Bishkek. He wore a long robe, even though it was a hot summer day, and ordered a pot of green tea that we shared. Although he was not an imam or leader of any mosque, he was recommended to me as a religious scholar and a prominent figure among the local pious Muslims affiliated with the *Tablighi*

Jama'at movement. As we spoke of piety and business practices, he insisted that capitalism is first and foremost about idolizing the economy. According to Muhammad Sharif, everything involving economic outcomes – material goods, money and success in this life – should be secondary for any devout Muslim. “Hope is an act of devotion with one’s heart. Once you rest your hopes on material things – you end up worshipping material over everything else³⁶,” he stated.

For Sharif, a spiritual orientation toward the future – the afterlife – must be radically juxtaposed to the moral capitalist stance expressed above. He prioritized worshipping God through one’s body (performing prayers), through one’s language (praising God), through one’s property (being charitable), and most importantly, through one’s heart (expressing hopes and desires related to the hereafter, not the mundane present). In Sharif’s words, only through these acts is one able to escape the systems of beliefs that are often imposed on us, including the ideology of the capitalist economy itself.

Religious authorities like Muhammad Sharif, who promote a Spiritual Islamic stance, consider the market economy “incapable of fulfilling the basic (religiously/morally defined) human needs” (Tugal 2002:101).³⁷ For them, neglect of the afterlife can lead to detrimental consequences. Interestingly enough, many imams who expressed these attitudes were involved in entrepreneurship themselves, and reinforced their spiritual network and sense of solidarity through market activities. Nevertheless,

³⁶ Muhammad Sharif, interview conducted at a café in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. June 3, 2014.

³⁷ Cihan Tugal identifies moral *anti*-capitalists as one of the expressions of Islamism (2002).

these religious authorities consistently articulated desirable moral futures in terms of a better life in the hereafter.

Bilyal damla [teacher], an imam who led one of the mosques known for its explicit affiliation with the missionary movement *Tablighi Jama'at*, spoke of the need to be industrious and self-sufficient, hard-working and disciplined in both one's business activities and personal life. According to Bilyal damla:

The Prophet Mohammad stated that the best of people can both take care of their mundane obligations and also remember about life in the hereafter. Those who can remember about life in the hereafter, and take care of their own children, without burdening others, are exemplary. I can't say, "oh I have seven children, can you please help me take care of them, so that I can spend my time preying at the mosque." You must be able to raise your children with one hand, and take care of your business with the other...in the meantime always following the Prophet's teachings³⁸.

Bilyal damla exhibited such industriousness in his own professional accomplishments and enterprises. In addition to his role as an imam, Bilyal damla also started a small-scale agricultural business, in which he worked plots of land and earned from breeding large cattle. He noted in particular that he was able to maximize his profit by selling his harvest during spring time, when the crops are more expensive, as opposed to in the fall when most farmers harvest their crops. He attributed this industriousness, frugality and discipline to the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. Linking his own industriousness since he was a young boy to the words of the Prophet Mohammad, Bilyal damla, summarized his teachings as an imam – that a pious person must be self-reliant and able to provide for the family.

Although his teachings are not incompatible with the National or Capitalist Islamic stances on the surface, Bilyal damla emphasized that the duties and concerns of day-to-day

³⁸ Bilyal damla, a leader of KASI mosque, Bishkek, Kyrgyzsan. Interview conducted June 25, 2014.

life should not outweigh the thoughts about the divine and the afterlife. Religious authorities who articulate Spiritual Islam set a higher bar for Muslim entrepreneurs to be considered truly pious. They must be sufficiently devoted and charitable as to be ready to give up profit in the name of spiritual calling. Religious duties require that they cleanse their profits and capital from the “dirt, rust and theft” of business (Tugal 2002:101). Some members of *Tablighi Jama'at* developed economic partnerships and ran their businesses together, and expressed genuine pride at their material success. Nevertheless, such religious authorities always framed material success in terms of the freedom and ability it gave them to practice a rigorously Muslim life, as the following excerpt from Bilyal damla's interview illustrates:

I went on the *haj* trip with the help of one *baike* [older brother in Kyrgyz, but a general term for an older, respected man], I heard that your *dua* [prayers] made in *Mecca*, come true. So we made a *dua* “oh God, give us a good job...so that no one would control our working hours, so that it has to do with something that interests many people, and so that we have a good income.” That's how we prayed. Once we returned from *Mecca*, my friend *Adyl* invited me to do business with him, selling cars. We quickly realized that cars were indeed a very good business.

Initially starting from small-scale trade, this venture evolved into a larger business. Bilyal damla was involved in the business for eleven years, which turned into a group partnership importing cars from Japan and Korea. The partnership involved around twenty other men, all devout followers and students of the same imam at a particular mosque, who taught them the ropes of the trade.

Thus, the mosque was not just a place of religious observance for the members of this group, but also served as a vibrant venue for civic and commercial life. Groups of men forged business alliances and relationships of trust and respect through this religious venue. Although the group eventually disintegrated, Bilyal damla and another group

member whom I interviewed spoke fondly of their collaboration together. For them, it was a perfect group of partners who all thought alike. They did not prioritize material gains, but rather a pious lifestyle and salvation. Bilim, one of the partners of Bilyal damla, stated with a note of pride that they would leave their business even in high season for the sake of their *dava 'at* trips. These kinds of sacrifices - criticized by moral capitalists as illogical and impractical – served to reinforce the group's solidarity that prioritized God's benevolence.

Imams in this faction frame the need for charitable action in the other-worldly terms, as indicators of the piety and obedience to God that open pathways to heaven. Such devotion supersedes the uncertainties that the entrepreneurs frequently voiced, namely uncertainty related to the economic returns on their pious commitments and moral business practices. Although the Capitalist and National Islamic articulations speak of the need to perform *sadaqa*, such forms of charity are seen as insufficient by those who articulate and subscribe to more Spiritually-oriented Islam. This latter school of *sadaqa* tends to emphasize continual action as a means of earning benevolence, as opposed to individual acts of charity. *Dava 'at*, or proselytization, provide an additional dimension that spiritual-oriented actors say is lacking from other approaches. Devout Muslims go door-to-door in both urban and rural settings to invite residents to attend prayer at local mosques. As a practice that had not been performed during the Soviet period, *dava 'at* is often criticized as foreign and backward-looking. Nevertheless, *dava 'at* has rapidly spread in Kyrgyzstan, particularly in conjunction with the rise of *Tablighi Jama 'at* in the country – a missionary movement from Pakistan that has recently enjoyed warmer relations with the Muftiate.

With an estimated global following of around 12-15 million, *Tablighi Jama'at* has expanded across Central Asia in the past decade. Originating in early 1920s in India (Ismailbekova and Nasritdinov 2012),³⁹ the movement identifies itself as a peaceful and apolitical brand of Islam, in which new members join the ranks primarily through *dava'at* groups, going with missionaries door to door (Reetz 2008). They also learn ways of piety through communal study groups and worshipping. Although the movement has been banned in Kazakhstan, it is quite popular in Kyrgyzstan. The new administration in the Muftiate of Kyrgyzstan officially voiced its approval of *Tablighi Jama'at* in 2012, even instituting a new *dava'at* department at the time of my fieldwork. Nevertheless, public disapproval around proselytizers and missionary trips is still stark.⁴⁰ Most missioners are criticized as under-educated, but more importantly, negligent of their families when engaging in missionary work. As a movement that is growing, however, *Tablighi Jama'at* still remains on the fringes of the religious field, and resonates mostly with under-privileged social groups (especially ethnic minorities and the unemployed), hence lacking the kind of institutional support that the religious authorities articulating the National and Capitalist Islam enjoy.

Conclusion

³⁹ The movement was established by a lead Islamic scholar Maulana Muhammad Ilyas. Since its origination, the movement has disseminated to countries in West Africa, North Africa, Southeast Asia, parts of Europe and Central Asia (Ismailbekova & Nasritdinov 2012).

⁴⁰ The *Mufti* that faced such criticisms, gave the practice a facelift by introduced new, standard garbs that the proselytizers would be required to wear. This “uniform” is light in color, and features traditional Kyrgyz embroidered ornaments, design choices which combat earlier perceptions that the clothing worn by *dava'atchi* was dark, somber, and “foreign,” drawing more from Pakistani or Afghani traditional dress. Source: <http://arch.24.kg/community/176842-v-kyrgyzstane-dlya-davaatchi-propovednikov-sshita.html> - last accessed June 1, 2016

In this chapter I explored the processes through which imams have increasingly taken on the role of business ethicists. I asked what claims they make in their teaching, and how they propagate the necessity of ethics in business. My exploration of these questions contributes toward our understanding of the work of imams in normalizing private business, and in celebrating moral entrepreneurship. Moreover, addressing these questions probes into broader themes of the legitimation of the wealth and material well-being that successful entrepreneurs have managed to gain. Finally, the discussion of normative claims sheds more light on ways in which imams nurture sensibilities of societal order that could be re-established now through morality in the market, *despite* the disorderliness of the market.

The concept of “moral futures” helps us to shift analytically from the phase of imagination to the phase of action. Expectations of future value – as in the case of the stock market – are based on fictions and on the manner in which these fictions are articulated. In other words, value extends from actors’ expectations of future conditions, which coordinates their present activities accordingly. Moral futures can take different forms in the narratives of imams. As they articulate these moral futures, imams suggest visions and imaginaries of what awaits one both in the short-term or long-term future.

There is much to learn from the synergist studies that have promoted the notion of “pious neoliberalism” and “market Islam,” especially the productive merging of religious and capitalist sensibilities in contexts like Egypt, Turkey and Indonesia. While I appreciate the insights existing scholarship offers, and find many parallel processes in the Central Asian context, I still argue that these studies must be extended to include the concepts of moral futures and articulation. In this chapter, I have sought to show how

moral futures come to be articulated by religious leaders, who are not traditionally thought of as market actors. These imagined futures mobilize market actors, directing their investments and business strategies. Moreover, the conceptualization of moral futures that are articulated by imams and other religious leaders reminds us that the merging of pious sensibilities and profit orientations may lead to a plurality of visions, expressions and practices within this moralized market.

In the specifics of my cases, decisions over how to dispose of money and engage in charity are connected to distinct moral futures, with their own monetary or other equivalences for *sadaqa*. Religious authorities who articulate and lean toward National and Capitalist-Islam tend to emphasize giving back to the community through patronizing mosques and engaging in charity for the poor, while those who articulate Spiritual Islam tend to emphasize expanding the following of Islam by incorporating new members and encouraging a deeper commitment to individual religious practice. In this case, the different moral futures clash on the central issue of whether economic activity can even serve as a means for engaging in good works, or whether one must abandon mundane, this-worldly interests in order to be an agent of divine benevolence.

CHAPTER FIVE

Translating Religious Tenets into Organizational Scripts: Accounts of Entrepreneurs

Introduction

In the early 1990s, the inflow of a wide of array of commodities and ideas presented the local populations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with choices they could have hardly imagined just a decade ago. The liberalization of the economy in that sense fulfilled its promise by saturating local markets with new commodities from China, Korea, Turkey and other places that had been entirely out of reach for Soviet citizens. At the same time, however, locals and sympathetic observers alike, lamented the lawless dispossession that prevailed in the the first decade of independence, or what the citizens of many post-Soviet countries themselves came to call “wild capitalism” [*dikiy kapitalizm*] (see Nazpary 2002 for more discussion). Concerns over unruly markets and moral disintegration began to settle by the end of the decade, and by the 2000s public life reflected a wave of even broader changes in the economic and religious landscape.

In Bishkek, a new market niche, the Muslim or Halal “lifestyle market,” began expanding rapidly⁴¹ starting from 2000. These ranged from small kiosks and bazaar stalls, to more upscale medium-sized enterprises in the service and hospitality sectors, that were all quick to join the trend of “Shariah-compliant” businesses. Banks and financial products emerged that were also explicitly marketed as Islamic. EcoIslamic bank and

⁴¹ Source: www.worldhalalforum.org - last accessed November 22, 2015.

several micro-finance companies extended their services for customers who were religious or otherwise inclined to look beyond conventional banks. This wide range of Islamic businesses provide a perfect entry point to study how material and spiritual concerns come together in the market.

The previous two chapters addressed how moral behavior in the market became something imaginable, thinkable and plausible within articulatory projects. I focused on state officials and religious authorities – those who articulate the different moral futures that prescribe a role for Islam in the market. But how are these articulations received among the primary actors in the market - entrepreneurs? This chapter explores which articulations – National Islam, Capitalist Islam, and Spiritual Islam – have gained greater traction in different market sectors and why. To understand how moral futures animate market actors' decisions and activities, it is crucial to shift our attention to entrepreneurs – or those who *enact* these articulations. The key question of concern here is whether the abstract moral commitments articulated by state and religious officials can be translated by businesses into organizational scripts and routines. As Michel Anteby (2013) rightly points out, contemporary sociological and organizational theories often leave this question of translation unattended. The Weberian “iron cage” thesis has long suggested that morality and humanity can get lost in the process of routinization. The assumption is that moral projects that get incorporated into formal organizational scripts leave very little space for individual discretion, and eventually become unrecognizable in the cogs of rational bureaucratic machines. Anteby has recently argued that the “iron cage” may in fact be less sturdy than Weber believed, and that there may still be space for “moral awakening [and] not merely the expected entrapment of its members” (2013: 123).

My goal in this chapter is to address several questions that are often left largely unattended by these existing debates. In particular, I explore the following questions: How do entrepreneurs in the Islamic business field make sense of their work? How do they discuss their niche and company as they seek to translate broader religious tenets into actual business practices? I draw from around eighty interviews with owners and managers of small to large businesses in various sectors, ranging from finance to construction, trade, and the service sector. I examine the reflections of these entrepreneurs on why they entered the field of Islamic business, how they make sense of the “Islamic” aspect of their companies, and finally, how they translate their moral commitments into day-to-day practices.

Before turning to these accounts, however, I must first recap my approach to analyzing Islamic businesses, which integrates three perspectives. First, I incorporate Beckert's (2011) understanding of economic decisions and actions as being driven by different *imaginaries* –representations of the future state of things. Secondly, I incorporate elements from (De Leon et al. 2009; de Leon et al. 2015), whose political sociology explains how imaginaries emerge from the labor of articulation. Finally, I draw from Tugal's (2002) view that Islam is a religio-moral source that provides the moral and discursive framework for both particular articulations and subsequently, for economic behavior. Imaginary representations of the future, rooted in Islamic tenets, inject meaning and a sense of purpose to the activities of economic actors by creating a sense of a gap between what exists in the present (e.g. market dynamics, institutions, legal and traditional norms) and what can potentially be attained in the future (e.g. changes in these dynamics and institutions, as well in one's position in the market).

Hence, the imaginaries that become articulated, which I identify as Capitalist Islam, National Islam and Spiritual Islam, come to fuel understandings of “who we are,” what “our” aspirations are, and how to attain those aspirations. This type of analysis enables us to see the plurality of ways in which Islam and the market – the spiritual and the material – become intertwined to create a “complex moral landscape” (Deeb and Harb 2013).

Paying close attention both to the historical trajectory of post-Soviet Central Asia, as well as to the narratives of entrepreneurs themselves, I will demonstrate in this chapter how the Capitalist Islamic orientation has motivated a wider variety of market actors than the other two orientations. This articulatory project has integrated market actors ranging from larger financial institutions such as Islamic banks, to medium-sized microfinance companies, business associations and distinct networks of entrepreneurs, and even so-called petty bourgeois bazaar traders and distributors. To this diverse set of actors, Capitalist Islam serves as a system of meaning and a “guide for aspirations” (Tugal 2002:89). Though they may not necessarily be closely linked in their market activities, and though they face different opportunity structures and prospects for future returns, all such actors subscribe to the idea that the free market has its virtues. They acknowledge the social problems that the free market may cause, yet they emphasize the capacity of lifestyle, personal conduct, and integrity to guard against market ills. This approach makes them distinct from more conventional entrepreneurs in the region, who consider it the mandate of the government to step in and regulate the market and re-embed it in the moral economy.

As I will elaborate in this chapter, these entrepreneurs view religious revival as both a solution for resolving the “crisis of values” in their contemporary societies, as well

as a source of investment and business opportunities. Returns of piety for them has a three-fold potential: it has the capacity to create moral persons, to generate economic returns, and to build better societies. Capitalist Islamists are engaged with a certain faction of religious authorities that was discussed in Chapter Four, but also see themselves as carrying a distinct ethic that combines market pragmatism with ethical and moral imperatives. They commonly view any success and prosperity as earned and deserved.

This chapter is therefore heavily informed by respondents who expressed an orientation toward Capitalist Islam. As I noted previously, however, these orientations can overlap in the narratives of respondents, and entrepreneurs tended to gravitate toward one orientation or another rather than subscribing exclusively. The goals of National Islam in particular bore an elective affinity with Capitalist Islam in the narratives of more patriotically-minded entrepreneurs, while Spiritual Islam presented greater tension with these moral futures that are oriented toward worldly success and national prosperity. The latter orientation that appeals to a smaller numbers of entrepreneurs who, despite running businesses, believe that they have a moral obligation to oppose market logics and profit-motives more radically. Hence, Spiritual Islamic orientation remains more marginal, even in the religious sphere, primarily because it is articulated by peripheral religious authorities who wage a low-level insurgency against the dominant Muftiate, and are therefore institutionally disadvantaged compared religious authorities who articulate a more mainstream National Islamic orientation. Heeding the call of Spiritual Islam to pave the way for a better life in the hereafter, such entrepreneurs prioritize their Islamic piety and the call to spread the word of God. Rather than speaking of profit, such respondents

instead focused on “cleansing” their businesses and income morally, and focusing more on spiritual fulfillment in their personal lives.

Table 2: Ideal-Types of Islamist Expression in the Economy

	Capitalist Islam	National Islam	Spiritual Islam
Articulated futures (or ends)	Moral capitalism i.e., economic & social development in the present life	Protective markets i.e., economic development, where resources are not controlled by bureaucrats and a few powerful entrepreneurs. Lucrative market niches need to be controlled by dominant ethnic, national and regional groups	Better life in the hereafter i.e., self-sustainable economic development, where distinct Islamic identity is protected and prioritized over profit
Means	Ethical business practices Discipline, industriousness and self-sufficiency Education Directing profit towards social projects	Promoting “natural alliances,” where Muslims of certain ethnic, national or regional identity mobilize	Giving up profit in the name of spirituality <i>Dava’at</i> trips Religious duties of <i>sadaqa</i> and <i>zakyat</i>
Interpellation of pious entrepreneurs	Practical and logical Ethical and moral Deservedly well-off	Practical and logical Compliant with precepts of the Quran Seeking justice	Spiritual and devoted Ethical and giving Ready to give up profit
Critiques offered	Criticize National Islam as exclusionary and Spiritual Islam as radical and backward-looking	Criticize Capitalist Islamists as “bourgeois,” and Spiritual Islamists as “foreign” and “alien” – both therefore potentially threatening the authentic identity of Kyrgyz Muslims.	Criticize Capitalist Islamists as sellouts.

