Stefan B. Kirmse

Youth and Globalization in Central Asia

Everyday Life between Religion, Media, and International Donors

campus

Contents

Acknowledgements 9

Introduction 13

1 Everyday Life in the City:
Youth between Family, Friends, and the State 39

2 Of Magicians, Missionaries, and "Mujahedeen":
The Emergence of a Transnational Religious Space 89

3 Globalization as Choice:
Youth in the Marketplace for Styles and Identities 127

4 Multiple Constraints:
Between Communal Expectations and Collective Identities 167

5 "Youth Spaces" and Global Gateways:
On the Effects of International Donor Activity 209

Conclusion 265

Abbreviations and Acronyms 283

Glossary of Terms 285

Bibliography 293

Appendices 315

Index 331

In the late Soviet period, bloody ethnic clashes rocked Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, situated in the border region of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Already dubbed "the valley of blood and tears" after violence between Uzbeks and Meshketian Turks had left hundreds of people dead in 1989 (Crowfoot and Glebov 1989, 155), another ethnic conflict erupted the following year. This time, fighting between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks caused hundreds of deaths in and around the city of Osh. In the 1990s, armed Islamist groups began to operate in the valley, now considered "the bastion of Islamic activism in the whole of Central Asia" (Haghayeghi 1997, 79). Gloomy pictures of the Ferghana Valley emerged in the press and the academic literature (for example, Lubin and Rubin 1999; Rumer 2002). When Islamic militants took hostages in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2000, local analyst Akimbekov concluded: "[These events] have demonstrated how ephemeral the notion of stability is in the enormous powder-keg called Central Asia" (2000).

The degree to which perceptions of the Ferghana Valley have been framed in terms of conflict is illustrated by a statement made by a young Frenchman who visited me in Osh, the site of my field research. "And this is supposed to be wild Osh?" he remarked while looking at the cafés, boys and girls in school uniforms, and crowds of city folk busy with their work. His reaction shows how a literature and media coverage focusing on holy warriors and ethnic tensions have created the image of a battlefield. As Megoran notes, "Outsiders perceive Central Asia through the prism of danger" (2005, 555). This image continues to inform Western policies. And yet, it often has little to do with people's everyday lives.

The Ferghana Valley is a fertile and densely populated area and home to a mix of ethnic groups. About 300 km long and between 20 and 70 km wide, it was part of the Soviet Union until 1991 (for a recent historical overview, see Starr 2011). Now its territory is shared by the independent republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (map 1). Low incomes, overpopulation, social inequality, drug trafficking, and anti-government mobilization have affected the region in recent years. In 2005, with uprisings leading to the overthrow of the president in Kyrgyzstan and the killing of hundreds of demonstrators in Uzbekistan, the Ferghana Valley once again made headlines as an epicenter of volatility. The mass violence in Osh in 2010, which came in the aftermath of yet another presidential crisis in Kyrgyzstan, represents the culmination of local instability and ongoing power struggles thus far.

The fact that many observers of Central Asia focus on conflict and security, however, also reflects a wider trend in the post-Soviet literature. Throughout the former Soviet Union (FSU), the end of communist rule has brought about tremendous change. Yet, scholars have tended to look at the social and cultural aspects of this change in different parts of the FSU from different angles. Developments in Slav-dominated regions are analyzed from a variety of sociological perspectives, including youth and youth cultural studies. In predominantly Muslim areas, by contrast, culture and society are usually placed within one of a number of established frameworks, such as post-colonialism and nation-building, "transition", or mobilization along clan, ethnic or religious lines.

Cultural globalization plays a subordinate role in discussions of Central Asia. Regional specialists examine individual transnational phenomena such as migration, religious activism, and international development cooperation. Though these discussions are illuminating, they do not address the multiple effects of cultural globalization on local lives in a holistic manner. These effects are explored mainly in relation to cultural elites engaged in processes of state and nation-building (Adams 2004; Megoran 2005; Blum 2007). Analyses of everyday life, by contrast, largely skirt around the global dimension (for example, Sahadeo and Zanca 2007). And yet, the expectations, life options, and self-identifications of ordinary people are shaped by a plethora of transnational connections, images, and actors. Youth are often at the forefront of global cultural exchange. In Central Asia, however, young

people are discussed mainly as victims of crisis (Nazpary 2002; ICG 2003; Falkingham and Ibragimova 2004; Moser 2007), as targets of state and elite policy (Handrahan 2004; Blum 2007; McGlinchey 2009), or as young "deviants" (not least, the relationship of young Muslims towards Islamic groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir [Liberation Party] has spawned numerous publications). These approaches are not unique to Central Asia. Urban youth are framed in terms of crises, violence, and marginalization throughout the Global South, both in the media and the social sciences (Hansen et al. 2008, 15, 208; Ansell 2005, 30-35). At the same time, analysts have become interested in the political potential of youth, studying youth bulges and youth participation in social and political "movements" across the former Soviet space and beyond (Council of Europe 2005; Urdal 2007; Dhillon and Yousef 2007; Nikolayenko 2007; Roche 2010; Shukan 2012; Comai 2012; Hemment 2012). To a degree, these perspectives draw on earlier studies of Western youth. Analyses of crime and deviance in the 1950s and 1960s, and discussions of symbolic rebellion in the 1970s, helped to sustain a "youth-as-trouble"-focus for decades (Pilkington 1994, 7-43). Offering an alternative to such approaches, this study paints an ethnographic portrait of young people's lives in the city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan. Osh is renowned as Central Asia's epicenter of Islamic activism, political instability, interethnic violence, and as a focus of international development aid. And yet, this book shows that young people often experience everyday life in the city in a very different way: as a series of interactions with transnational actors, goods, and images.

By focusing on urban youth, this book addresses a specific yet important social group in Central Asia. While they are more dependent, more monitored and regulated than older people, they are also more eager to experiment and challenge. They in many ways stand at the cutting edge of globalization and post-Soviet change and thus offer a useful point of entry for the analysis of these processes. I discuss globalization as the "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual" (Held et al. 1999, 2). As a set of processes that operate on various levels, globalization also incorporates the exchange of cultural meanings. It is the local experience of such "cultural globalization" that I concentrate on in this book.

Building on Appadurai (1990), I frame cultural globalization in terms of complex "global flows". The academic literature has extensively discussed the supposed effects of these flows, devoting considerable attention to the question of whether globalization promotes cultural homogenization, resistance, or diversification (for overviews, see Featherstone et al. 1995, and King 1997). Admittedly, few scholars are still making cases for global cultural convergence or divergence on a grand scale. Evidence from the field has called for more nuanced analyses that acknowledge the "in-between-ness" of cultural belonging. Undoubtedly globalization involves "the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local" (Robertson 1995, 30). Beyond this insight, however, there are many open questions. Various concepts have been used to capture the process and outcome of cultural mixing, including "hybridization" (García Canclini 1989; Hall 1990; Bhabha 1990) and "glocalization" (Robertson 1992, 172; 1995). These concepts, however, tell us little about the distinctiveness of cultural globalization in particular places.