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Staging Soviet Islam in Turkey and Iran, 1978–1982

Timothy Nunan

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**GETTING REACQUAINTED
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“If one fine day the iron gates of the Soviets opened, wouldn’t you want to flee the country?”

Question asked “8–10 times total” during the course of the 1982 Izmir Exhibition.¹

“Iranian women asked me whether Soviet women and girls have the right to dress in modern clothing and wear high heels. One young woman (an Azeri) said with tears in her eyes, ‘I surely will not see this free life, but I wish only that my children will not live under these hellish conditions!’”

A. Akhadov, CRA Bureaucrat, Report from Tehran Exhibition, 1982.²

* The author would like to thank Alexander Morrison (Liverpool), James Meyer (Montana State), Stephanie Cronin (Oxford), and Katharine Holt (Columbia), as well as two anonymous reviewers for *Ab Imperio* for their comments on this piece.

¹ GARF. F. R-6991. Komitet po delam religioznykh kul'tov / Komitet religioznykh del. Op. 6. Mezhdunarodnye sviazi. D. 2475. L. 13. Otchet nachal'nika razdela “Islam v SSSR” sovetского pavil'ona na 51-i Mezhdunarodnoi iarmarke v g. Izmir (Turtsiia) 1982 g. T. Akhadova A. F.

² Ibid. L. 18.

In summer 1982, Muhammadjon, an Uzbek living in Saudi Arabia, left his home in Ta'if and traveled to Izmir. He was visiting his brother in the suburbs of the city, but the real reason for his trip was to meet Uzbeks living in Turkey. His brother, a fifty-seven-year-old pensioner, was acquainted with a Soviet Uzbek interpreter on a business trip to the port city who had arranged to bring Muhammadjon some guests. Muhammadjon was frustrated – the interpreter brought him two Soviet Azerbaijanis – but the pair of visitors, a bureaucrat and a mullah, nonetheless told him of life in his Uzbek “Motherland.” They gave him an outlet to vent about living in Saudi Arabia: nepotism, a brutal police state, and xenophobic Saudi Arabs. Even Uzbeks born in the Kingdom longed to return “home” to Uzbekistan, Muhammadjon told them. But while these two could provide him with more details about the Uzbekistan of his dreams, they soon had to excuse themselves, off for a quick stop in Istanbul before returning home to Baku.³

Muhammadjon would have to return to Saudi Arabia, but his trip was hardly unsuccessful. Nor was it a failure from the perspectives of his guests, a mullah and a bureaucrat on a business trip to Izmir that September to provide Turks with an “objective picture” of the conditions of Soviet Muslim life. Muhammadjon’s meeting with the two men, Akhadov and Mikhailov, represented just one of tens of thousands of encounters between Soviet and non-Soviet Muslims across Turko-Persian Asia in the 1970s and 1980s: international exhibitions like the one in Izmir, conferences between Soviet and Afghan *ulema*, and high-level visits by Soviet Shia *mujtahids* to the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁴ In these encounters, Muslims on both sides of the Soviet border could imagine what Muslim life could be under different political orders. This process of getting reacquainted with the Muslims of the USSR reflected the complex and evolving relationship between the Muslim world, the USSR, and the vision of modernity the latter represented.

This region of Eurasia – Turko-Persia, “that large area of highland Asia stretching east from Anatolia and the Zagros Mountains through the Iranian

³ Ibid. L. 7.

⁴ For examples of other encounters, see, for DUMZak mullahs in postrevolutionary Iran, GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1970. L. 1-9. Otchet o poezdke Zam. Predsedatelia ZAKDUM Sheika Pashaeva A. I., Zav. Mezhdunarodnym otdelom etogo zhe DUM Gasanova S. V. Islamskuii Respubliku Iran na torzhestva po sluchaiu vstrechi XV veka khizhri i 1-oi godovshchiny Islamskoi Respubliki, sostoiavsheisia v Tegerane s 4 po 11 fevralia 1980 g. For Afghan *ulema* visiting DUMZak in Baku, GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1970. L. 44-66. Spravka o pribyvanii v Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR delegatsii predstavitelei obshchestvennosti DRA.

plateau to the Indian plains”⁵ – had a long history as a zone for imperial interaction and competition between visions of modernity.⁶ The Ottoman and Safavid empires had dueled for influence in Turko-Persia in the early modern period. The competition for visions of modernity relevant to Muslim populations became more heated as Moscow extruded itself into the region at the expense of Istanbul and Tehran. The work of scholars like Vladimir Bobrovnikov, Robert Crews, Adeeb Khalid, Charles King, James Meyer, Michael Reynolds, and others has illuminated the hugely complex relations between Istanbul, St. Petersburg, the two imperial bureaucracies, and the populations of Turkic Eurasia, as both empires competed with one another and Iran.⁷ In the twentieth century, Kemalism, Soviet socialism, Iranian constitutionalism, the Iranian Left, and Muslim reformers (think the Jadids

⁵ Thomas Barfield. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton, 2010. P. 54. For more on the concept of “Turko-Persia,” see *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* // Robert Canfield. Cambridge, 1991.