The Rise of Capitalist Islam

From Foreign-Educated Entrepreneurs to Petty Bourgeois

As I started cultivating relationships with a range of entrepreneurs, I noticed a consistent pattern among those who strongly espoused the Capitalist Islamic orientation. I found that they presented clearly articulated social imaginaries of a better society that could be built through industriousness, education and ethical business practices. Many of the strongest proponents of this orientation came from a large business association in Kyrgyzstan, *Jash Ishkerler Associatsiyasy*. Both the leadership and members of the association consistently emphasize themes of hard work, integrity, accountability, self-reliance and “moderate” piety as means of building a better and more progressive society. The association is constituted by over five hundred small, medium and large companies in Kyrgyzstan, which work in various sectors ranging from the hospitality and service sectors, to construction, textiles, education, and trade.

At the core of this network is the vision that entrepreneurs are worthy of their profits if those profits are earned through hard work in line with Islamic tenets, understood as discipline, industriousness, ethical businesses practices, and a willingness to give social aid. A just and orderly society for the members of the JIA is not to be built by strictly following religious guidelines, but rather by being ethical and honest, by mobilizing and addressing collective problems, and by contributing to social projects.

The JIA is closely connected to the Gülen Movement that I discussed in Chapter Four. The movement has succeeded in catalyzing expansive grassroots network in the country that initially began from a series of Turkish boarding schools. The schools were initially sponsored by followers of the movement in Turkey, and quickly gained a

reputation for their high quality education and faith-driven teachings of ethical and personal conduct. Twenty years later, alumni of these schools, many of whom later pursued higher and advanced degrees in Turkey, came to form business alliances like the JIA, which opened their doors to business people who share a similar interest in building a more pious society through progressive Islam and moral business practices. The association is open to engagement with the state, but asserts independence from any state direction or support.

The mission statement of the JIA, stated prominently on their official website and publications, is very much in line with what I consistently heard throughout my interviews with the individual members:

Members of JIA recognize that taxes and other obligatory deductions contribute towards our common future – our schools and public institutions, whose services we and our children will use. Our mission is rooted in the understanding that the development of our country is dependent upon a competitive private sector and conducive business environment.⁴²

As can be seen from the mission statement, this business association embodies key qualities of the Capitalist Islamic orientation, and is a testament to the fact that religiously-inspired movements can aspire to more than merely protecting traditions and extant meaning systems in the face of contemporary challenges.

The case of this association speaks against conceptualizations of religiously-inspired movements that see them mostly as reactions to a quickly modernizing world. In Turkey itself, followers of the Gülen movement have allegedly acted against “the populist and revolutionary interpretations of Islam,” and instead promoted a “non-confrontational Islamicization of society and state” (Tugal 2002:93). Members of the JIA

⁴² Source: <http://jia.kg/about/> - last accessed June 3, 2016.

in Kyrgyzstan similarly press for a moderate and progressive interpretation of Islam in their business activities. Similar to their Turkey predecessors, the JIA and other local Central Asian nodes of the Gülen-inspired network encompasses a radio station, numerous mosques, charity organizations, and the religious association *Adep Bashaty*. Far from merely reacting, the JIA makes proactive efforts to create a more conducive business environment in line with Islamic tenets as they understand them. These efforts include defending the interests of enterprises from corrupt state organizations and a deteriorating public system, as well as meeting the challenges of integrating into a competitive global market.

At the time of my fieldwork, I interviewed three of the executive board members in this association. All three were graduates of Turkish high schools in Kyrgyzstan, with higher educations from the American University of Central Asia. One of them Umbriel, was the founder of the *Tredstone Capital Partners* investment company, which had attracted over 100 million USD into the local economy. The second, Temirbek, worked in the mineral resource mining industry and as an advisor to the Business and Investment Council under the chairman of the Taxation Agency. He also founded *Zamat Consulting*, which provided legal and financial consultation, and co-founded *Premium Development* construction company. Finally, the third, Semetei, was the founder and principal manager of the *Bishkek Fashion Retail Group*, which outsourced their apparel production to China and involved a chain of stores that sold apparel of Euromoda, Mia, Levi's, Mavi and Colin's brands.

Figure 4: Scenes from JIA meetings and workshops.⁴³



When I sat down with Temirbek and the executive director of the association, Ruslan Akmatbek, they both spoke of their work in terms of building and running honest and ethical businesses that enabled entrepreneurs to earn a clean profit:

Company owners that are in our association pay membership fees. Now most of our business people are not used to the idea of belonging to a formal association, they are not used to paying fees. So when we established the association, we wanted to change that. We were founded by a group of enthusiasts who wanted to make a difference, and hence the goal of our association is to deliver real services to members. Therefore, we provide various information about patents, fairs, and exhibitions in which our entrepreneurs can participate. We also organize seminars and business trips outside of the country. In these endeavors, we collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce, as well other business associations and embassies, including the Turkish, Russian, US, and Indian embassies. Just recently, we organized trips for our entrepreneurs, where they visited relevant businesses in Tajikistan, Germany and India. All of the expenses are typically covered by the association⁴⁴.

These entrepreneurs juxtaposed themselves to other “narrow-minded” groups who only cared about regional, ethnic and national affiliations.

The networks of the JIA stretch across Kyrgyzstan, incorporating even small business owners such as Bakyt, the owner of a confectionary shop with fifty employees

⁴³ Source: <http://jia.kg/about/> - last accessed June 3, 2016.

⁴⁴ Interview conducted at the JIA office, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. June 3, 2014.

in Osh. Now in his mid-forties, Bakyt used to work in Tajikistan with his partner, serving as a distributor for local factories. He later moved back to his hometown, Osh, to open his own company with the help of his close Tajik friend who had experience in the industry. When I asked Bakyt how he went about deciding on the company's specialization, he began his account with his discussion of how both capitalist management and Islamic principles match each other well:

First of all, I do the *namaz* [prayer] five times a day, and I wanted my business to be clean as well.... My training was in management. I find that managerial principles actually overlap with Islamic tenets quite a bit. For example, the principles for good managers state that they need to consult with their workers; they need to make decisions democratically. But the *hadiths* in the Quran say similar things! They also instruct us to treat workers well, to pay them before their forehead sweat dries off [*mangdai teri kurgaganga cheiyn*, in Kyrgyz]. It's considered a form of *sadaqa* [benefaction, good deed] if you treat your workers respectfully and keep them content⁴⁵.

Bakyt regularly pointed to his workers, who were on the other side of a glass wall on one side of his office. He evoked some of the institutional continuities speaking of Soviet trained and younger generations of specialists. Both lacked modern technical skills and forward-looking vision, in his mind. The solution, for him, lay in learning from foreign expertise.

When we first started, we really lacked good experts and technologists. Those who studied during the Soviet times may have gotten good training, but their knowledge is really outdated at this point. I ended up recruiting a consultant from abroad. I was able to invite a consultant from Holland through an international organization that facilitates businesses. He and I recruited two students from the technology department of a local university here in Osh. After working with them for ten days, the consultant told me "send them back; these efforts are worthless." I realized that our students are also being taught by those Soviet-trained specialists, but those specialists either don't have business experience themselves or don't have the right skills for modern industry. So what can they really teach?

⁴⁵ Bakyt, the owner of a confectionary shop, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. July 10, 2014.

Bakyt regarded the benefits of being a member of an association such as JIA were very much worth the fees, which he diligently paid on a monthly basis. Echoing the above-quoted leaders, Bakyt voiced his belief that collective action and mobilization can resolve various problems with taxation, bribe extortion, finding potential investors, and more. Besides the lobbying potential that JIA wielded both formally and informally by nurturing relationships with ministers and parliament members, the association also often organizes managerial training workshops, seminars, and retreats for all those involved. While Bakyt may not personally recognize the reach of this community, which is transnational in scope, he spoke of the JIA as a catalyst of his personal and business values rooted in tolerance, prioritizing education and creating conducive environment for those who are at the helm of enterprise.

Members of this association certainly varied in their own piety, some openly telling me that they are first and foremost entrepreneurs and are only trying to capitalize on the “Islamic” brand. One such entrepreneur, for example, scoffed when I asked him why he was seeking to find a way to establish an Islamic investment company – “I don't care about the religious component to be frank, but if there're people who care about it. Why not use my chance, right?” Regardless of their personal piety, however, many entrepreneurs in this alliance were avid believers in “doing business right and doing good.” Because of their foreign education, international collaborations, and tendency to have more high-end businesses in their respective sectors, these entrepreneurs embody what Mona Atia called “pious neoliberal subjectivities.” Entrepreneurs who espouse this orientation seek to instill values of responsibility, productivity and usefulness to society

as part of being a good Muslim. In other words, they link “material and spiritual benefits” primarily through their entrepreneurial work (2012:144).

Beyond the network of JIA, however, similar themes of integrity, ethical principles and moderate piety resonated in the rhetoric of the so-called petty bourgeois: owners of small family-run stores and traders at bazaars, all of whom also explicitly identified their businesses as “Shariah-compliant.”

Figure 5: Scenes from Dordoi bazaar, Bishkek. Summer 2014.



One of my respondents, Ainur, a small bazaar trader selling Muslim apparel for women, echoed these sentiments of improving her own *iman* [belief] and working for the benefit of her society through ethical business:

In Shariah, it explicitly says that people need to abide by the laws of their government. So I will pay for my license, although I know that most of my money will probably end up in the pockets of those sitting in the government. They will have to face God for their own sins. I, in turn just want to do things the right way. All those movements, like Hizb-ut-Tahrir for example, who want to overturn the government and establish a Caliphate... even though they are pious, they're not the right kind of Muslims, you know. In Islam there's no such thing as coercing someone into religion. I believe it's the same thing here – people need to realize that the only way to build a stronger society is by doing your work well, earning your money through hard and honest work, by paying your taxes, and not really expecting much from someone else⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Interview conducted at her workplace at Dordoi bazaar, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. July 1, 2014.

One could argue that even the most secular entrepreneurs seek ways of “doing things right” similarly to Ainur, and of instilling principles of ethical work into their business routines. Only through the labor of articulation, however, are people able to orient their efforts to common moral futures that transcend the individual. As demonstrated by common themes in Ainur’s words and those of JIA members, entrepreneurs who espouse Capitalist Islam seek ways to carve out a niche of morality in the market by connecting moderate, apolitical Muslim ethics with profit-oriented work.

Morality in Practice – Bringing Production in Line with Religious Tenets and Directing Social Aid to the “Right” Organizations

For Bakyt, religiously-driven morals were incorporated into several areas, including the production process, labor relations, and social aid. In altering his production process, he mostly relied on the halal certification agency (discussed in Chapter Six) that enforces both composition and process standards in businesses that wish to be halal-compliant. In regards to compositional standards, such certification agencies prohibit the use of certain products relevant for confectionaries, such as gelatin, thickeners, certain colorants, preservatives dissolved in alcohol, or any ingredients that could come from haram sources. Following the guidelines of the certification agency, Bakyt changed several ingredients that he had used before, mostly related to gelatin and colorants. He replaced some of his former suppliers with others that were recommended to him as producers of halal-compliant products. Although he admitted that there was still room for doubt as to whether all of their suppliers were halal, he was happy to rely on the certifiers and their approval.

Bakyt also believed that he had successfully implementing Islamic moral tenets in his relationship with his employees:

Most of the workers are women; some of them are single mothers and I do realize that they do hard work here, so I make sure that their working conditions are good. We organize picnics and other fun events outside of the company. I also have the tradition of bonus pay on their birthdays...in other words, I do my best not to turn their daily work into a purgatory.

For Bakyt, his managerial role and his interactions with workers were directly linked to his ideas of how he should be engaging with social aid. He considered it his obligation to promote piety, but at the same time voice concerns over the rise of religious extremism.

I do pay attention to the workers' piety. If they're believers, they may be more trustworthy; you can work with less caution. But at the same time, if our government doesn't pay much attention, radicalization of religion may rise, and it's bad for the government as well. Even in TV broadcasting, there needs to be more space given to the educated imams, or else radical religious movements will expand and cause us all problems. They [radical religious organizations] can just look at the two of us and decide that we're not Muslims, solely based on our dress. And if they call *us* non-Muslims, then they pose a huge threat for the rest of the society.

Here Bakyt touches on a common theme among entrepreneurs employing the discourse of Capitalist Islam: the power of moderate Islam to counter the rise of radicalism, and especially the capacity of entrepreneurs to aid this process through pious dealings and directing their excess profit to social projects. Bakyt explained it in the following terms.

I contribute to the Adep Bashaty foundation... then there's a charity foundation Yiyk Ata-Jurt [Sacred Fatherland] and also to the JIA. Adep Bashaty is a clean [*taza* in Kyrgyz] organization. All the guys who work there received their education from Egypt and Turkey. They're far from having radical religious views. They are instead tolerant and treat everyone similarly, be it a Kyrgyz or Russian, Muslim or Christian. The reason I support them is that... if they don't expand, then radical religious movements will take over. If we end up having conflicts and clashes based on religion, our economy will be in tatters. You can see that that even today, Adep Bashaty members are already disliked by some.

Interviewer: Why do you think they're disliked?

These guys [Adep Bashaty and JIA members] go for modern business suits, they are clean... more educated. They don't wear those long *chapans* [traditional long jackets], they don't opt for long beards. So those groups who are radical and view such attributes as required for pious people, they view Adep Bashaty members negatively. They fixate on their foreign education and immediately assume that they are not genuine Muslims, or that they're receiving foreign financial aid. Some even think that they get their funding from Israel. I and my friends keep helping Adep Bashaty however, because they are tolerant. In true Islam, we have *hadiths* that show that you can't assault someone based on their religion. There's no violence or terrorism in Islam. Instead, we propagate education, tolerance and *yiman* [define]. There are too many radicalized people these days. Our government doesn't think about the consequences. You yourself must have heard that some of our people are joining the Syrian war, and you'd be appalled to see some of the younger kids – they can't even properly read or write, so of course they're brainwashed by the radicals!

As can be seen from these quotations, concerns over how to “Islamicize” business practices go beyond changing ingredients and implementing managerial techniques that are in line with religious tenets. For entrepreneurs like Bakyt, Islamic enterprise also directly involves concerns over how to preserve the coherence of moderate Islam and the Capitalist Islamic moral future.

From Islamic Banks to Microfinance Companies

One of the puzzles that I raised in the introduction of the dissertation requires reiteration as I move to the case of Islamic finance. Namely, why does the Islamic business model appeal to a variety of entrepreneurs, despite the lack of consensus over the substance of these models? As the case of Islamic banks and microfinance companies will show in this section, there are inevitable rifts between competing actors in the same field due to the different opportunity structures that confront these actors. While the state officials have favored larger Islamic banks as potential sources of revenue, they neglected smaller institutions such as Islamic microfinance companies. This disjuncture between larger and smaller Islamic Financial Institutions (IFIs) has led smaller-scale financial organizations

to take on a critical, Spiritual Islamic orientation that contrasts with the Capitalist Islamic orientation of larger Islamic banks. Islamic microfinance companies regard these larger institutions as bending the religious tenets in the interests of profit. Despite these different orientations, however, representatives of both kinds of IFIs articulate the field of Islamic finance in conjunction with each other. The field unites their efforts in the same cause – investing in the moral futures that promises to yield returns if they collectively promote the value of Shariah-compliance in the financial sector. Consensus on what constitutes Shariah-compliance in finance does not precede the work of these institutions, but (to the degree that consensus does obtain) follows from their competing articulatory projects.

Islamic financial institutions generally incorporate two major precepts on the morality of income into their lending policies: avoiding *riba* (usury, unjustified interest), and *gharar* (uncertainty, risk). *Riba* is the prohibition of charged interest due to the view of interest as exploitative (Mills and Presley 1999), in contrast to profit earned by active labor. *Gharar* is the prohibition of ambiguous and uncertain contracts. Hence, transactions should avoid “all contracts that contain uncertain counter values in exchange (e.g., the sale of fruit before it has ripened)” (Mills and Presley 1999:5). Some of the most popular financial products that IFIs offer are based on these two key tenets.

Mudarabah is a profit-and loss-sharing agreement, wherein the bank provides financial capital, and the lender, here defined as the partner, implements a business. *Musharakah*, operates as a joint venture, where all involved partners (the bank and the customer) agree in advance on profit sharing, and estimated losses are divided proportionally to the shares of each partner (Warde 2010). *Murabaha*, as a kind of fiduciary sale, involves three parties – the bank, a commodity seller and a client. The

bank obtains a good from the seller and re-sells to the client with a profit. In these and other transactions, all information of costs should be honestly declared and rooted in real commodity trade, not just financial dealing (Wolters 2013:5).

The largest Islamic banks in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were established with much state facilitation and enthusiasm from local entrepreneurs.⁴⁷ In Kazakhstan, *Al-Hilal* was established as a daughter company of an Abu-Dhabi-based bank in 2010. The bank serves only large corporations, “giving preference to corporate clients in oil and gas, rail transport and other infrastructure industries.”⁴⁸ In Kyrgyzstan, EcoIslamic Bank took off as a pilot project under the aegis of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in 2010, after an inter-governmental agreement was signed. The director, Shamil Murtazaliev, first bought shares of a conventional Russian/Kyrgyz bank, and then led the initiative of making it a pilot project of IDB. EcoIslamic Bank built its signature Islamic financial products on the foundation of an already mature organization, with core personnel, a large customer base, and its own “archetypal” form of finance and credit lending.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Although the origins of IFIs in Kyrgyzstan are often tied to the initiative of the Islamic Development Bank, and in Kazakhstan to the state’s active role in searching for investors and changing legislation, officials and entrepreneurs in both states acknowledge that the field has been primarily driven by local enthusiasm. A representative of the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan stated that if not for Shamil Murtazaliev’s own enthusiasm, EcoIslamic bank would not have launched the pilot project in agreement with the IDB. Murtazaliev’s vision of Kyrgyzstan as an Islamic financial hub in the region was instrumental in instigating new legislation supportive of Islamic finance (Aliev 2012, Wolters 2013). Similarly, a representative of the National Bank of Kazakhstan noted in an interview that the path to introducing IFIs was initially paved by an enthusiastic group from BTA bank, which was driven by young, local professionals, some of whom were pious believers. The first large conference on Islamic finance in Kazakhstan was similarly organized and sponsored by BTA bank.

⁴⁸ Source: http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2012/05/11/feature-01 - last accessed November, 2015

⁴⁹ Currently, the network of the bank includes 120 branch offices throughout the country, and over 100,000 customers who use variety of services, such as Islamic deposits, banking cards and halal cash transfers. From the interview with Askat Chonorov, director of customer service department, EcoIslamic Bank. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Interview conducted on October 3, 2012.

The emphasis on economic utility within official state discourses on Islamic finance has strongly influenced these states' prioritization of larger banks. This is particularly true in Kazakhstan, where the government even eased some of the regular requirements for the banking sector in the case of *Al-Hilal*. For example, the bank was allowed to enter the market despite its parent bank's low (in fact absent) credit rating. It was also allowed to have a higher ratio of foreign specialists than other financial companies. State regulators have rushed to revise existing laws on banking and the securities market, driven by high hopes that opening their markets to Islamic finance would yield inexhaustible sources of investment. In Kazakhstan, lobbying groups made great headway initially, spearheaded by the Association for the Development of Islamic Finances (ADIF or АИИФ in Russian), which includes IDB, Kazakh BTA bank, and state agencies such as the Ministry of Industry and Trade. This alliance of upper-echelon state officials and large investors has been steadily leading discussions and negotiations, with large infrastructure projects and corporate clients as a priority.⁵⁰

In Kyrgyzstan, Shamil Murtazaliev, the official representative of the IDB in Kyrgyzstan, is often mentioned as the initiator of similar legislative changes.⁵¹ Allegedly well connected to then President Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010), he facilitated the passing of a July 2006 decree "On the Pilot Project of Introduction of Islamic Financial Principles in the Kyrgyz Republic." Based on the decree, the National Bank later adopted

⁵⁰ This has been done primarily through the implementation of a 41-point government road-map for Islamic finance, that envisages amending taxation rules and introducing other legislative changes favorable to Islamic banks. The road map consists of eight chapters, and lists the tasks that various state and public organizations are charged with fulfilling by 2020. Hence, it is a comprehensive guideline that seeks to facilitate "the expansion of Islamic finance infrastructure, the establishment of more Islamic finance services including new banks, more educational and scientific work, a closer cooperation with foreign partners and the development of state organs" (Wolters 2013, 9)

⁵¹ Arzykan Osmonova, head of the department, National Bank of Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek. Interview conducted on April 2, 2013.

a statute for Islamic financial principles, which discussed in detail the banking instruments specific to Islamic finance. Starting from December 2006, the National Bank gained the right to issue licenses to IFIs in the country. Moving further, “state regulators continued their talks with consultants of the IDB and investors from Malaysia, further introducing amendments in the legislation to allow micro-finance companies to offer credit in form of *mudarabah*, *musharakah*, *ijara* and others” (Wolters 2013:13).

Both banks and microfinance companies that explicitly identified as Islamic sought to establish their customer base and to carve out their own niche vis-à-vis their conventional analogues. Many of the smaller-scale entrepreneurs within Islamic finance, however, founders and managers of microfinance companies, brokerages and insurance firms, complained that the playing field is tilted by the state in favor of larger Islamic banks and projects. The primary critique of these entrepreneurs is that the legislation that has been passed on Islamic banking barely touches upon issues of insurance and securities, the domains that are important for small-scale entrepreneurs who seek to institute Shariah-compliant insurance and credit unions, for example. The legislation on Islamic banking that was passed by the state in 2009 was created in a rushed manner, with only the banking sector in mind. As will be shown further through individual cases, the existing legislation does not allow a full range of activities for new Shariah-compliant businesses, nor are the state agencies in charge enthusiastic about passing the amendments that these entrepreneurs propose.

These contentions shed light on a different side of state policies towards Islamic finance. The legislative changes that were publicized as conducive to IFIs have not guaranteed equally favorable conditions to all Islamic businesses, as evidenced by the

deprivation of economic freedom to particular initiatives such as businesses striving to deliver retail products to the local population. In Kazakhstan for example, entrepreneurs have encountered significant difficulties in turning these ostensibly Islamic companies into profitable and sustainable businesses. This framework therefore restrains the activity of smaller-scale entrepreneurs within Islamic finance, and makes it difficult for them to generate profits and returns on their capital investment.

These tensions between Islamic banks and smaller-scale financial organizations, are particularly well illustrated in the experience of Alina,⁵² who established Takaful, a Shariah-compliant insurance company in Kazakhstan. Alina recounted her original rationale of opening the company: “I thought that if I’d earned money in a non-*halal* sector previously, I should at least gain *sabap* [benefaction] by shifting to a *halal* sphere.” At the same time, she connected this motivations to a second rationale that focused on the benefits for the broader community of believers: “I wanted to make Shariah-compliant insurance available to people who care.” A specialist in insurance products and a devout practitioner of Islam, Alina actively participated in drafting the roadmap and legislation for Islamic finance. The amendments that Alina drafted with a close group of like-minded entrepreneurs have not, however, been passed after two years. Due to the lack of legislation on Shariah-compliant insurance, her company cannot offer as wide a range of products as conventional companies. In her understanding, the regulators have been delaying the passage of amendments partly because they are not as deeply convinced of

⁵² Alina, founder of Takaful insurance company, Almaty, Kazakhstan. Interview conducted on June 14, 2013.

its necessity as are local enthusiasts of Shariah-compliant finance – “It’s only one among a whole list of other things that they have to work on.”

Besides the lack of state support, technical issues related to size and profit-turnaround challenge the efforts of smaller-scale entrepreneurs to tap into the resource and knowledge network of large Islamic banks. “They’re just too large to be interested in us” – said Alina, who had hoped to collaborate with *Al-Hilal* when she founded her insurance company. Had her suggestions of collaboration been accepted, she could have gained a large pool of customers from this one bank alone, and deliver comprehensive medical insurance coverage from within a trusted network of medical professionals. *Al-Hilal’s* management was initially interested, “but when they found out our size and portfolio, they quickly lost interest,” according to Alina. To be able to offer inclusive health insurances to the workers of *Al-Hilal*, her company would need to grow and be registered as a joint-stock company.

Fattah Finance presents a similar case. Established by Nurpiisov, a devout Kazakh Muslim economist, as the first Shariah-compliant brokerage and investment company, Fattah’s leadership aimed to include non-government securities to the official list of Kazakhstan’s stock exchange, and to provide services to help investors analyze and make investments that were Shariah-compliant. Nurpiisov and his colleagues were initially optimistic about the Presidential decrees on support for Islamic finance in the country, and invested considerable time, energy and capital into researching both local and foreign markets. They even drafted legislation – the 2020 road map for Islamic finance development – which was approved by the government. They gained significant interest from potential investors in Malaysia, Brunei, and other countries with well-

institutionalized IFIs. Fattah Finance's leadership signed an agreement with the state-owned Malaysian group AmanahRaya and the Development Bank of Kazakhstan (DBK) to open a second Islamic bank in the country. This bank, it was hoped, would deliver commercial financial products that would make finance available to the community of devout Muslims in Kazakhstan, who have long been waiting to access Shariah-compliant mortgages and loans.

Despite these hopes however, the initiative had stalled at the time of my fieldwork. One of the reasons, according to Nurpiisov, was the fact that AmanahRaya had a subsidiary firm in an offshore zone in Labuan, which was blacklisted by the National Bank of Kazakhstan.⁵³ According to Kazakhstani legislation, no local banks could invest in financial institutions that had any connections to this offshore zone. To resolve this technicality, the Malaysian prime minister requested that the Kazakhstani prime minister facilitate the removal of Labuan from the blacklist. The management of Fattah Finance sent official requests to the upper-echelon state officials, but once the process stalled, state officials took little further initiative to resolve the matter, attributing the lack of progress to technical problems. However, in the words of the entrepreneurs who initiated this project, the reason seems to be more culturally laden than state officials are willing to admit. According to representatives of Fattah Finance, they have already lost hopes for opening the bank in the near future.

In this and may similar cases, local entrepreneurs estimated that such process would take much less time if the government was more interested in supporting its own devout

⁵³ From Nurpiisov's interview to Interfax-Kazakhstan, February 2012. Source: http://www.interfax.kz/?lang=eng&int_id=13&category=exclusive&news_id=65 - last accessed November 22, 2015

Muslim constituents. Smaller-scale entrepreneurs interpret the state's lack of support for their activities as an unwillingness to allow devout, economically autonomous Muslims to become active in the public domain. The state's ambivalence toward smaller-scale entrepreneurs involved in Islamic finance also disengages them from the rhetoric of National Islam. The technical specificities of operation among larger-scale IFIs further disconnects their practices and efforts at building Shariah-compliant finance from the policies of the state.

Morality in Practice – Infusing Moral Considerations into Formal-Rational Transactions

Despite the tensions discussed above, I suggest that Islamic banks and microfinance companies contribute to the articulation of the field, for they commonly criticize the usurious conditions of the conventional financial market that has been too focused on “making money from money.” In Islamic financial practices, products like *murabaha* tackle these money-making practices and partly addresses the misuse of funds. While discussing Islamic finance as a solution may be idealistic, entrepreneurs in both Islamic banks and microfinance companies invoked a common denunciation of the conventional financial system among a growing clique of businessmen. Zamir Pusurov, the director of a micro-finance company in Osh, which is a subsidiary of one of the largest micro-finance companies in Kyrgyzstan, explains the increasing interest in Islamic finance in terms of general public discontent with the lack of transparency in the interest rates of conventional financial products, as well as with the generally usurious conditions of loans at conventional financial companies.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Zamir Pusurov, director of Kompanion Invest, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. First interviewed on March 7, 2013.

At the time of my fieldwork, Islamic banks and microfinance companies were mostly implementing *murabaha* [cost-plus sale] as a financial product that was meant to replace conventional loans. Here, the IFIs would finance the purchase of an actual commodity (e.g. construction materials or home appliances), and would add a mark-up fee to the cost. Customers would then repay the total cost of the commodity plus the mark-up divided into equal parts over the course of a certain period. As a corporate bank, *Al-Hilal* sold such loans to large businesses, while EcoIslamic bank worked with smaller-scale entrepreneurs as well as individuals. Meanwhile, microfinance companies appealed to smaller, marginal sets of customers who were overlooked and shunned by larger banks.

Although the terms of such loans seem quite clear on the surface, my respondents often pointed out that even the simplest *murabaha* financial instrument requires negotiations when implemented in practice. The intended use of funds can be a particularly murky element, determining what types of businesses can be funded and what types must be rejected. These decisions tend to be made by Shariah boards, which consist of imams and other religious authorities, who oversee the work of banks and microfinance companies. Representatives of smaller-scale IFIs tend to complain that the religious tenets these Shariah boards cite can be interpreted and bent quite liberally in the name of profit.

Zamir Pusurov, director of the microfinance company *Kompanion Invest* in Osh, shared his experience of working for EcoIslamic bank in Kyrgyzstan. Initially excited about the opportunity to gain experience at EcoIslamic bank, he quickly became disillusioned by the management's way of doing business, as they were more concerned

with profitability than with honesty to his mind. One such practice, which for him served as evidence of how large IFIs bend the Shariah law in favor of profit, was when EcoIslamic bank's Shariah board allowed loans to be granted to entrepreneurs engaged in commerce and trade that involved sales of tobacco and alcohol. The management and the Shariah board would not care, as long as only 50% of these businesses' profits came from the sales of illicit commodities. Zamir shared his sense of disillusionment with how religious tenets can be stretched in the interests of profitability by larger banks, but this experience did not necessarily dissuade him from the Capitalist Islamic orientation. The take-away from his experience of working in the bank was rather that the managers and owners of Islamic businesses are the ones to ensure better compliance of business practices to the claimed moral commitments.

Because I was welcomed into Kompanion Invest by Zamir, I conducted fieldwork observations with his staff for over a month. In my observations of employees' daily interactions among each other and with customers, it was evident that deliberation over the "creditworthiness" of customers, or the risks involved in loaning to certain small and medium companies, were primarily concerned with the types of commodities that would be purchased and the sectors to which the loans were going to be channeled. The workers that I shadowed on their "assessment" trips to potential customers' homes or worksites often subjected potential clients to extended interviews over how they were going to spend the money – is the customer interested in buying construction materials or some other commodities? Does the convenience store of a small entrepreneur who applied for a loan sell only licit goods only, or does it also offer alcoholic beverages? The interview forms, diligently filled out by the employees, were brought back to the company and

discussed with the director, as well as with the Shariah board member who was in charge of overseeing their work. In other words, for him as for many other entrepreneurs, their work involved a continuous effort of infusing ethical principles in their day-to-day practices.

As can be seen, representatives of Islamic banks, microfinance companies, and insurance firms view their model as a “social project,” and “something more than a credit lending institution.”⁵⁵ They believe in their potential to tackle existing economic problems and allow their societies to improve their moral integrity by incorporating religious precepts into their daily lives and manner of doing business.

Other Orientations at the Margins of the Field

“We’re Only Making Ends Meet!” Spiritual Islam and Entrepreneurs who Eschew Profit

As I endeavored to generate a diverse pool of respondents, I also approached entrepreneurs who were not part of established networks like the JIA or the Islamic financial institutions discussed above. Using the local online Muslim forum, I started cold calling companies from the advertisements placed in this forum. One of the entrepreneurs whom I got to know through this forum was Aziza, a Kyrgyz woman in her late thirties, who owned a Muslim childcare center in Bishkek. As I sat with her on the second floor of the private house that she rented for the childcare center, children went up and down the stairs in recess. Some of them came up to the water dispenser standing right next to her desk. “What do you say before drinking your water?” – she inquired from each child – reminding them to say their *dua* [prayers]. Aziza’s journey as an entrepreneur began only

⁵⁵ Yerlan Bidaulet, interview conducted in Almaty, Kazakhstan. On November 26, 2012.

after several years of working as a teacher in public schools. Her accounts evoked public and government run institutions as spaces with little oversight and lax discipline.

I first worked in college teaching English language and literature, and used to wonder why students knew so little. “What did they learn at high school?” – I used to wonder. But later, when I transferred to teach at a public high school, I realized some of the reasons. The principal of the school used to arrive only at 10 in the morning, as though it was her private school. She drove a Land Rover, and that is with the salary that she supposedly made in a public institution. I remember it was during the election season [all elections from local administrative levels to country level are usually held in public school buildings], and I was one academic year into my work there. Only then did she manage to come talk to me in person. I was already veiled back then, and she asked me to take it off. I told her I couldn’t... A principal who smoked, who didn’t have any oversight of how classes were running (our schedules changed all the time)... how could you trust such a school to give good education to children?⁵⁶

For Aziza, the mismanaged public educational system lacked not only discipline, but also integrity and a sense of community. Juxtaposing her experience at the public school, she described her own business model which to her meant provide a holistic education that shaped children’s worldviews through regular classes and religious knowledge. Aziza put a priority on efficient cooperation with teachers on the curriculum, and described her business practices as constantly evolving – as a product of continuous efforts to purify her work.

Recounting her initial experience of achieving halal certification, Aziza shared, “We always thought we were complying with all the rules, but it turns out we had been eating all kinds of things that include *haram* [prohibited] ingredients. All those candies containing pork gelatin....and now just imagine how many children we had given all the prohibited food!” To illustrate the consequences of consuming haram goods, she talked

⁵⁶ Interview conducted at the daycare center, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. June 11, 2014.

about procedures of slaughtering: “You know that there’s a certain order, and rules of slaughtering cattle, right? For one thing, a slaughterer is not supposed to sharpen a knife in front of the animal, because that will cause the animal to be afraid and have an adrenaline rush. All of that adrenaline will then stay in the meat that we’ll consume if not drained...no wonder why so much aggression comes out of people!”⁵⁷ For Aziza, making sure the children at her private Muslim daycare center were fed halal food and given a well-rounded education that included religious knowledge was a way to enforce discipline and ensure the physical and spiritual well-being of future generations.

Another respondent, Taalim, the owner of a halal café in Bishkek in his late fifties, shared his experience while leaning back on a *tapchan*⁵⁸ in his shady backyard. He was, by his own confession, into drinking and smoking less than a decade ago. Taalim worked in Russia and enjoyed the carefree life of a man who had enough money to afford the lifestyle he enjoyed. Speaking of his shift to a pious lifestyle, he highlighted the story of his close relative: “He had been into drinking, and lost his family and house as a result. He eventually died all alone with no family to support him. After his funeral, I asked myself whether I would be happy in the end of my life when I would look back.” After his loss, Taalim started searching for ways of leading a meaningful life, and went on a Dava’at trip to Bangladesh. He described it as a deeply transformative experience for him. “I was there for forty days. There I quit smoking and drinking. We spent our time reciting Quran and crying [*yi menen ottu ubagybyz*]. It turns out that crying eases the pain of your heart and clears your inner world [*ichki duinong tazarat eken*].” After his *dava’at*

⁵⁷ Interview conducted on June 11, 2014.

⁵⁸ Elevated platform with a low round table for dining and pillows around it.

trip, Taalim decided to make his café more convivial for devout Muslims, and built separate prayer rooms for women and men.

Taalim and other respondents with whom he connected me were all part of the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement. As I discussed more extensively in Chapter Three, this self-described peaceful and apolitical Islamic missionary movement originated in Pakistan, and now has a global following of around 12-15 million people. Their philosophy, very much opposed to National or Capitalist Islamic orientations, is rooted in the idea that followers should prioritize securing a safe place in the hereafter through *dava'at* or proselytization. In this and many other ways, they promote a more Spiritual orientation to Islam, including in their business activities.