⁶ For more on Azerbaijani links across the Russian-Persian-Ottoman border, see: Raoul Motika and Michael Ursinus (Eds.). *Caucasia Between the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1555–1914*. Wiesbaden, 2002; Touraj Atabaki. *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran*. New York, 1993; James D. Clark. *Provincial Concerns: A Political History of the Iranian Province of Azerbaijan, 1848–1906*. Costa Mesa, CA, 2006; Tadeusz Swietochowski. *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. New York, 1985; Eva-Maria Auch. *Muslim-Untertan-Bürger: Identitätswandel in gesellschaftlichen Transformationsprozessen der muslimischen Ostprovinzen Südkasiens (Ende 18.–Anfang 20. Jahrhunderts)* Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Nationalismusforschung. Wiesbaden, 2004; Jörg Baberowski. *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus*. Munich, 2003; A. Holly Shissler. *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey*. London, 2003; Firouzeh Mostashari. *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus*. London, 2006. For several recent dissertations on the shared worlds across the Russian-Ottoman border, see: Eileen Kane. *Russian Hajj: Imperialism and the Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca, 1801–1917* / Ph.D. Dissertation; Princeton University, 2005; Jim Meyer. *Turkic Worlds: Community Leadership and Collective Identity in the Russian and Ottoman Empires, 1870–1914* / Ph.D. Dissertation; Brown University, 2007; Mustafa Tuna. *Imperial Russia’s Muslims: Inroads of Modernity* / Ph.D. Dissertation; Princeton University, 2009.

⁷ Vladimir Bobrovnikov. *Musul’mane Severnogo Kavkaza: obychai, pravo, nasilie: ocherki po istorii i etnografii Nagornogo Dagestana*. Moscow, 2002; Robert Crews. *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*. Cambridge, MA, 2006; Adeeb Khalid. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. Berkeley, 1998; Charles King. *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. Oxford, 2008; James Meyer. *Turkic Worlds: Community Representation and Collective Identity in the Russian and Ottoman Empires, 1870–1914* / Ph.D. Dissertation; Brown University, 2007; Michael Reynolds. *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918*. Cambridge, 2011.

in Central Asia, or Mahmud Tarzi in Afghanistan) were some of the key parts of an international story of Eurasian visions for reform and modernization. It is a story that scholars like Ervand Abrahamian, Thomas Barfield, Louis Dupree, Michael Kemper, Bernard Lewis, and Leon Poullada have outlined, and one more recently taken up by scholars newer to the scene like Samuel Hirst, James Pickett, and Thomas Wide.⁸

The 1970s and 1980s were a particularly complicated chapter in this story of mutual imitation, curiosity, and interaction. From the Soviet perspective, much of Turko-Persia went from being positively inclined toward socialist modernity to crisis. As Ayesha Jalal notes, “at the onset of [the 1970s] there was little to portend a specifically Islamic revolution or instances of state-sponsored Islamization across broad swaths of the Muslim world by decade’s end. In the 1970s the cafés of Kabul were vibrant hubs of cosmopolitan social and political discourse.”⁹ South Asian leaders such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Pakistan, 1971–1977), Indira Gandhi (India, 1966–1977, 1980–1984), Mujibur Rahman (Bangladesh, 1971–1975), and Mohammed Daoud Khan (Afghanistan, 1973–1978), while never seeking to build Soviet-style clone regimes, spoke a language of socialist populism: *roti, kapra aur makan* (bread, clothing, and housing) went the chant of Gandhi’s Congress Party.¹⁰

True, in the western half of this world (Iran and Turkey), the situation was different. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi attempted to build a *montazh* (mish-mash) of Western capitalist modernity within an authoritarian monarchy backed by a brutal secret police, oil exports, and the pretension to be acting in the legacy of the Achaemenids.¹¹ True, Iran had a vibrant (and notoriously fractious) Left. But Tudeh was fractured by Maoism, Hoxhaism, and the repression of SAVAK (the National Intelligence and Security Organization).

⁸ Samuel Hirst is a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania writing a dissertation titled “Allied Against the West: Anti-Imperialism in the Soviet Union and Turkey, 1920–1937.” James Pickett is a graduate student at Princeton University writing a dissertation on the *ulema* in Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thomas Wide is a graduate student at the University of Oxford working on Afghan intellectual history in the 1920s. For some of the classic literature on the region’s modern history, see: Ervand Abrahamian. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, 1982; Leon Poullada. *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929*. Princeton, 1973; Louis Dupree. *Afghanistan*. Princeton, 1980; Bernard Lewis. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. London, 1961.