Entrepreneurs like Aziza and Taalim identify themselves with the movement, and see their form of doing business as oriented towards building strong communities, but also enforcing continual engagement in acts of earning benevolence from the Divine. Resonating what religious authorities like Muhammad Sharif, one of the spiritual leaders of the movement discussed in Chapter Four, they expressed their concerns about the young generation getting too invested in the ideals of capitalism. For them, economic outcomes such as money and worldly success were secondary to their devotions to God. They felt obliged to act upon their spiritual orientation in daily life – through worship, prayer, glorifying God, charity work that was directed to sustaining their own mosques and communities, but also through economic transactions. In other words, as Muhammad Sharif put it, one conduct business practices so that he or she ensures internal compliance to God's tenets through one's body (performing prayers), language (praising God), property (being charitable), and most importantly, through one's heart (expressing hopes

and desires related to the hereafter and not the mundane present). Only through these acts is one able to escape the systems of beliefs that are often imposed on us, including the ideology of the capitalist economy itself.

It was through my connections to Aziza and two other women who had similar Muslim daycare centers and preschools that I was introduced to their spiritual teachers. One of these teachers, Noor, in her late fifties rented a space in a building adjacent to one of the largest bazaars in Bishkek. She opened her doors to anyone eager to take individual or group classes in Quran and Arabic, and also delivered public lectures on various issues, from marriage to those concerning one's business. Most of her clientele were petty traders from the bazaar, but also included individuals like Aziza – women entrepreneurs who owned their own small and medium businesses. Although generally polite and courteous with her students, Noor was quite vocal when it came to women's outfits. Most of her students were veiled, but women occasionally resisted wearing a veil or headscarf and wore trousers instead of long dresses. In one such incident, Noor criticized her student's outfit: "Are those pants that you're wearing?" The woman tried to justify herself pointing out that they were quite wide and did not show any body curvature, but Noor was not convinced and retorted back encouraging her to dress more modestly.

This particular encounter reminded me of (Mahmood 2003) study of women's piety movements in contemporary Egypt, where the community of believers enforced the idea that piety and fortitude are acquired not only through one's beliefs, but also through outward behavior that involved social demeanor and bodily acts. In the context of my cases, the community of entrepreneurs who espoused Spiritual Islam similarly engaged in

an active search for the right practices and bodily habits, coupled with the right inward dispositions. In this orientation, the market economy is believed to be “incapable of fulfilling the basic (religiously/morally defined) human needs” (Tugal 2002:101), and the neglect of these needs can have detrimental consequences in both this life and the next.⁵⁹ Interestingly, many of the imams who propagated these attitudes among entrepreneurs were themselves involved in entrepreneurship, and reinforced their spiritual network and sense of solidarity through market activities. Moral futures in this orientation are tied to the notion of a better life in the hereafter. Hence the dividends will mostly be in terms of secure place in heaven.

National Islam and an Orderly Market

As I discussed in previous chapters, the National Islamic orientations is the most valorized by the state. State officials actively engage in articulating this imagined future, in which Kazakh and Kyrgyz Muslimness should stand out as unique identities and sources of national agency, distinct from the mold of *homo Sovieticus* that was imposed in the past and from brands of Islam rooted in the traditions of other regions. The state promotes the validity of centrally positioned religious authorities, particularly imams in the Muftiate, and hence it is not surprising that the head Mufty and other affiliated imams were the first to be recruited by the pioneering entrepreneurs to join their Shariah boards.

But the National Islamic orientation has not succeeded to gain traction as much as the Capitalist Islamic orientation, perhaps mostly because it is promoted by the apparatus of the state. Whereas Spiritual Islam largely rejects the privileged place of the nation based on religious principle, Capitalist Islam diminishes the nation by promoting

⁵⁹ Cihan Tugal identifies moral *anti-capitalists* as one of the expressions of Islamism (2002).

an outward-looking economic ethic, which often looks to linkages with foreign countries such as Malaysia and Turkey as a means of development. Both Capitalist and Spiritual Islam thus generally push the National Islamic orientation to the margins. Nevertheless, there are groups of entrepreneurs who evoke the National Islamic orientation. They uniformly belong to titular ethnic group of their respective country, i.e. Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. They identify themselves as as *nukura* [authentic] members of that ethnicity, and only then Muslim, emphasizing that local Muslimness should not take on the features of foreign forms of Muslimness.

Nurlan, a young entrepreneur in his late twenties who co-owns and manages a family-run guest house in Osh, made particularly cogent connections between the moral individual and the social whole – in his words the immediate community as well as the nation. As we sat in a wooden garden house in the backyard of the guest house he ran, Nurlan shared his personal trajectory of piety and entrepreneurial aspirations in terms of improving national “Kyrgyz” character.

When I was a freshman in Bishkek, I already knew that there was something lacking in my life. I couldn't quite tell back then what exactly it was. Later, I ended up going to the US through the Work & Travel program. I actually was so lucky to travel with a guy who later became my close friend... His name was Olaberdi, yes an Uzbek from Osh. He was already pretty religious back then. While there we worked and lived together. And what struck me most during my stay was that I met so many people from all over the world. And all those Christians from Spain or Christians from Latin American countries would tell me all kinds of stories about their homeland, but also about the Bible ...I realized I didn't know anything about my own religion back then, and I started spending more time at the library⁶⁰.

For this young and eager entrepreneur, running a “clean” guest houses meant that alcoholic drinks and cigarettes were not allowed and that guests were offered halal food,

⁶⁰ Interview conducted at the guest house, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. July 14, 2014.

but also that employees were respected and treated well was a way of contributing toward a better future for Kyrgyz society. Sharing his observations of the Kyrgyz people's national character, he noted:

You know, how our people [*bizdikiler*] tend to think that hanging out with friends and drinking is not only about having a good time, but causing mischief [*jindilik salabyz*]? I wanted to prove through my business, that we can also behave well, and that we can as Kyrgyz entrepreneurs do business well. When we started our guest house, people used to think that we basically opened a brothel. But overtime I think all of them came to realize that we're actually a clean business...they even call us "halal guest house" although we don't call ourselves as such.

Reflecting on their market activities, entrepreneurs like Nurlan who echo the sentiments of National Islamic orientation often identify a pathway towards a better future through building "natural alliances" with those who share the same national (e.g. Kyrgyzstani), ethnic (Kyrgyz or Kazakh), and regional affiliation (Southern vs. Northern). Such ideals are often invoked in connection with rhetoric of the need to protect local markets from foreign influence. Overall however, the National Islam orientation remains a secondary discourse in the rhetoric of many entrepreneurs, perhaps partly because of its more insular approach. This may be of no surprise, given that both of these post-Soviet countries are multi-ethnic (there are about 60 different ethnic groups in each country, including but not limited to Uighurs, Koreans, Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Chechens and others), and that their populations are strongly Russophone and largely support foreign policies that favor allegiance with Russia.

Conclusion

When entrepreneurs in my field site discussed their personal trajectories, often charted against the backdrop of post-Soviet degradation in everyday life, they continually

anchored their stories in visions of the future. These entrepreneurs spoke of their business practices as a way to envision and implement a new society, either overtly drawing off of Islamic beliefs or more covertly employing what some claimed as broadly ethical standards. Often interweaving their personal trajectories into these narratives of the larger transformations that they have witnessed, they would suggest that private business – particularly ethical private business – provides unique means through which to socialize people properly. Through the cases discussed above, I have shown how business owners and managers interlink their personal journeys as both individuals and entrepreneurs with those of their business practices that are understood as efforts in the present to achieve a better futures. These beliefs are sustained by the communities in which they are immersed. Another objective that many entrepreneurs had for these narratives, therefore, was to explicate the diverse formal associations and informal communities that have served as active proponents of these moral futures.

The key argument of this chapter is that not all moral projects around Islam in the market are created equal. As state officials and multiple religious factions articulate them, these different orientations contribute to a “complex moral landscape” (Deeb and Harb 2013). Drawing from my analysis of entrepreneurs’ work, I suggest that Capitalist Islam has thus far been able to enroll wider groups of market actors, to a large part because of its flexible moral norms. Unlike the National Islamic orientation that emphasizes the need to protect ethnic, regional and national alliances, or Spiritual Islamic orientation that seeks to promote sound pious commitments from those involved, Capitalist Islam resonates with both small-scale traders as well as more established business people. This success can be both explained in terms of the formal and informal institutions that extend

it, including business associations as well as grass-root level networks. Secondly, and more importantly, I demonstrated that Capitalist Islam leaves more room for negotiation and interpretation of how one should enact moral business. Imams cannot consult each individual entrepreneur and give explicit instructions for how to make the religious practice more compliant. Religious authorities speak of morals in convincing, but ambiguous terms. How then do entrepreneurs translate their commitments to moralize their businesses and the entire market into specific organizational practices? They are, after all, on the other end of articulatory projects, and need to actually implement in their day-to-day routines those principles that may be touted from lecterns and tribunes by religious authorities and community leaders. In post-Soviet Central Asia, with its secular political context, the Capitalist Islamic orientation resonates with both younger and older generations, who share growing concerns of how to incorporate religion into their lifestyles, so that it does not contradict with their desires for modern and progressive societies.

CHAPTER SIX

Valuation circuits: The Rise of Private Halal Certification

Introduction

As I discussed in Chapter Four, by the time of my fieldwork in 2012, the major cities of Bishkek and Osh in Kyrgyzstan and Astana and Almaty in Kazakhstan boasted a wide range of businesses that advertised as Islamic, Shariah-compliant or halal. These businesses ranged from large banks to microfinance and insurance companies, from Muslim daycare and halal food producers to wholesale and retail traders of goods targeted at pious Muslims. A large subset of these companies, particularly food producers and those in the hospitality industry, has been particularly concerned with compliance to halal standards. According to the owners and managers of such businesses, the definition of halal standards cannot be simply taken for granted (c.f., Zuckerman 1999). As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, respondents commonly voiced concerns over the ambiguity around what halal means and whether some entrepreneurs might be deceptive about their compliance. Many expressed doubt around their own compliance as well, frequently admitting, “I’m not sure if my business is 100% halal.”

Scholars who have studied religious identity formation and pious expression in Central Asia may interpret these tendencies as inherently tied to the inferiority complexes of Muslims in the post-Soviet world vis-à-vis the more “authentic” Muslim other (e.g., Louw 2010; McBrien 2008; Rasanayagam 2006). While sentiments tied to self-identification and religious expression in public spaces is important, it is also crucial to

recognize that the notion of halal in the Islamic economy is inherently fuzzy due to certain conditions of uncertainty. As van Waarden & van Dalen (2013) have suggested, this market generally lacks clear norms and standards for the “quality” of halal goods and services, as well as the sufficient means of monitoring and evaluating commodities labeled as halal. This means in addition to the kinds of uncertainties that I have discussed in Chapters Four and Five, entrepreneurs involved in this market also face the challenge of communicating the distinct qualities of their goods and services to external actors, including investors and customers.

In this sense, the Islamic business field is quite similar to other markets that deal with risk and uncertainty, including the market for financial products (Mackenzie 2003; Sinclair 2014), antique commodities (Bogdanova 2013), and even labor markets (Gerlach 2013). In all these markets, the value and the “actual” quality of goods and categories are invisible or opaque (Beckert 2013), which opens up great potential for entrepreneurs to profit from information asymmetries. The common consensus among studies of such uncertainty within economic sociology is that market actors require “judgment devices” to make evaluations and judgments about the quality and worth of commodities. These devices can range from guidebooks and reviews (Karpik 2010), to the advice of neutral, third-party experts and authorities. In the Islamic business field, in response to the uncertainties, private halal certification agencies emerged in Central Asia starting from the early and mid-2000s to facilitate the construction of value in the Islamic business field – primarily the value of goods and services marked as “halal.” Despite their recent appearance, these agencies have quickly gained traction in the market. Independent halal certification agencies in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan emerged in close collaboration with

the Muftiates of both countries. As of summer 2015, there were approximately 200 small to large businesses in Kyrgyzstan and 600 small to large businesses in Kazakhstan that received halal certification from their country's respective agencies. Moreover, halal certifiers in Kazakhstan recently boasted that halal-compliant producers constituted 35% of the country's GNP in 2014.

However, uncertainties around the quality of halal goods alone do not explain why entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan running halal or otherwise "Islamic" businesses would voluntarily choose to go through certification, in a context where businesses in general are known to evade registration, licensing, and other paper-work regulated by the government. Certifiers themselves face challenges of credibility and uncertainty (van Waarden and van Dalen 2013:199), making their adoption by entrepreneurs all the more curious. The ubiquity of conversations about certification, particularly among the subset of entrepreneurs who mostly produce food products labeled "halal," but also among a smaller group of entrepreneurs in the service sector running guest houses and Muslim daycare centers, sparked one of the primary puzzles that I sought to explore in my research, namely, why third-party certifiers gain traction. More specifically, why would actors, who diverged in their interpretation and practice of "Islamic" business, converge in their search of certification, and what does the credibility and authority of certifiers hinge on?

This chapter aims to contribute to the broader argument of the dissertation that actors in the Islamic market such as entrepreneurs and religious officials are investing in moral futures, hoping to create through their very activities future modes of economic and moral behavior. Through such investments in the Islamic economy, these actors hope

to create the kind of moral order in which they hope to reside, but in concert with that goal to create greater demand and value for their commodities and services that feed into that pious lifestyle. In this chapter, I argue that certification agencies play a crucial role in making these very futures feasible and valuable through their authority to evaluate and certify the value of goods and services in the broader Islamic economy. Furthermore, these agencies not only help to underwrite the moral futures pursued by entrepreneurs and religious authorities, but also, in line with the fictionalities of Muslim entrepreneurs, help to bridge the local Islamic economy to the global Muslim world. I will examine the rise of *valuation circuits* in this chapter, through which the authority to assess the value of Islamic and halal goods takes on both a global and local dimension. Third-party certification agencies in Kyrgyzstan, for example are often accredited through Kazakhstan's halal committee, which in turn is accredited by Malaysian halal authorities.

In this way, these private halal certification agencies are illustrative of what some scholars have called “the new century’s central tendency” (Schneiberg and Bartley 2008). They constitute a new form of global governance institution that, according to these explanations, emerge in response to the information deficiency in the market (Christmann and Taylor 2006; Potoski and Prakash 2004) and in order to promote transparency and accountability among businesses (Bartley, 2007, 2011; Guthman, 2007). They do not simply monitor the compliance of businesses to certain normative standards, however, but actively construct those standards themselves, and help market actors to ascribe value and worth to their goods, be they “halal,” “organic” or “fair trade.”

The key argument that I put forth in this chapter, then, is that halal certifiers and their transnational network of accreditors construct *valuation circuits*. These networks of

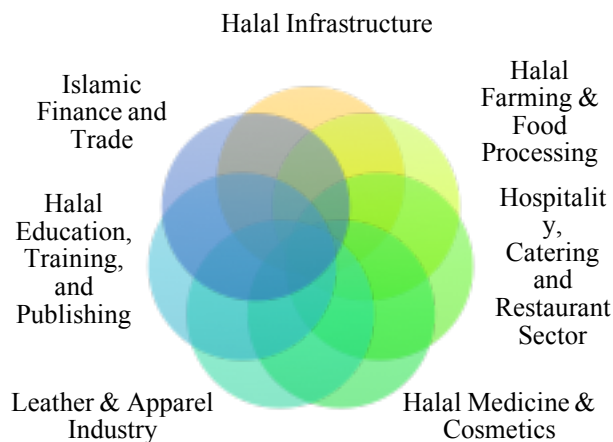
actors constitute a chain of moral authority in which halal compliant goods and services are presented as measurable, technical and translatable to market values (specifically market price as an indicator of value). In addition to demonstrating that these private certifiers rely on transnational accreditation for their authority, however, my investigation extends the literature on economic sociology by demonstrating that halal certifiers seek moral consensus in much the same manner that political candidates seek to gather as many factions of constituents as possible. Both kinds of “institutional entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio 1988) realize the need to speak to different interests and groups of constituents simultaneously – in my case pious entrepreneurs who interpret and practice Islamic business in distinct ways.

In what follows, I trace the emergence of certifiers in Kyrgyzstan in close connection to their Kazakhstani accreditors, and explore their work with entrepreneurs. I will first discuss the origins of halal principles and the dynamics of contemporary transnational circuits that facilitate halal certification. I will then describe the strategies that the Halal Certification Agency (HCA) employs in enacting the binaries between halal vs. non-halal goods. Besides their role of issuing judgment devices, I intend to show in the second part of the chapter that the ability of local certifiers to gain traction was also contingent upon their efforts of constructing halal certification as a process of rationalization, localization and purification. Each of these processes resonate with particular interpretations and understandings of Islamic business among entrepreneurs that align themselves with different articulations discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

“What’s in a word?” Definitions and Uncertainties of Halal

In Arabic, halal means “permissible” or “lawful,” and traditionally connotes the “pure” or “clean” status of food and other items. The knowledge of what constitutes pure and clean comes from three sources, including the Quran, *sunnahs*, and *fikh*. While the Quran mostly consists of verses that are related to religious duties, *sunnahs* that contain the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad serve as another authoritative source for rules and norms within various spheres of life for pious Muslims. Since not everything is spelled out by the Quran and sunnah, it is the task of theologians and religious officials to interpret and apply religious rules to various circumstances of modern life (Brown 2004, p. 120).

Halal generally refers to proper social conduct and lifestyle. The principles encompass rules on consumption (of both food and other commodities), but also provides



broader rules of conduct (proper clothing, makeup), including principles of how to be a better producer and business person (dealing with honesty and integrity, abstaining from usury, ethics in slaughtering animals and

Figure 6: Applications of Halal

other forms of production) (van Waarden & van Dalen 2013).

Like Kosher guidelines, food production and diet provide the most prominent sphere in which halal rules are evoked and claim adherence. Across the modern global

economy, however, halal standards have been adapted to a very wide range of goods, including biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, care products and household items (Fischer 2016, van Waarden & van Dalen 2013). Some of the requirements are to avoid any substances that may be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol, gelatin, glycerin, enzymes, flavors and colorants that come from haram or prohibited sources. Moreover, there are certain rules regarding animal care and slaughtering, including but not limited to rules about animal well-being and slaughtering.

As is often noted in discussions of halal standards, they are derived from the sources that date to 600 AD, and therefore may not necessarily apply well to contemporary life. What was considered humane back then, may not necessarily hold true today. Hence, critics of halal, or of any other religiously informed rules in modern business practices, are quick to note that “what were once means to an end – health, respect for nature, gratitude – have become ends in themselves” (van Waarden & van Dalen 2013:200). In Kyrgyzstan’s media, these types of denunciations are typically directed at producers of bottled water, or taxi companies that claim to be halal. The former head Mufti of Kyrgyzstan, Chubak aji Jalilov, noted in an interview,

Currently, there is a noticeable excess of *halalization*... Hotels and taxi services have begun operating under the label halal. Who knows what’s next - they may begin labelling clothing halal. In reality, according to Sharia, ‘halal’ only applies to food products.⁶¹

Similarly, in the debate over water, one religious authority from Kazakhstan declared in an interview that “all water is halal, and one should not make a business from sacred values.”⁶²

⁶¹ Source: http://www.gezitter.org/interviews/34992_chubak_ajyi_jalilov_eks-muftiy_slovo_halal_nado_pisat_tolko_dlya_myasnoy_produktsii/ - last accessed, June 5, 2016

⁶² Source: http://www.megapolis.kz/art/Halalvoda_kazahstanskoe_nouhau - last accessed, June 5, 2016

While the Quran and sunnahs provide the core ideas for halal rules, they are only incomplete guideposts. As a result, religious authorities employ *fikh*, or the body of theological thought and commentary on the Quran and sunnahs, in issuing *fatwa* – rulings that apply to specific cases of contemporary life. This proliferation of interpretations has also invited opponents and proponents of Islamic businesses to question whether religious authorities and business owners are actually sticking to the letter or to the spirit of Islamic laws. Since halal involves both product and process-standards, it becomes increasingly difficult to trace compliance. According to halal standards, for example, production must not involve the flesh or any other part of animals such as pigs, most carnivores and insects, as well as blood from any animal. An otherwise harmless product such as gelatin must be replaced if made with the use of pig bones and connective tissues. Moreover, other types of ingredients, like thickeners, colorants and preservatives, could come from haram sources. Red colorants may be made from lice, and preservatives may be dissolved in alcohol (Waarden and Dalen 2011). In this manner, a wide array of products, including but not limited to sausage, yogurt, cakes, candy bars, soap and others may be disqualified as haram if they include any of the prohibited ingredients.

Theoretically, the *composition* of products is not difficult to test, and those concerned can use modern laboratory methods to detect any haram components of food and other products. In contrast, *process* standards in halal can be more difficult to monitor, as they include various requirements for animal welfare, slaughtering methods, and storage that must be followed throughout the entire chain of production, transportation and allocation. In the production of meat, for example, process standards require (among other things) that animals be fed properly, undergo rituals of ablution

before being slaughtered, including the recitation of certain passages of the Quran, that the method of slaughter be quick and painless, and finally, that halal meat be stored and transported separately from any haram products). As global chains of production and supply expand, it is increasingly difficult to trace these process standards and to verify whether a product and its various components have been properly handled throughout the supply chain.

Moreover, both producers and consumers alike frequently point out that there are “grey areas” – certain aspects of production, consumption and broader economic transactions which do not easily fall into a certain existing category, and require informed personal discretion. In one of the Quran study groups in Bishkek that I attended regularly for example, one of the students brought medicines prescribed by her doctor and asked her teacher if she could still consume them if the medicine contained alcohol. Similarly, those who subscribe strongly to the spiritual and salvation Islamist orientation tended to suggest that their aspirations to run a halal business extended to a myriad of micro-practices. These minute details range from how they avoid shortchanging customers to how they treat their business partners, and finally how they dispose of their profit.

These kinds of examples are ubiquitous in contemporary Islamic business in the region. Echoing these, some of the entrepreneurs in my research reiterated time and again that for them “halal” and “Shariah-compliant” were a continuum, within which one can continually strive for higher integrity and a higher extent of compliance. Islamic jurisprudence in fact does not impose strict bifurcated set of requirements. Instead, spheres of action are categorized as obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mandub*), permissible (*halal*), disapproved (*makruh*), and finally, forbidden (*haram*) (Brown 2004).

While the obligatory and forbidden categories of action are the two extremes, which literally oblige pious Muslims to follow them, the intermediate categories suggest that there are no serious repercussions if one does not comply with them. Some also note that the grey areas between the clearly lawful and unlawful are designated their own category *mashbooh* (Riaz and Chaudry 2004), with the recommendation to avoid what is doubtful or questionable. These grey areas may emerge as a result of divergences in religious scholars' interpretations, or because of suspicion due to undetermined ingredients in commodities.

Final decisions are left to Islamic jurists and religious scholars, as well as experts in certification. These authorities are expected to make their recommendations with the "divine order" (Riaz and Chaudry 2004:12) in mind, and depending on the commodity and the ways in which it was produced and distributed. Furthermore, the Quran has provisions for flexibility and even transgression from the obligatory actions, particularly if someone is led to do things without being fully informed. One of the chapters of Quran has a well-known passage that states that "if one is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, then he is guiltless" (Quran, Surah al-Baqarah: 173). In other words, if one were to buy goods labeled as "halal" that do not comply with the rules, in this interpretation the consumer should be considered guiltless because he or she was misinformed by the trader.

All of these nuances and "grey areas" complicate the work of creating and standardizing the rules and norms of halal, and subsequently affect the transparency of production and trade. These issues are quite similar to standardization and certification efforts in other market niches such as Fair Trade that work within food production,

apparel, agriculture and forestry and aim to harmonize and monitor firms' compliance to certain standards of accountability (Bartley 2007). Similarly, concepts of “well-managed,” “wholesome,” “environmentally friendly” and “humane conditions for labor” can also prove to be fuzzy and difficult to standardize. Despite these challenges however, halal certifiers often suggest that halal and haram are binary and technical categories – that something is either strictly halal or haram.

In Chapters Four and Five I showed that the post-Soviet context opened a space for different actors to imagine what Islamic business means. Extending that point, this chapter demonstrates that the certifiers are reflexive about these diverse interpretations and practices. This variety of imaginaries has enabled halal certifiers to recruit the broadest range of entrepreneurs. As they engage with entrepreneurs, certifiers enforce binary classifications between halal certified goods and services and those that are not certified. They are in that sense “institutional entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio 1988) who span the boundaries of the field and reinforce certain cognitive frameworks and principles of evaluation (c.f., Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012).

The Work of Halal Certifiers in Kyrgyzstan

As the Islamic economy has grown larger and more lucrative since the early 2000s, along with it have grown temptations to profit through disingenuous business practices. Local media outlets have sparked public debate by uncovering stories of allegedly fraudulent companies that claimed to produce halal or otherwise genuinely Islamic products. In June 2012, for example, a company that specialized in producing halal sausages, “Abroi,” was

accused of using pork and American-imported poultry in its production.⁶³ In the fallout that ensued from this allegation, local communities of pious Muslim voiced their concerns that it was not easy for them to filter through the many companies that cluttered the market, some of which appeared to be duping their consumers.⁶⁴ The matter was made worse by the fact that Abroi had been certified as Halal by the Muftiate. The halal certification branch under the Muftiate that had issued the certificate was accused of “turning religion into business.”

These types of episodes demonstrate the stakes for entrepreneurs of entering moralized market niche. Those seeking a share of the demand for halal and Islamic goods face the potential loss of their reputation and profit for perceived malfeasance, even if the quality of their goods may not necessarily have been compromised. Not only potential rewards, but also clear risks present themselves to owners and managers who commit to running their business in line with religious or otherwise ethical norms and conventions. Similar risks confront certifiers as well, who offer their moral backing of companies.

The Halal Certification Agency (HCA) in Kyrgyzstan was established as a wing of the Muftiate, officially known as the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan. Although the Muftiate’s history goes back to the Stalinist policies of the Second World War discussed in Chapter Two (see more in Tasar, 2010), initiatives such as halal-certification emerged only in the early 2000s. The director of the HCA, Myktybek Arstanbek or Myktybek aji,⁶⁵ initially worked under the Muftiate with a small

⁶³ News source: <http://kloop.kg/blog/2012/06/01/muftiya-obvinili-v-nezakonnoj-vy-dache-halal-sertifikatov/> - last accessed May 10, 2016.

⁶⁴ News source: <http://russian.eurasianet.org/node/60455> - last accessed May 10, 2016.

⁶⁵ *Aji* is a title in Kyrgyz for someone who has completed pilgrimage to Mecca or *haj*. The first interview conducted on June 24, 2014.

group of experts as a department of halal certification. Because of their work however, the Muftiate found itself under attack by local media and prominent public figures, who cautioned against turning a revered theological institution into a place for profane commercial activities. The department of halal certification, like all certifiers, charged fees for its services, which did not fit with the broader mission of the Muftiate in the eyes of critics.

As a result of this pressure, the certification department eventually branched out as an independent agency, the HCA, in 2013. Myktybek aji gathered his own team of experts, who work alongside him promoting their work and recruiting companies who might be interested in attaining certification. Since becoming a self-sustaining organization, Myktybek aji has become a well-known lecturer on a wide array of issues related to Islam. A journalist by profession and already a widely known figure prior to his current work, he has become well connected in the community of practicing Muslims. He delivers lectures at *medressahs*, mosque gatherings, and other religious organizations.

The HCA still enjoys the official backing of the Muftiate, giving it a distinct advantage over competing certification agencies. Despite its relatively recent inception, the HCA has outmaneuvered another third-party certification organization, the technical committee on halal standards, led by Kamchibek Omurzakov under the Islamic Center. Omurzakov claimed that the Muftiate was using its religious authority to pursue business interests, particularly marginalizing rival certification agencies.⁶⁶ All certification agencies charge fees for issuing certificates, which in part offset the expense of

⁶⁶ News source: http://www.vb.kg/doc/200883_kamchybek_omyrzakov:_sozdannaia_myftiem_standartizaciia_halal_nez_akonna.html - last accessed, May 10, 2016.

monitoring the halal compliance of companies. Omurzakov nevertheless took exception with how the Muftiate helped the HCA monopolize the market. In the incident mentioned above involving the company *Abroi*, the Islamic Center accused the HCA of issuing a halal certificate to a company that was allegedly non-compliant with its requirements.

Although the Islamic Center actually began certifying private businesses first, it was quickly outcompeted by the Muftiate backed HCA. The latter gained traction due to its official backing, and over the past several years has issued certification to about two hundred businesses in Kyrgyzstan. These companies range from small and medium enterprises like meat stalls, bakeries, and daycares, to larger cafes, guesthouses and food producers that work for both local and regional markets (especially Kazakhstan and Russia). At the time of my research, the Islamic center was barely visible, and only a handful of entrepreneurs out of the eighty that I interviewed knew about its existence. Hence, I focus on the HCA and their work as they establish their status as experts on issues related to halal.

The procedures of certification involve six different steps, as demonstrated in Figure 2. First, the HCA recruits companies – by way of advertising, but also by directly approaching company owners. Once an owner shows interest, the HCA conducts an initial audit of the company to determine its size and complexity, and agree with the owner on a fee for its certification services. Once the parties have agreed to proceed with certification, the HCA carries out one or two week trainings for the owners, managers and workers of the company.

Figure 7: Process of certification



At the end of these trainings, all trainees are required to take written and oral exams, the passing of which qualifies the company to move to the fourth stage. At this time, committee specialists attend the company and learn about their production process and working conditions. Depending on company specializations, this process takes from one to two weeks, by the end of which the halal committee makes recommendations about various changes that the company must implement to be compliant with their guidelines. Once the company completes these changes, the committee issues a certificate valid for one year. In the end of the year, the company is free to renew their certificate, which involves fewer stages, but still requires the company to make a payment for the certificate.

According to interviews with thirty entrepreneurs who have gone through certification, the HCA issues a variety of recommendations, but they largely fall into three categories: those linked to the production process, those linked to working

conditions, and those linked to relational aspects of running a business. First, recommendations on the production process normally start from specific rules for purification. The primary focus revolves around the ingredients or goods that are used in business. All of the components of production have to be halal, and haram ingredients are to be substituted by their licit equivalent. The agency recommended to the owner of a café, Shekerbek, for example, that he eliminate the sale of alcoholic beverages and cigarettes on the premises of his café. Oksana, the owner of a bakery, was recommended to eliminate multiple ingredients in her pastry and cake production. Gelatin was one of the major ingredients that she had to be cautious about. As a result, she said she shifted from gelatin imported from Ukraine and Russia, to that made in Turkey, since most of the producers there made gelatin from sources other than pigs like large cattle or seaweed extracts.

Second, recommendations related to working conditions involved those that aimed to improve the sanitation of facilities and hygiene of workers. In pictures published on the HCA website, agency workers are depicted visiting various businesses in white coats and disposable gloves – so as to communicate the seriousness of their intentions to enforce hygiene and cleanliness. Finally, recommendations on business relations encourage pious entrepreneurs to collaborate with other halal-certified businesses and partners. Through this attempt to tie the circuit members together, not just ideologically but also economically, the HCA has started publishing glossy monthly catalogues listing all of the certified companies' information. Besides sending these catalogues to all certified entrepreneurs, the agency also actively promotes the idea of collaboration among them. Aziza, the owner of a Muslim daycare center, was provided a list of trusted

companies from which she could buy meat, bread and other groceries. Following their advice, Aziza also started making her own yogurt for daycare children, for many of the store-bought yogurts were said to contain unhealthy preservatives.

Performing Disinterest in Profits

When it comes to charging business owners for their services, the HCA projects disinterest in profit. As Zelizer (1985) has long shown, market actors may face significant challenges in establishing monetary values in certain markets. Incommensurable categories such as human beings (discussed by Zelizer in her widely-known work on life insurance market), or art work or individualized services cannot be easily ranked and translated into a common metrics of value (Espeland and Stevens 1998:326). As Akyel (2013) study of the funeral bureaus reminds us, it is then morally unacceptable for certain professional workers to monetize and standardize their services. Hence, market actors often perform disinterestedness in profit, and instead interact with their customers in such a way that moral sentiments (e.g., sentiments of affect and emotional closeness to the deceased, in the case of the funeral market) will enter the scale of evaluation, eventually informing the decisions of consumers regarding the prices that they are ready to pay or feel obligated to pay.

In the halal certification market, disinterestedness in profit is communicated through pricing strategies. Instead of establishing flat rates for their trainings and certification services, the agency workers charge each company according to its size and the level of complexity in its production or internal coordination of work. As Myktybek aji noted:

Prior to issuing certificates, we determine the level of complexity that each organization requires – how many visits and how often we need to be going

to their place. This is important for us, since once we issue our certificate, we are taking on the responsibility of backing their halalness.⁶⁷

In line with the reports that I have brought up at the beginning of the chapter, the discourse of local certifiers emphasizes the technical side of certification. They strive to show that they derive their knowledge from canons in the field. Their emphasis is on the technical, legal approach, which enhances their authority as experts, and reinforces the conventional view of halal certification as something static and measurable.

The officials of the halal certification agency speak of their work as helping business owners to understand and navigate what might feel like confusing sets of requirements. Once the certification agency trains and approves a certain company, they are interconnected both in their reputation and in moral responsibility. Any failures by the companies to deliver on their promises blemishes the certification agency's reputation. Echoing this point, Myktybek aji talked about one company whose certificate had to be annulled by the agency after numerous complaints and hearsay that the company was renegeing on its obligations.

There's this meat place, they specialize in selling meat. But once they'd gone through our certification, they started buying up meat from random butchers at the bazaar who do not slaughter according to halal-standards. We had to use radical measures, use candid camera to prove their fault and annul their certificate. That sent everyone a clear message - that we are not liable for them anymore.

In cases such as this, the HCA also serves as a gatekeeper that defends the halal "brand" from companies that prioritize profit over piety. Not only do the certification agencies perform disinterest in profit, but even for-profit halal businesses participate in this

⁶⁷ From the interview with Myktybek Arstanbek, director of halal-certification agency. First interviewed on June 24, 2014.

performance of valuing a higher goal for their businesses. Any business that deploys the halal brand while renegeing on these ideals damages this collective performance.

Tensions between National and Transnational Governance: Certification Agencies as Nodes in Network of Religious Authority

Similar to the case of Islamic Finance, state leaders in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have promoted halal actively. Adopting international standards of halal certification can present these states with a number of benefits, but can also create friction state sovereignty. One of the clearest benefits is access to sources of commerce and finance.

The World Bank estimates that the global profits of the halal market reached around 700 billion USD in 2014, and that annual growth was estimated at close to 25%. This growth is not only limited to Muslim-majority countries, as these promotions highlight.

Countries such as Argentina, Brazil and New Zealand, have become large exporters of halal meat in the international market after adopting halal standards.⁶⁸ Accordingly, most government reports and media coverage in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan depict halal through the lens of economic utility. By pointing to economic growth and prosperous countries, upper echelon state officials seek to validate their activities aimed at entering regional and international halal markets.

Another goal of halal compliance can be to project a countries' Muslim identity in the global economic and political arena. This goal is reflected, for example, in Kazakhstan's initiative to develop halal-compliant government standards in tourism and food production industries in 2007 – among the first in the post-Soviet region. As the

⁶⁸ Op-ed piece of Zhankeldi Estenbaev, general director of International Institute of Modern Islamic Economics and Finance in Kazakhstan: <http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/opinion/7053> - last accessed May 10, 2016.

director of the Halal Industry Association in Kazakhstan, Marat Sarsenbaev, notes, these standards can served a springboard for numerous hotels and food manufacturers to receive certification as halal-compliant in preparation for the 2011 Asian Winter Games, which were hosted in the cities of Astana and Almaty in Kazakhstan.⁶⁹ Countries such as Iran, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore and others had requested that certain needs of their pious Muslim athletes were met at this event. Following suit, Kyrgyzstan incorporated some of the halal standards aimed at regulating production, storage and transportation of halal food products into the legal codex, introducing a new National Standard.⁷⁰

Such enthusiasm for national profile and international integration often begets difficult question for how to incorporate international standards into national legislation. The halal standards acknowledged by the states of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were seen as a step forward in shifting halal from the field of religious authorities to the jurisdiction of law. The HCA in Kyrgyzstan and their Kazakhstani counterparts noted that this step ensures that consumers can take their complaints about fake halal products to court.⁷¹ Yet, the Consumer Rights Protection Agency (CRPA) in Kazakhstan claimed that local halal standards do not pass legal muster. After independent analysis, the Agency concluded that the halal standards recognized by the state do not represent actionable legal norms. Currently, the CRPA has directed their concerns with these halal standards

⁶⁹ Source: <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/analytics/w-monitorings/23624/> - last accessed May 10, 2016.

⁷⁰ Source: http://www.vb.kg/doc/193070_halal_stal_dlja_proizvoditeley_kyrgyzstana_oryjiem_v_borbe_za_potrebitelia.html – last accessed May 10, 2016.