⁹ Ayesha Jalal. *An Uncertain Trajectory: Islam’s Contemporary Globalization, 1971–1979* // Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent. *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*. Cambridge, MA, 2010. P. 319.

¹⁰ Ferguson et al. *The Shock of the Global*. P. 323.

¹¹ Roy Mottahedeh. *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*. New York, 1985; Abrahamian. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, 1982. Pp. 419–449.

Its leadership lived in East Berlin, not Tehran. The non-Maoist, non-Soviet Left in Iran, meanwhile, was motivated by distinctly Iranian intellectual traditions (think Jalal al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati). In Turkey, meanwhile, throughout the 1970s the country was ruled by coalition governments headed by the Republican People's Party, a Kemalist political party with tendencies toward democratic socialism. Turkey's membership in NATO limited the influx of Soviet visions, although regional underdevelopment and the emergence of an Islamist intelligentsia created new tensions.¹²

Still, looking at South Asia and the Middle East in, say, 1977, one might conclude that the region was on its way toward becoming a constellation of secular, relatively stable states that just happened to have Muslim populations. True, Iran was in CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and might claim regional leadership as a bastion against communism after British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971. But it remained a regional order in which Soviet answers to questions of social justice, economic development, and governance remained relevant.

The late 1970s and early 1980s marked the beginning of the collapse of this trajectory toward secular Islamic socialism. The 1973 oil crisis cut the bottom out of South Asia's already anemic oil-dependent economies, forced secularist governments to pander (Bhutto declared Ahmadis non-Muslims and curtailed their rights), and provided Saudi money to extremist Islamist parties to propagate their ideologies in mosques and madrassas. Pakistan saw Bhutto overthrown and replaced by a Sunni fundamentalist military dictatorship. The Iranian Left combined with the *ulema* to overthrow the shah, but failed to produce a leader who could compete with Khomeini's charisma or his co-opting of Iranian leftist tropes such as that of the *mostazafan*.

In Turkey, the coalition governments of the 1970s were overthrown in a coup that ushered in a period of market liberal reforms at odds with any Soviet-inspired visions of the economy. The coup's leaders sponsored the idea of a "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" (*Türk-İslam sentezi*) – the idea that

¹² For a solid overview of Turkish modernity, see: Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Eds.). *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*. Seattle, 1997; Orhan Pamuk's 2002 novel *Snow* touches on many of these issues. For nationalism and Islamism in twentieth-century Turkey, see Gavin Brockett. "How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk". *Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity*. Austin, TX, 2011. Brockett is also engaged in a project on the emergence of political Islam in Turkey, titled "Nationalism and International Islam in the Early Cold War World: The Roots of Political Islam in Modern Turkey (1945–1960)."

“Islam held a special attraction for the Turks because of a number of striking similarities between their pre-Islamic culture and Islamic civilization” – so as to promote an Islam friendly to the state.¹³ Only Afghanistan followed the script of secularizing planned economies within a Muslim society. And even there, the April Revolution had ushered into power an internally fratricidal communist party governing a state now surrounded by two aggressive neighbors.

From Moscow’s perspective, this was not how things were supposed to have turned out.¹⁴ The Soviet vision of secular Islamic modernity, once relevant, had been transformed in a few years from a role model to an outlier. What if cities like Tashkent, Baku, or Ufa were not the only models for what twentieth-century Muslim modernity could look like?¹⁵ Could not the clerics in Qom, the generals in Rawalpindi, or the Muslim businessmen of Anatolia offer equally valid ideas for the way forward? Here was the arena in which bureaucrats and mullahs like those that Muhammadjon met appeared. They had to advertise the Soviet model of modernity that they represented: *khushchoby* apartment buildings, three-line metro systems, and cosmonauts, all within the reach of Muslims, too.

The difficulties of reasserting the Soviet Union’s vision for secular Muslim modernity soon became clear. In early February 1980, when an Azerbaijani sheikh and representative of the Spiritual Assembly of the Muslims of the Caucasus visited Tehran, the “Afghan question” dominated his weeklong trip. At one meeting with an Iranian minister and several other Islamic representatives from New Zealand, South Africa, Romania, Pakistan, and Turkey, the Turks and Pakistanis made “attacks on Soviet policy not only on the Afghan question but also on the USSR itself as a country of Communist ideology.”¹⁶

¹³ Erik J. Zürcher. *Turkey: A Modern History*. London, 1997. P. 303; Hakan Yayuz. *Political Islam and Welfare Party in Turkey // Comparative Politics*. 1997. Vol. 30. No. 1. P. 67; Sena Karasipahi. *Comparing Islamic Resurgence Movements in Turkey and Iran // Middle East Journal*. 2009. Vol. 63. No. 1. P. 97.