⁷¹ Marat Sarsenbaev, from the interview conducted on June 24, 2014.

to the General Prosecutor's office, in the hopes that legal experts will further develop these standards to the point that they can actually serve as a basis for litigation.

The loose wording and otherwise poor state of halal standards makes it easy for fraudulent companies to take advantage, according to the CPRA in Kazakhstan. Mid-rank state officials in Kyrgyzstan have voiced similar concerns. Officers of the Sanitary-Epidemiological Station in Kyrgyzstan, in charge of checking the sanitary conditions of private food producers, caterers, and some retailers, have voiced frustration with halal certified companies. According to the representatives of this government agency that I interviewed, such businesses do not strictly follow the state's requirements on sanitation, food storage, immunization of workers and other issues. Despite these lapses, the Halal Certification Agency continues to treat halal certification as part of the standardization process, which it presents as primarily based on technical and measurable aspects of business practices. In a market where there is so much uncertainty around the quality of goods and services that claim to be halal, producers and consumers find it easier to defer to "judgment devices" such as certificates and labels in making their decisions. This reliance begs the question of where the authority of these judgment devices comes from.

Transnational Valuation Circuits

When asked about their authority, officials of the Halal Certification Agency in Kyrgyzstan point to the Halal Industry Association in Kazakhstan, from whom they received accreditation. The Halal Industry Association (HIA) enjoys considerable political clout. According to Marat Sarsenbaev, the director of the HIA, support for the establishment of halal-certification in the country came directly from the chairman of the ruling party "Nurotan" (who also happens to be the nephew of Kazakhstan's President).

Speaking enthusiastically of the administrative clout that his organization enjoys, Marat Sarsenbaev highlighted that Kazakhstan was among the first post-Soviet countries to include Malaysian halal standards into their *gosstandart* [government standards].

Figure 8: Valuation Circuits in Practice



From left to right, the head Muftiy in Kyrgyzstan receiving accreditation from Marat Sarsenbaev, who represents the Halal Industry Association in Kazakhstan; the head Muftiy reciprocates with a gift; the HCA in Kyrgyzstan grants a certificate to an entrepreneur.⁷²

Officials of the Halal Industry Association in Kazakhstan are part of the Eurasian Union of Standardization and Halal Certification, which was established as an alliance between Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus in 2012. As a result of this partnership with the religious authorities and independent halal certifiers in the post-Soviet region, HIA representatives signed an agreement for the mutual recognition of certificates issued by the respective certification agencies in these three countries. This agreement enables halal producers from within this union to export their commodities into Kazakhstani markets without another round of certification, and similarly assists producers from Kazakhstan seeking to export their goods into Russian and Belarusian markets.

In additions this partnership in the post-Soviet region, however, the HIA representatives point without fail to the International Halal Integrity Alliance (“IHI Alliance”) based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from whom they received accreditation.

⁷² Source: official website of HCA - <http://halal.kg/galleries> - last accessed May 10, 2016.

The IHI Alliance was formed as a result of a resolution passed at the World Halal Forum in May 2006, signed by over 30 countries interested in the development of the global halal industry chain. The IHI Alliance was a response to the “absence of a credible reference center for information [that] has resulted in industries and consumers being bombarded with various interpretations of the meaning and application of halal, which often contradict each other.”⁷³ The Malaysian IHI Alliance is connected to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which includes 58 member states.

Figure 9: Transnational Valuation Circuits



From left to right, the Muftiy of Tatarstan, Ildus Faizov, center, holds a meeting with Marat Sarsenbaev, the president of the Halal Industry Association in Kazakhstan, far right; the Moscow Halal Expo in 2015; the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Malaysia, Dato’ Ahmad Rasidi Hazizi officiating the Halal Expo in Kazakhstan in 2011 together with the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and “Nur Otan” People’s Democratic Party in Kazakhstan.⁷⁴

The growth of halal regulation in Malaysia has been primarily driven by the Malaysian state. Although other Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Indonesia have also entered the race to become international centers for halal certification, Malaysia has by far outcompeted them up till now. As Fischer argues, Malaysian leaders aimed to turn the country into a global hub of halal production, trade and regulation, and therefore “intensified regulation and scientification of halal” (Fischer

⁷³ Source: <http://www.ihialliance.org/home.php> - last accessed, June 5, 2016.

⁷⁴ Sources: 1) <http://xn----7sbxcmhchjud6b.xn--p1ai/halal/?ID=19147> 2) <http://np-nasih.ru/news/1202/> 3) http://www.kln.gov.my/web/kaz_astana/n2011/-/asset_publisher/ME2g/blog/kazakhstan-2nd-international-halal-expo-2011-19-21-october-2011-kazakhstan?redirect=%2Fweb%2Fkaz_astana%2Fn2011 - last accessed, June 5, 2016.

2016:40). Malaysia was able to export these standards abroad through world-wide halal forums, trade fairs, and the bureaucratization of procedures. As a result, Malaysia's MS 1500 standards (covering the production, preparation, handling and storage of halal food) and MS 2200 standards (covering consumer goods for cosmetic use and personal care) have become international benchmarks for halal certifiers (Fischer 2016).

I introduce the concept of valuation circuits to explain how private certifiers link the authority of such international standards to the products they certify locally.

Valuation circuits denote networks of religious authority (often international) within the Islamic economy that provide local certification agencies and local entrepreneurs with the authority to deploy the halal "brand." These networks feature a circular flow of resources, in which certifiers ease the anxieties of those concerned with the authenticity and appropriateness of their business practices by taking on the moral responsibility of backing them; a feeling of confidence is gained both by the certified and the certifiers as they engage in the construction of shared meanings about carrying out "morally pure," "spiritually nourishing," "honorable" business practices.

I adapt the concept of valuation circuits from Zelizer's "economic circuits," which refer to a certain type of interaction that occurs when market actors face "significant collective problems of trust in the absence of central authorities that could enforce agreements" (Zelizer 2010:307) They are also likely to occur "when the costs of defection and misbehavior for long-term collective welfare rise" (Zelizer 2010:307). Distinct from networks, circuits have well-defined boundaries that the members themselves construct as they carry out a set of economic exchanges of goods, services, and claims. Zelizer's "circuits" oppose Granovetter's (1983) concept of networks, the

followers of which have largely neglected the content of social ties, i.e., how market actors negotiate, contest, and enact the roles that they play (Wherry 2012). The relational approach that Zelizer promotes is more attuned to exploring the shared meanings that market actors come to develop. In other words, circuits involve distinctive social relations among individuals, who carry out their economic activities by means of those social relations.

Zelizer's work contributes to a broader literature on the problem of collective action under uncertain or opaque official rules. Scholars in this literature have explored various circuits, including those among corporate managers (Morrill 1996), French factories with their circuits of concealed production and distribution (Anteby 2003), art dealers in Amsterdam and New York (Velthuis 2003), and contemporary global finance (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002). In each case, social ties facilitate the construction of meanings to guide market actors. Thus, Anteby (2003, p. 234) uncovers circuits of clandestine production and distribution among workers in a French aerospace factory. Relations among workers produce tacit agreements of morally acceptable practices on the shop floor. Such circuits produce agreements on the degree of poaching is considered acceptable, for example, which take account of the position of a given worker in the workplace hierarchy. Velthuis (2003) demonstrates how the worth and market value of art pieces are created within specific circuits. Immersed in these circuits, dealers, artists and buyers negotiate and share understandings about what is a good quality art and how that intrinsic value should be translated into a market price. Besides facilitating economic transactions, however, members of the circuit construct collective understandings of what

distinguishes commercialized art from the work of artists genuinely concerned with the purity of art.

At the core of these studies is the idea that economic transactions not only involve exchanges of financial resources, but also exchange of “emotional resources” (Bandelj 2012) and “collective representations” (Wherry 2012). Adopting the concept from Alexander (2004), Wherry (2012, p. 208) notes that collective representations that are produced in economic circuits help members to perform as “buyers and sellers, as givers and takers, as producers and consumers who deal with the sacred versus the profane, the magical versus the scientific, the passionate versus the methodical.” An analogy can be drawn to Bogdanova’s (2013) discussion of vendors in the antique commodities market, where the antique objects gain a particular status and value depending on the status of the vendor. Similar efforts to construct shared meanings and value surrounds the work of the valuation circuits that construct halal-compliance in Central Asia.

These circuits play a crucial role in translating religious ideals into market values.

Figure 10: Links in the Halal Valuation Circuit



From the HCA in Kyrgyzstan to the HIA in Kazakhstan, to the IHI Alliance in Malaysia

In the case of halal certification in Central Asia, valuation circuits connect commodities of indeterminate quality in the local market to religious authorities in Malaysia, a country that for many pious Kyrgyz and Kazakh embodies the kind of moral future that they envision for their own country. In popular local consciousness, Malaysia represents a progressive Muslim

country that achieved rapid economic growth in the recent past, while retaining true to national character and religious values, even promoting itself as a global leader in the Islamic economy. These ideals become projected onto Malaysian halal certifiers and accreditors, raising them to a higher level of moral authority.

Linking local commodities, businesses, and halal certifiers themselves to this ideal ultimately has less to do with guaranteeing compliance with the technical aspects of halal certification than with marketing halal-compliant products in a way that is attractive to local consumers. Connection to these international standards raises the status of regional certifiers. In the Central Asian halal certification market, certificates of the HCA

gain higher credibility and status due to their backing by accreditors in Kazakhstan, who are in turn connected to certifiers in Malaysia. Thus, these transnational circuits are not only crucial in helping to certify the quality of halal products – they actually help to articulate the moral values captured by the very ideal of halal and translate them into market values for products and services.

It is notable that the HCA and other certifiers in the transnational circuit of halal certification refer to this higher level of certifiers. Responsibility for moral commitments is passed from entrepreneurs to certifiers, and from certifiers to the higher-level of accreditors. Besides being a mechanism for diffusing responsibility, however, these circuits also sustain confidence among market actors that Islamic tenets are being incorporated in modern value chains. This confidence facilitates economic transactions, ultimately. This transnational dimension would not completely make sense, therefore, without devoting attention to the local market dynamics that draw upon these valuation circuits, which is what I focus on in the subsequent sections.

Speaking to Different Moral Futures

During my most recent interview with the director of the Halal Certification Agency in Kyrgyzstan I asked whether he believed that all of the halal certified companies actually complied with their standards. Perhaps accustomed to such critical questions from journalists, he was not taken aback, and affirmatively stated: “Well, look...when a person with driver’s license gets into a car accident, we do not tend to blame those who issued the license, but the driver. It’s the same thing here. I’m sure there’re those who are cheating and using their halal certificates to brand themselves.” Later in the interview Myktybek aji reflected upon the variation that exists among entrepreneurs who have been

certified. According to him, those who were pious and strictly followed the letter of Shariah law were only a minority, and those who were profit-oriented, but wanted to know how to comply with halal standards were in the majority.

Myktybek aji's candid discussion indicates that despite their official rhetoric of working with measurable and technical halal standards, certifiers were actually quite reflexive about different kinds of interpretations and approaches to halal among entrepreneurs. In what follows, I discuss how the HCA's ability to recruit and enroll the growing numbers of entrepreneurs depends on more than their role as experts who impose standards and monitoring compliance. The HCA's appeal relies largely on their ability to speak to various factions of entrepreneurs with different orientation toward the value of halal certification and toward Islamism in the market more broadly.

Rationalization and Islamic Capitalism

Certifiers in Kyrgyzstan and in Kazakhstan have been advocating the need to merge halal standards with government standards on food safety and sanitation. As was noted earlier, Kazakhstan was among the first post-Soviet countries to develop halal-compliant government standards in tourism and food production industries in 2007, and Kyrgyzstan soon followed suit. The process was particularly supported by the upper echelon state officials, as the country prepared to host the 2011 Asian Winter Games with athletes from Iran, Malaysia, Qatar and Singapore constituting the core group. Such steps – calculating the utility that can be gained from halal compliance, implementing relevant standards and streamlining national legislation accordingly – can all be seen as manifestations of the Islamic Capitalist orientation.

To reiterate, this orientation views market economy with ethically behaving market actors as a way to build a prosperous *and* moral society. According to Capitalist Islam, a better society or future can be built through the incorporation of religious tenets into market activities oriented toward profit and efficiency. As with the entrepreneurs who fall in this camp, the upper-echelon state officials who advocated halal certification emphasize their forward-looking and progressive worldviews.

The director of the Kazakhstani Halal Industry Association, Marat Sarsenbaev, in his interview in March 2015 stated that their authority cannot be disputed by religious jurists or mosques who might also want to start issuing halal certificates:

Our organization was created ten years ago, and we have been registered with the Ministry of Justice. We are also accredited in the governmental system of certification. Thanks to our efforts there, our government standards involve halal standards as well, and we have the copyright to the standards related to production, storage and transportation of halal goods.⁷⁵

As evident from the quote, Marat Sarsenbaev draws clear boundaries between religious authorities and his organization, and positions the Halal Industry Association as the legitimate governing body within the market. Their standards have been incorporated into government standards, with which producers must inevitably comply. This association boasts that its logo and reputation are widely recognized. Beyond the six hundred companies certified by the HIA within the country, producers from Russia, Belarus, and even Turkey have gone through their certification.

⁷⁵ Source: <http://kstnews.kz/news/market?node=20743> - last accessed May 5, 2016.

The Halal Certification Agency in Kyrgyzstan echoes their accreditors in Kazakhstan, and emphasizes the rational side of their halal standards. Myktybek Arstanbek asserted in one of his interviews to local journalists:

Halal standards are a technical expression of Shariah laws. Religious authorities issue fatwas, that for example pork is haram. Our role then is to find where pork and porcine residues can be present and to help producers eliminate such ingredients. It's not religious authorities' work to detect this. Let's take cake as an example. It can contain so many haram ingredients, including colorants, gelatin and alcohol. So for a cake to become halal, we need to work with producers, and the work may take up to half a year. We do our work considering that producers want to make sure that halal production is not going to be too costly for them, and that the taste of their cakes is not going to be compromised. It's hard work. And only after this meticulous work do we issue our certificate, which is good for one year. Throughout the year, we also make sure to visit certified producers, to make sure that they're complying with the standards.⁷⁶

This rhetoric directly resonates with entrepreneurs who align themselves with the Islamic Capitalist orientation.

One such respondent, Bakyt, a forty two-year old owner of a large bakery that employed around fifty employees in Osh city of Kyrgyzstan, talked about his desire to lead a clean business. He had received certification a year ago, and displayed his certificate in his office along with other diplomas and certificates from the trainings he attended locally and abroad. Bakyt, spoke about the need to enhance both the technology and the skillset of his workers. He invited a consultant from the Netherlands last year, so that he would provide training workshops for his workers. When I asked him, why he went through halal certification, he answered:

I may not be very religious, but I do want my products to be actually halal. That's my *ichki sezim*, my inner feelings that drive my desire not just to stamp the label, but to actually comply. Halal, is actually very much in line with food safety...you probably know that food safety is big in Europe. So halal calls us to comply to religious tenets, but it's also just another term for

⁷⁶ Source: <http://halal.kg/blogs/42> - last accessed June 5, 2016.

products that are not harmful⁷⁷.

For Bakyt and many other entrepreneurs alike him, halal certification was a convenient and familiarly bureaucratic way to verify that they were abiding to the prescribed rules, and were not thereby stamping the halal label without authorization.

Localization and National Islam

As was mentioned earlier, grey areas inevitably arise in moral markets (Riaz and Chaudry 2004), particularly in cases where Shariah laws meet with local tastes and customs. In the Central Asian context, one telling example involves *kymys* [fermented mare's milk] traditional to the nomadic cultures of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic groups. The religious authorities in Kyrgyzstan have debated whether *kymys* should be considered *haram* for its minor alcoholic content, by which it could be considered intoxicating. After extensive debates, the Muftiate issued a fikh, that *kymys* was to be regarded halal, since its alleged health benefits outweigh its negligible alcoholic component. *Kymys* is seen as an authentic piece of national heritage, which could not be labeled haram, as this rhetoric would suggest that it was harmful and impure. The justification for the halal status of *kymys*, was rooted in the rhetoric that it is mostly consumed for restorative rather than recreational purposes.⁷⁸ The HCA in Kyrgyzstan heavily promotes these kinds of

⁷⁷ Interview conducted at his office, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. July 10, 2014.

⁷⁸ The episode with the mare's milk in the contemporary Kyrgyzstani context reminds us that similar deliberations among religious authorities have been going on for centuries. One of the historical examples of how consumption of certain goods was contested by Islamic jurists is well conveyed by the sixteenth century coffee debate. According to Brown (2004), coffee and coffee houses that quickly spread throughout Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul and other Middle Eastern cities in the sixteenth century, sparked a controversy leading to an assembly of legal experts. The jurists that gathered in 1511 in Mecca debated whether coffee should be classified haram [prohibited] as well as wine, for it can be considered intoxicating. Eventually, coffee was prohibited, but not due to a systematic argument connecting coffee and wine – but “simply because it is vaguely harmful to one's well-being” (Brown 2014:119).

localization efforts. Together with the HIA in Kazakhstan, they have collaborated with their Russian counterparts based in Tatarstan to institutionalize Eurasian halal standards. These standards mostly resonate with Malaysian standards, but also take into account local traditional foods like horse meat and mare's milk.

Besides localizing halal standards however, the HCA employs the rhetoric of “protecting local markets.” In an interview with Myktybek Arstanbek in the summer 2015, he noted that “the agency has been moving towards promoting the idea of protecting the local market. If you're a producer, you should source locally – then it's easier for us to trace halalness of goods.” In making these statements, the HCA promotes a national Islamist orientation, that lucrative market niches should feed into the norms of dominant ethnic, national and regional groups, thereby contributing to civic consciousness and public life. Halal standards in particular must meet the needs of “traditional” national values. Entrepreneurs who have the most affinity for this rhetoric offer their critique of Islamic capitalists as easily bending the religious tenets so that they could turn a profit. Besides this complaint, however, such entrepreneurs also criticize Islamic capitalists, who have often studied abroad in Turkey and other countries, as “bourgeois” and “foreign.”

One of my respondents, the owner of a jam producing company in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, noted that the HCA has experts who will specifically overlook the quality of local produce in their efforts to preserve the competitiveness of local producers. The agency in his mind protected the market from foreign producers, who were flooding the local market with unhealthy products loaded with preservatives and other chemicals.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Interview with the owner of the company producing jams in Osh, conducted July 11, 2014

Purification and Spiritual Islam

Certifiers often emphasize that halal certification is also about cleansing and purifying your business practices. Although Myktybek aji considers practicing pious entrepreneurs to constitute only a minority of those who have been certified, he delivers lectures to various Quran study groups, medressahs, and other religious associations on the need to practice Islam not only through in word, but also in deed. Those who align with Spiritually-oriented Islam are particularly receptive to these efforts and framing. For them, economic outcomes such as material goods, money and success in this life should only be secondary to the aspiration of paving the road to heaven. This group is particularly vocal about the need to not only receive the certification, but to actively earn it. For them, it was not so much their *visible market* activities, but even those invisible actions monitored only by God that were most crucial.

One instance that was commonly voiced among halal business owners closest to the Spiritual Islamic stance was reconsideration of their relationship with state officials. Typically, business owners are accustomed to solving any disputes with “street-level bureaucrats” through bribes or *krysha* (“protection,” or literally, “a roof” in Russian. See more in Ledeneva 1998). Although admitting that they still do give bribes when demanded, many of my respondents in this category said they have intentionally been avoiding corrupt practices. Aziza, a 35-year old owner of a Muslim daycare center in Bishkek, for example, admitted that she initially ran her daycare without proper registration, and subsequently had to bribe some of the state officials who would come to check her gas and electricity meters. Since the building was registered as a “private residence” and not a “business,” she paid lower utility rates and bribed state officials. Checking the creases of her headscarf, she talked about her decision to come clean.

I eventually registered my daycare, and the whole building had to be officially documented as serving commercial purposes. As we were getting all of our paperwork done, one of the state workers came and asked for his usual amount. He very well knew we just didn't have all the documents ready yet, but still came asking. I couldn't help myself and started yelling – “Do you know what's awaiting you in your next life? Bribes are haram!

As she emotionally described her encounter, Aziza expressed her sense of pride that she now ran a registered business and did not need to hide from the bureaucrats.

It is this emphasis of both certifiers and the companies' deliberate search and enactment of the rules of the sacred that helps them construct the collective sense of demarcating the space of morality in the otherwise chaotic and unruly market. After going through certification, entrepreneurs in this group expressed their pride in being clean, compliant with religious precepts, and making money through honorable business practices. From the interviews, it was evident that the process of going through halal-certification, and their deliberations of proper business conduct, spilled over to various areas of their activities that went far beyond their concern with the ingredients and the technical aspect of production.

The narratives of pious entrepreneurs reveal collective representations that reflected the meaning-making at work and juxtapositions made to other non-halal market practices and spaces. These binaries are reinforced through the narratives about what is good and what is bad, moral and corrupt, which comes to shape the scripts that are perceived by entrepreneurs and their audiences as “plausible and the performances as authentic, sincere, or otherwise genuine” (Wherry 2012:209). These shared meanings flow in the circuit of the certification agency and certified entrepreneurs, generating internal collective beliefs and shaping ways in which these actors communicate their distinction to those outside of the circuit.

Table 3: Binaries Produced through the Halal-Certification Process⁸⁰

Halal-certified	Non-certified
Compliant with religious precepts	Compliance with religious and moral values is questionable
Bureaucratized and government-backed	Self discretion is not legitimate
Healthy	Potentially unhealthy
Locally sourced, therefore easier to trace	Foreign, therefore more difficult to trace
Nourishes spiritually	Corrupts spiritually
Produced through honorable business practices	Produced through morally illicit practices
Clean	Dirty

Certified entrepreneurs and the certifying agencies come to create “shared understandings concerning the meaning of transactions within the circuit, including their moral valuation” (Zelizer 2010:304). Once obtained, halal-certificates communicate the authenticity and genuine intentions of the company, and hence are displayed in “front stages.” Certificates are often laminated and displayed at storefronts of cafes, or framed in owners’ offices, where they meet with their partners. Thus, while halal-certificates are technically only thin sheets of paper issued by the agency that ceremonially evaluates compliance to halal standards, these accounts of entrepreneurs presented above demonstrate that they come to carry layers of meanings and sentiments for entrepreneurs.

Conclusion: Implications of Valuation Circuits

In this chapter, I have focused on third-party halal certifiers in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Emerging only in the early and mid-2000s in both countries, these certifiers gained popularity with entrepreneurs in the Islamic business field due to their ability to classify and sort goods and services labeled as “Shariah-compliant” and “halal” from

⁸⁰ Wherry (2012) presents the binaries that he sees being developed through the discourse of the sacred and profane in an art market. I borrow from him, in developing this table.

their conventional analogues. In that sense, they engage in the process of constructing and reifying “categories and understandings that enable us to engage in economic action” (DiMaggio 1994:28).

As new forms of governance in the market, the case of halal certifiers can contribute to the broader inter-disciplinary literatures on certifiers, which have explained the utility of kosher, fair trade, organic, and other certifiers as a response to information asymmetries in expanding global markets (Christmann and Taylor 2006; Dewally and Ederington 2006; Masters and Sanogo 2002). These authors argue that private certifiers primarily prove their worth by devising techniques for monitoring the composition of goods and the process and conditions of production, thereby alleviating the state and market actors’ concerns around health risks, safety, and environmental hazards. From the standpoint of these studies, certifiers gain popularity because they lower monitoring costs for the state and other regulators (Christmann and Taylor 2006), help certified businesses gain a competitive edge and access to global markets (Dewally and Ederington 2006), and enable cognizant consumers to make informed choices in the market (Masters and Sanogo 2002; Micheletti 2003).

The common shortcoming of these studies is in their explicit and implicit assumptions that third party agencies are neutral sources of evaluation and approval (Baines 2009). These limitations are well addressed by researchers who employ a political economy view to frame certification as a space for contestation and negotiation between stakeholders (Bartley, 2011). Studies within this political economy camp remind us that labeling and standardization processes are far from being politically neutral, and involve struggles over the co-optation and dilution of standards (Timmermans and

Epstein 2010). Although more nuanced, this political economy perspective still tends to relay hope that the problems of co-optation can be addressed by the bottom-up by “counter-movements” that push for credible information. Focusing on international Kosher certifiers, Starobin & Weinthal (2010) for example, argue that their expansion has hinged on dedicated religious authorities and close-knit religious communities, who catalyze the credibility of Kosher certifiers and certified businesses.

Although informed by these two broader strands of literature on certification, my approach to halal certifiers differs in one crucial way. I suggest that the authority of certifiers is not based on their actual technical expertise and ability to enforce transparent and measurable standards on businesses – at least not to the degree that other authors emphasize. Instead, certifiers are more like “institutional entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio 1988), or agents who modify the “institutional logics” (Friedland and Alford 1991, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012) specific to a field. In this case, they speak to cognitive frameworks that have been shaped by state officials and religious authorities around different manifestations of Islam in the market. The work of certifiers is best understood as a process of “quality” construction – where explicit and implicit, visible and invisible aspects of market practices become connected to a particular good or service that is labelled as “halal.”

Entrepreneurs’ sentiments of self-doubt in the appropriateness of their business practices, coupled with the evasiveness of consensus on halal standards, generate uncertainties in the market. Adapting Zelizer's (2009, 2010) concept of economic circuits, I argue that the resilience of certifiers has been due to the collectively constructed *valuation circuits*, where certifiers’ higher level accreditors ceremonially evaluate

compliance to halal standards, taking on the moral responsibility of backing anxious entrepreneurs or lower-level certifiers in their commitment to practicing religiously ethical business. I have elucidated the transnational circuit of which Kyrgyzstan's Halal Certification Agency is a part, extending to their accreditors in Kazakhstan, the Halal Industry Association, which is in turn accredited by the International Halal Integrity Alliance based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this circuit, each level of certifier depended on a higher level of accreditors when claiming their authority and credibility. This transnational circuit is the chain of moral authority in which the halal compliant status of goods is meant to become measurable, technical and translatable to market indicators such as price. However, this transnational piece would not have made much sense without explorations of how certifiers are able to relate and speak to different sentiments and orientations of Islam locally.

In exploring the local dynamics, I have turned to the conceptualization of credentials and certificates as catalyzers of collective beliefs in the accountability of all parties. My observations resonate with the concept of the logic of confidence – where good faith among internal members and external constituents legitimates organizations, “enabling them to appear useful in spite of the lack of technical validation” (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Very similarly, halal certification, although presented as technical and able to contribute to the transparency of the production process, is mostly anchored in “pretended representations” (Beckert 2011:7) of the production process. As van Waarden & van Dalen (2013:208) poignantly phrase it, market actors, investors, entrepreneurs and consumers have to engage in transactions “as if” all halal goods and services are compliant with the standards.

These negotiations between pious entrepreneurs, certification agencies, and religious authorities demonstrate that the distinction between “Islamic” and “non-Islamic” businesses is far more than mere semantics, as some authors have claimed.⁸¹ What is important to emphasize from the relational perspective of the economic sociology literature is the meaning-making deliberations in which both certifiers and certified are involved. Through the deliberate search and enactment of what are considered to be the rules of the sacred (as opposed to the profane), the halal-certification agency and entrepreneurs are demarcating the space of morality. The halal manner of doing business has become intertwined with various ethical codes that are seen as key in the behavioral norms of entrepreneurs.

⁸¹ (Kuran 2010) claimed that adaptations of conventional financial products and procedures with only slight nominal changes were primarily done for the purposes of gaining their own brand of Islamic finance.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic Economy and Its Puzzles

I opened this dissertation with a report on the State of the Global Islamic Economy, which estimated that global spending within the Islamic economy surpassed two trillion USD in 2013, including food, clothing, and other sectors that market to the halal lifestyle. The message that such reports broadcast is that the Islamic economy is growing exponentially. Zooming into one of the newer nodes of this worldwide network, however, I suggested that these trends raise more questions than answers. Besides the question of why Islamic economy may be traveling so quickly to new socio-political terrains such as post-Soviet Central Asia, I brought up the considerable ambiguity surrounding the concept of Islamic economy itself. Taking note of these tendencies, I posed the question of why the Islamic economy became such an appealing alternative developmental path for the post-Soviet Central Asian region, despite the uncertainties and ambiguities that it encompassed?

First and foremost, to understand the puzzling “sudden” turn of post-Soviet countries toward the Islamic economy, one must attend to the alternative scenarios. If Islamic economy did not emerge, what would have been an alternative scenario for this region? The answer to this question does not have to be manufactured hypothetically, as an alternate scenario had already been in the works long before Islamic businesses started emerging. As I discussed in Chapter Three, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, among other post-Soviet countries, initially made a rapid shift to the market economy in early 1990s. Their extensive collaboration with the World Bank and the IMF were coupled with

government approval of the “Western” blueprint of free markets. Under its first president, Askar Akaev, Kyrgyzstan joined the WTO in 1998 and implemented open-door policies in trade. These reforms facilitated the rise of small and medium businesses, particularly in trade, where many entrepreneurs found niches either re-exporting Chinese goods to other Central Asian markets and to Russia, or importing foreign commodities and selling them in domestic markets. Kazakhstan in turn liberalized its economy, but at a slower pace than Kyrgyzstan, primarily relying on its vast oil resources. The growth of oil prices between 1998 and 2008 turned Kazakhstan into one of the world’s fastest growing economies (Pomfret 2012), but also gave President Nazarbayev’s administration sufficient resources to buy social docility and sideline political and economic reforms. In both countries, the Old Guards, former politicians and technocrats were the ones to benefit from the institutionalization of market economy primarily, along with a new class of small and medium entrepreneurs.

Meanwhile, the majority of the population struggled to make ends meet in the first decade of independence, due to the shortage of jobs in state-owned factors and plants, as well as the drastic evaporation of welfare benefits. Unsurprisingly, there was a wide disenchantment with what the new government and the market economy promised to deliver. Particularly in Kyrgyzstan, where the civil society strengthened at this time, one could witness continuous, damning criticism of the new wealthy elite, as well as of the institutions that people believed promoted Western values and principles. The wealth of the newly rich was now expressed and publicly visible in villas (Humphrey 2002), luxurious vehicles, property ownership and conspicuous consumption patterns at shopping malls (Botoeva 2006). Religious movements and institutions then, as the

actively mobilizing and growing part of the civil society, came to voice their similar criticism and their unease with free market. Their attempts of bringing in civility, morality, and religiously informed ethical principles into daily practice came to engulf many areas such as one's choice of outfit, diet, public demeanor, choice of where to send children for education, and many others. I would avoid however, calling this simply a "reactionary" movement – a term that gets used too frequently in reference to the Global South as a shorthand for processes in which the local population purportedly gets defensive over their traditions and identity when they feel threatened by external forces.

It was not only until early 2000s that state officials of both countries started to voice their support for alternative paths of socioeconomic development. They pointed in their speeches to countries like the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Malaysia, among others, as examples of nations that combined rapidly growing economies with Muslim identities through "non-Western" models of development. This tendency of associative affiliation, as well as actual efforts in nurturing inter-governmental relations with "Muslim" nations, began to rise starting from 2007-2008. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, when many Western banks restrained their lending, the government of Kazakhstan actively sought alternative sources of capital. It was in this period then, that the EcoIslamic Bank in Kyrgyzstan and Al-Hilal Bank in Kazakhstan were founded as a result of inter-governmental collaboration, as well as cooperation among state officials, the Islamic Development Bank, and well-connected local entrepreneurs. The state officials of both countries sought to take charge of "Islamization" in line with the national ideologies that they had shaped, and to project their Muslimness both in the local and international domains. In doing so, they pursued a clear agenda of keeping "radical" and

“fundamentalist” religious movements at bay, while launching several initiatives that supported “moderate” Islam as compatible with the modernizing nation-state project.

The first and most notable step that the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan took was identifying Hanafi Islam as the legitimate school of Islamic thought and practice (McGlinchey 2009). Hanafi Islam is one of the four schools within Sunni Islam, and is often referred to as the most tolerant of diverse theological, philosophical and mystical positions (Nasr 1996:114). Second, both presidents sought to demonstrate their approval of their citizens seeking connections with Muslims beyond the region, in certain major centers of Islamic civilization. President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan made his first *hajj* to Mecca in 1994, following a lesser pilgrimage (*umra*) in 1992 (Huskey 2003). Similarly, President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan visited Mecca and Medina in 1994. Both presidents also supported the establishment of Islamic educational institutions, which resulted in the Islamic Institute in Kyrgyzstan and Nurmubarak Islamic University in Kazakhstan. The latter was affiliated with the Egyptian Al-Azhar Islamic University, one of the largest and most reputable Islamic educational institutions worldwide (Achilov 2015). These gestures were meant to communicate that Islam had become a key part of the new national identity of both countries.

In response to the state’s formulation of National Islam, the diverse religious-social movements that had established themselves by the early 2000s fought to participate in the process. Throughout this dissertation, I have called for the recognition of the distinct forms of Islamism that are being instituted by diverse factions within civil society, as well as the market. I have corroborated this call for attentiveness to different orientation by examining different networks of entrepreneurs. Members of the *Tablighi*

Jama'at movement, for example, believe that even business is “a way of doing *dava'at*,” or proselytizing. They aspire to showcase their devotion to the path of Godliness, for example, by shutting down their business even during high seasons. Representatives of the Gülen-inspired movement, meanwhile, support a more “progressive” orientation to Islamic business – what I call capitalist Islam – wherein their devotion is expressed more in terms of group cohesion as a business community. In many ways these different networks represent what economic sociologists have long argued: that markets are inherently reflections of social institutions and the social order. Hence, it should not be a surprise that the field of Islamic businesses reflects diverse social groups, who strive to instill their distinct understanding and practices of Islam in market activity. In other words, rather than viewing the Islamic economy as an abstract convergence of different Islam and capitalist ethics, the field presents a divergent dynamic among those factions who articulate or adhere to a particular form of Islamism, be it a National, Capitalist or Spiritual Islamism.

Clearly, social movements could not be as active if it was not for a certain degree of political tolerance. The tone is set by the political climate, which is often determined by those who stand at the wheel of the government. It was this political opening, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, that enabled religious movements and their leaders to engage in voicing their vision of Islam’s transformative power in daily life. Many of the actors involved in the field of Islamic business (including entrepreneurs, and state officials, and consumers) actually embrace globalization. They embrace opportunities to receive an education beyond their home countries, access to diverse sources of media, news, and literature. They often embrace cultural exchange between their own home countries and

other nations that serve as reference points on Islam that carry (in their understanding) greater authority, be it Saudi Arabia or Malaysia or Turkey. It is crucial to note, however, that this embrace of globalization and (to varying degrees) free market principles also entails contestation over what form of Islam should be hegemonic, and how Islamic principles should be instituted in the market. My key argument in this study, therefore, is that the Islamic economy as a developmental path and a model for businesses emerged in the post-Soviet context as a result of such contestation.

Connecting the insights of political and economic sociology, I suggested that the Islamic economy, like any other developmental project, does not emerge through means-ends rational policy alone, but is rather actively articulated by actors with complex agendas, such as state officials, religious authorities, and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs in particular hope not only to build a more pious society through their efforts at promoting an Islamic lifestyle, but also to occupy a competitive position in a market that will become increasingly profitable should demand for this lifestyle increase. It is important to attend to the competing *moral futures* or *imaginaries* that contending factions of market actors articulate – images of the potential future state of society that these factions hope to build through their efforts in the present and someday occupy.

Only by attending to this diversity of moral futures are we able to view Islam as a multivalent religious and moral force, which has served as an ethically acceptable source of different orientations, that at times conflict, but yet enroll a wide range of entrepreneurs, investors, and other market and civil society actors into the Islamic economy. As a public sphere, the market does not simply reflect changes in the broader social order and in commonly held values. Rather, it serves as a space through which

religious authorities and entrepreneurs can take an active part in shaping the material practices of people (e.g., having access to hijabs, or literature in Arab), and their expressions of religiosity in everyday life. Throughout my dissertation, I have aimed to show that rather than fully adopting the argument of social embeddedness of markets, I share the view that social values and norms can also be created and reinforced *through* markets.

Borrowing insights from economic sociology, I suggested that for religiously-informed moral tenets to be incorporated in the economic system, there must first be actors who articulate these tenets in terms of moral futures. Drawing from Jens Beckert, I define moral futures as imaginative frameworks that guide economic decisions based on anticipated future values (both in monetary and non-monetary terms) of commodities and services within the moralized market niche. Beckert (2011) asserted that the future value of any economic decision is uncertain to some extent - like in the stock market or futures markets, where market actors need to make their decisions and investments in the present based on their best judgment of potential future returns. This depiction of uncertainty is further complicated when we bring into our analysis cases such as Islamic business models, which combine at their core both calculable (profit) and incalculable (spiritual) returns. As Zelizer's (2010) school of thought would suggest, all markets are more moralized and less rational than economists tend to recognize. This observation is especially true in the case of the Islamic economy, in which the substance of "morality" itself can be every bit as uncertain as the dynamics of markets.

To demonstrate how moral futures emerge, I incorporated the concept of "articulation" from political sociology. Articulation is performed by actors, especially

intellectual producers such as political parties, who “naturalize some identities and collectivities and suppress others” (De Leon, Desai, and Tugal 2009:194). Studies of political articulation promote the idea that policy regimes, developmental projects, and the demands of constituents do not simply emerge in a socio-cultural and political vacuum. Rather, key actors shape the sensibilities of the population on the ground by articulating or interpellating a certain social group, its idealized image of self, its grievances, and its interests. Originating in the work of Althusser, the verb interpellate means to bring something or someone into being, or to give identity to an individual or a social group. As Cedric De Leon and his colleagues (2009, 2015) contend, without this active process of articulation, which makes the lived experiences and ideals of certain social groups more coherent and visible in the public space, political and social identifications could never take hold. I add to this concept, by arguing that the work of articulation also constructs mental representations of desirable and plausible models for economic and social development. In this respect, political parties are not the only actors who engage in projects of articulation. In the cases I investigate, religious authorities and even entrepreneurs similarly articulate images of the futures to which they hope to contribute through their activities in the market.

Empirical Findings

To address the overarching puzzle discussed above, I raised three interrelated sub-questions, the answers to which can be extended not only to the Islamic economy in other nation-states, but also to the broader case of moralized markets. First, I asked under what conditions moralized markets gain political and social valence as a viable and attractive model for commerce and finance. Secondly, I asked how the market incorporates

religiously-informed moral concerns and tenets into actual business practices. Finally, I questioned how the quality and value of goods and services that are produced in the moralized market become standardized and evaluated. In what follows, I summarize my empirical findings that specifically address these questions.

In *Chapter Three* I demonstrated that a historically-informed analysis of post-Soviet Central Asian states enables us to stay away from sensationalizing their new aspiration to build an Islamic economy. Tracing current economic and religious policies to their Soviet roots, I showed that the Soviet state, including the administrations of the Central Asian Soviet Republics, neither uniformly opposed organized religion, nor completely eradicated religious institutions and carriers of religious knowledge over the seventy-year period of Soviet rule. In the second decade of their independence, state officials of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan promoted a National Islamic orientation that, similar to Soviet religious and nationalities policy, saw religion as a means of directing the popular will toward national consciousness and loyalty to the regime. In the moral future advanced by the state, therefore, Islam represents one pillar of national traditions that ground the nation even as it strives for progress. The Islamic economy in particular represents an alternative model of economic development that can advance these goals. This rhetoric, and the efforts to bring Islamic banks to local economies, became particularly heightened in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. State bureaucrats held up Malaysia, Qatar and others countries in the Gulf as examples of nations that successfully combined progressive, outward-looking economic agendas with reverence for their local traditions.

In *Chapter Four*, I turned to religious authorities, who have also contributed to competing articulations of Islamism in the market. By drawing from sources like the Quran and *hadiths*, imams offer idealized sets of values that are meant to drive economic transactions. Incorporated into sermons, *medresseh* lessons, and personal consultations, and increasingly communicated through other media such as pamphlets, books, webcasts and newspapers, these tenets come to form an imaginative framework about what “Islamic business” promises in the short and long term for those involved. In this context, religious authorities interpellate otherwise religious subjects as market actors and vice versa, using competing articulatory projects. I showed that imams affiliated with the Muftiate tended to reiterate the National Islamic orientation articulated by state officials, albeit with greater emphasis on religious as opposed to national consciousness, but that contending factions such as Gülen affiliated imams and members of *Tablighi Jama'at* alternate competing moral futures, which emphasize Capitalist Islam and Spiritual Islam, respectively. Though these articulatory projects go beyond market activity, I demonstrated that all of these factions devote considerable thought to issues such as market chaos, the moral cleanliness of profit, and the role of the economy in constructing moral futures.

These two chapters combined present three orientations of Islamism in the market, namely, National Islam, Capitalist Islam and Spiritual Islam. These analytical categories demonstrate that Islamism produces different frameworks for understanding desirable end goals and the proper means to attain them, thereby shaping the decisions, strategies and practices of pious entrepreneurs in their network. *National Islam* is actively articulated by the government leaders of both countries, as it is meant to inculcate a sense

of national distinctiveness from both the former Russian colonizer, as well as from Muslim “new others” such as Arabs. Large faction of imams connected to the central Muftiate extend this logic, by promoting the idea that the interests of the nation must be protected from the foreign influence. *Capitalist Islam*, is most explicitly articulated by the religious officials affiliated with the Gülen movement, who express their appreciation of the virtues of the free market. In the rhetoric of this faction, Islamic tenets and pious aspirations should be merged with orientations towards profit and efficiency. Finally, the *Spiritual Islamic* orientation has been articulated and promoted most explicitly by autonomous religious movements, which do not enjoy as much institutional support as the previous two factions. The future such groups aspire to produce is one of improving spirituality and piety in this world, and securing a place in the afterlife.

Shifting our attention to entrepreneurs in *Chapter Five*, I focus on the process through which moral futures animate market actors’ decisions and activities. If it is true, as Caroline Humphrey (2002) asserts, that culture is in part made through material and economic exchanges, it seems all the more important to pay attention to the emergence and expansion of Islamic economies. Moral and ethical commitments in the market have long interested scholars, practitioners and policy-makers alike, but the need to better specify how and through what social configurations religious and moral tenets get incorporated into market activities has gained more urgency in light of recent proliferation of moralized markets such as Fair Trade, organic food, ethical fashion and impact investment.

As such, this chapter argues against accounts of a monolithic “pious neoliberalism” or “market Islam.” In fact, its putatively coherent cultural values are

formed through contestations and competing articulations of Islamism. The central argument of the chapter is that not all moral projects that promote Islam in the market have gained equal traction in Central Asia. The Capitalist Islamic orientation has thus far enrolled more and diverse groups of market actors, from small-scale traders to more established large business owners. In part, I suggested that the success of this orientation can be explained in terms of the formal and informal institutions that extended it, including business associations such as JIA, and the broader network of the Gülen movement. Also, this orientation leaves more room for negotiation and interpretation of how one should enact morality in business.

When it comes to the articulations and self-depictions of entrepreneurs, however, we must distinguish between the idealized self-images entrepreneurs present, and how these entrepreneurs are perceived by the public, to whom such representations may not carry the same meaning and weight. The tension between piety and profit can be a particularly sensitive fault line. Prosperous entrepreneurs may present themselves as working to tame and moralize a chaotic market, and depict their material success as a manifestation of this spiritual mission, but more spiritually-oriented entrepreneurs and the broader public might perceive such success as a sign of a bourgeois mentality and lifestyle that conflict with the spirit of Islam. Yet this gap reveals not so much entrepreneurial malpractice or an opportunistic desire to capitalize on the halal or Muslim brand, but rather the general conditions of uncertainty that market actors face both in the post-Soviet context and any moralized market elsewhere.

Finally, in *Chapter Six*, I emphasized that even as moral futures crystalize and develop into a clear repertoire of rhetoric and practices, questions remain as to the quality

and value of the products produced in the field of Islamic business. How are the quality and authenticity of “Islamic” goods and services evaluated and legitimized in the face of mass skepticism? This chapter provides an answer to such questions by examining the work of private halal certification agencies, who have come to serve as a source of moral authority in the field of Islamic business. I utilized two concepts to explain the value that these certification agencies provide for the field of Islamic business. First, the halal certificates that these agencies issue serve as “judgment devices” that allow entrepreneurs and consumers to transcend doubt about the quality and value of the products offered in this market. Second, I contended that the authority of these certificates is derived from transnational *valuation circuits*, through which local certification agencies draw on the authority of more established (in popular understanding) Islamic nations. I will briefly address each of these concepts in turn.

When conceptualizing the uncertainties in the Islamic economy, I drew parallels to other markets, including financial markets (Mackenzie, 2011; Sinclair, 2014), antique commodities (Bogdanova, 2013), and even labor markets (Gerlach 2013), where market actors similarly face uncertainties around the value and authenticity of goods and services. These studies from economic sociology remind us that the value and the quality of goods can indeed be invisible and/or opaque (Beckert 2013). Extending the notion of “judgment devices,” I turned to third-party halal certification agencies and the certificates they issue. I conceptualized certificates and credentials of halal-compliance as catalysts of a collective beliefs in the accountability of all parties – the certification agencies and the businesses and products they certify. Through my investigation of the transnational networks of certifiers, I contended that certifiers are not so much technical experts, but

rather institutional entrepreneurs that tap onto the sensibilities of different sets of businesses on the ground.

My observations demonstrated that instead of technical validation and transparency in the production process, certifiers construct transnational *valuation circuits* that bridge transnational networks of accreditors with local entrepreneurs to collectively construct and share understandings of what constitutes halal and Shariah-compliant products and practices. Certification agencies appeal to local entrepreneurs by tapping into the sentiments and logics of diverse faction of entrepreneurs in the field of Islamic business. In that sense, the case of halal certifiers calls for the recognition that market judgment devices and expertise primarily facilitates “pretended representations” (Beckert 2011:7), which enable investors, entrepreneurs, and consumers to act “as if” halal goods and services were completely compliant with the standards.

Broader Implications of the Study

This dissertation contributes to the social studies of how economic decisions and actions in the present are oriented towards the future. The dissertation contributes to these investigations mainly by advancing scholarly understanding of why moralized markets emerge in new contexts, and how they get validated and enacted by a constellation of actors. Bridging strands of economic and political sociology, it has shown that *imaginaries* of what the future holds can shape human understandings and action in the present. My research contributes to the growing interdisciplinary interest in future-oriented action through explorations of how the emotive, nationalist, and materialist dimensions of imagined frameworks direct the behaviors of different sets of market actors.

The broader significance of my study is three-fold. First, it provides a detailed empirical account of contemporary actors in the field of Islamic businesses in post-Soviet Central Asia, an understudied node in the global network of this moralized market. Second, its substantive focus offers an alternative vantage point from which to enter scholarly debates on business ethics in the Global North and South, and on transnational forms of governance. Finally, the research breaks ground in the study of moralized markets, as spaces through which both new models of finance and commerce become validated, along with new identities and cultural categories.

While I developed concept of moral futures to understand the articulatory projects of Islamism in the market, I believe the concept can be applied to other cases where the valorization of broader moral practices in the economy are increasingly politicized and pushed as a result of reified identities. Obvious analogues include those of impact investment, ethical fashion, organic farming, and the Fair Trade movement, fields which articulate moral futures around concerns that conventional capitalist modes of business are unsustainable environmentally and unjust towards those at the bottom of the global commodity chain. As with the different moral futures I examined, these articulations appeal to different actors globally, from impoverished farmer unions and their advocates, who see hopes of more equitable compensation and better working conditions, to large corporations that have also joined the bandwagon of ethical business in the hopes of attracting more discerning consumers.

The promise of these moralized markets – the viability of the moral futures they project – is still uncertain and heavily disputed in both scholarly and policy circles. As this dissertation suggests, however, debating the ideals of these moralized markets is less

revealing than conducting a relational analysis that examines who articulates such moral futures, and through what processes and field dynamics. The particular approach I have developed and offered in this dissertation pays close attention to the role of politicized imaginaries, articulated orientations of Islamism, and constructions of value, in order to understand how market actors understand, express, and enact visions of piety in business practices in a developing economy. Although we cannot yet see the fruits of the labor that my informants promise, we can be certain that the moral futures I outlined here will continue to be articulated and rearticulated, with great implications for the future development of the Islamic economy.

How generalizable are conditions in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan? Since these two countries serve as a context through which I explored the emergence of religiously-informed moralized market, it is proper to ponder upon the question of whether what I find to be true in these two countries could be observed elsewhere. First, let me begin with neighboring states in Central Asia. Turkmenistan is perhaps the least likely case where similar dynamics could emerge, with two consecutive presidents that employed authoritarian tactics of rule by intimidation. In Uzbekistan, where Islam Karimov has served as the sole authoritarian president since independence, the political regime has also been quite restrictive when it comes to religious expression. In Tajikistan, finally, the government has been actively re-shaping national and religious traditions in ways designed to undermine popular expression of Islam. The government has banned the wearing of veils by women in public institutions, and at the time of writing had shut down the last madrassah in the country. Under these more constraining circumstances than in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, social movements whose vision does not align with

that of state officials are not likely to expand and gain traction on the ground. As a result, only a few large businesses such as Islamic banks will be able to survive, and only if they stick to the script written and orchestrated by the state.

Moving beyond Central Asia to other post-Soviet countries, however, one can see the expansion of Islamic businesses in many other contexts. It typically goes unacknowledged that the Russian Federation is home to approximately sixteen to twenty million Muslims, which constitute around twelve to fifteen percent of the entire country's population. Populations in the Northern Caucasus, including the modern republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Tatarstan, have embraced their Muslimness in recent decades in a similar manner to people in the Central Asian republics. The media provides glimpses of these processes. One can see various businesses opening under the banner of "by Muslims for Muslims." Various boutiques, salons and fashion houses that cater to those with proper tastes and deep-enough pockets stand as reflections of what some have called "bourgeois Islam." This orientation represents an ostentatious marriage of both higher economic status, progressive thinking, and abstract religious aspirations. Other forms of businesses modeled after the Islamic economy are also taking place in Tatarstan, and some of my respondents in Kyrgyzstan remarked on numerous occasions that they seek to build connections with their Muslim counterparts there.

I do, however, venture to predict that under the current political regime, the Islamic economy is not going to flourish in any part of the Russian Federation. This is primarily due to Vladimir Putin and the broader Russian government's management of Islam and Muslim religious authorities. In the light of the rise of ISIS, Putin and his administration have only intensified their rhetoric of shaming and stigmatizing any form

of zealous religiosity. Meanwhile, Ramzan Kadyrov, the strongman President appointed by Putin himself in Chechnya, has banned the sale of alcohol and enforced a compulsory Muslim dress code on Chechen women.⁸² Reportedly, there were incidents when those who did not abide by the policy and continued to wear “immodest” outfits were publicly shamed, abused and shot with paintball guns.⁸³ This should not be seen as a flourishing Islamic lifestyle that could support a politically autonomous Islamic economy, however. Instead, this is part of top-down efforts to control and co-opt Islam as a tool of state control. In other words, this articulation that is resonant with National Islam extensively discussed in this dissertation, is less likely to enroll the majority of the population in the country.

Echoing these autocratic tendencies, the government in Azerbaijan, another oil-rich Muslim country formerly in the Soviet Union, has also banned Islamic movements that are seen as threatening to the sovereignty of the country. In July 2014, Azerbaijani authorities closed schools affiliated with the Gülen Movement. They also eliminated people from state and government agencies who were known to be affiliated with the movement. This reached even higher-profile government officials, including a senior presidential adviser to President Ilham Aliyev, over his alleged connection to the Gülen movement.⁸⁴ In July 2016, the government of Turkey, an important regional partner for Azerbaijan, presented unsubstantiated accusations that Fethulla Gülen and his movement followers were behind a failed coup attempt. This accusation immediately put further

⁸² Source: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/10/chechnya-hard-line-protector-muslim-rights-151001085135746.html>, last accessed May 15, 2016.

⁸³ Source: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2011/0311/Report-Chechen-women-attacked-with-paintball-guns-for-immodest-dress>, last accessed May 15, 2016.

⁸⁴ Source: <http://www.dailysabah.com/asia/2014/06/18/azerbaijan-closes-schools-affiliated-with-the-gulen-movement>, last accessed May 15, 2016.

pressure on followers of the Gülen movement throughout the region. It is clear that any political climate that does not tolerate deviation from a state-orchestrated orientation toward National Islam (and perhaps Capitalist Islam) – that is politically sterile and “Islamic” only to the extent that the state sees fit – will not provide enough space for a thriving Islamic economy.

Outside of the post-Soviet region, observers note that Muslim intellectuals “have responded to the transformative power of capitalism during the past hundred or so years” (Tripp 2006: 194). As an ongoing process, the articulation of the Islamic economy has involved large swathes of intellectuals and practitioners, who sought to draw from the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence and thought. Muslim intellectuals in contexts like Egypt under Nasser, and Saudi Arabia under King Faisal’s ruling, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran, have engaged in debates over the proper role for the state in organizing and regulating the economy along Islamic lines (Tripp 2006: 197-198). Islamic jurisprudence and other texts, including holy Quran, have served as sources from which one could selectively draw tenets to meet the demands of contemporary social issues or problems at hand. As Charles Tripp (2006) notes, the ‘Islamic economy’ in these contexts, was envisioned not only a project through which to moralize the market, but also as an effective way through which these countries could engage with the wider world of Muslims. The author highlights that “those who devoted themselves to the theoretical elaboration of an Islamic economy began with an idealized set of principles” (Tripp 2006:198). As a result, their discussions took on “the moralistic air, but also an idealist flavor, since they were more concerned to refer their prescriptions to an established body of Islamic jurisprudence, or even to new interpretations of existing Islamic law, than to

the actual workings of the global economy” (Tripp 2006: 198). These articulations of an imagined role for Islam in contemporary economies have valorized the Islamic economy in the above-mentioned contexts, despite the lack of empirical evidence as to how it stacks up against conventional financial and economic models.

In light of the analyses presented in this dissertation, moralized markets, such as the Islamic economy, can be predicted to expand as forms of resistance to the expansion of conventional capitalism, which has incorporated most parts of the world. These articulations can fully expand and institutionalize themselves, however only when sufficient space, both imaginative and institutional, made available for diverse social movements to interpret, promote and practice distinct forms of Islam. Just as liberal democracy has become an umbrella project that managed to enroll a wide variety of constituents and social movements over time, the Islamic economy can succeed when it is articulated by different factions of entrepreneurs, religious and state authorities, and other market actors, and when these actors appeal to diverse interests among the broader population.

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