¹⁴ Given the huge complexities of American involvement in Turkey and Iran during the 1970s and early 1980s, it is not possible to devote detailed attention to this subject in this piece along with the Soviet material. Beyond similar public diplomacy files at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD, one might also consider the U.S. relationship with the Turkish Counter-Guerrilla or, of course, the Shah’s regime.

¹⁵ For more on Tashkent during its period of ascendancy into this role, see Paul Stronski. *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City*. Pittsburgh, 2010. Pp. 234-256.

¹⁶ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1970. L. 2.

Later, in a meeting with Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti,¹⁷ the sheikh was reminded about the “Soviet incursion” and told that Iran had opened its border to Afghan refugees. “The Afghan spiritual leadership (*dukhovenstvo*) has,” his Iranian counterpart told him, “requested us to provide help against the intervention of the Russians, and we are ready to provide it to them.”¹⁸ On the evening of February 8, the sheik’s trip coordinators informed him that both Afghan refugees and Iranian protestors were running loose in the streets of Tehran and that he could “expect anything.” And while attending a speech by President Abulhassan Banisadr,¹⁹ he was dismayed to hear: “We want to see Afghanistan as an ‘Islamic Republic.’ But I think that if we can manage (*sumeem*) to form an Islamic bloc and unite all of our strengths, we can force the Soviet leaders to pull their forces out of Afghanistan.”²⁰ Following his trip to the Iranian capital, the sheikh wrote that “the simple people of Iran know little about our activity” and that it would be desirable to provide them with more detailed information about the Soviet Union.²¹

How the Soviet Union sought to reimagine Soviet modernity in the Islamic world following these shifts of the late 1970s, as well as how two groups of Muslims (Iranians in Tehran and Turks in Izmir) reacted to this staging of Soviet Islam is the focus of this piece. In particular, I examine several reports from the Council on Religious Affairs (1965–1991)²² (CRA), a Union-level institution whose employees monitored the religious activities of Soviet citizens.²³ As Eren Tasar has demonstrated, the CRA also liaised extensively with the four Soviet muftiates.²⁴ It put on several exhibitions throughout the world purporting to give an objective account of the state of Islam in the Soviet Union. CRA employees staffed these

¹⁷ Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti (1928–1981) was an Iranian ayatollah and revolutionary who was a major player in the early years of the Islamic Revolution. He was assassinated in a bombing organized by the People’s Mojahedin of Iran in 1981.

¹⁸ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1970. L. 3-4.

¹⁹ Abulhassan Banisadr (1933–present) is an Iranian revolutionary who was president of Iran from 1980 to 1981. He was impeached under accusations of conspiring against the clerics, and has lived in exile in France since 1981.

²⁰ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1970. L. 6, 7.

²¹ Ibid. L. 9.

²² The CRA was the successor organization to CARC, the Committee for the Affairs of Religious Cults (Sovet po delam religioznykh kul’tov), which existed from 1943 to 1965.

²³ The current standard work on CARC/CRA is: Yaacov Ro’i. *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev*. London, 2000

²⁴ Eren Tasar. *Muslim Life in Central Asia 1943–1991* / Ph.D. dissertation; Harvard University, 2010.

exhibitions, conversed with visitors, answered their questions, kept records of the highlights of an exhibit’s run, and, in some cases, maintained a list of visitors’ questions.

Several of these reports have been kept in CARC’s archival *fond* at the archives in Moscow – the sources for this piece. In particular, the Moscow archives at GARF hold the annual files concerned with “international ties” (*zarubezhnye sviazi*) from year to year throughout the CRA’s institutional life. I would like to emphasize that these files do not represent the complete scope of such exhibits. Tasar’s research in Uzbek archives has shown that bureaucrats at SADUM, the Central Asian Muftiate, constructed a similar exhibit for a Soviet fair in Kabul from April 18 to May 24, 1979, visited by over 100,000 Afghans.²⁵ No such files exist in the Dushanbe archives, while graduate students working in Baku have confirmed that DUMZak never handed over its internal files to the Azerbaijani archival bureaucracy.²⁶ To the best of my knowledge, the situation in other former Muslim SSRs, ASSRs, or AOs remain unclear. I elected to focus on three exhibitions held in Tehran (twice) and Izmir both because of their timing (the only CRA exhibitions in the Middle East around the late 1970s conjuncture) and because of their richness. They contain detailed narrative accounts and long lists of the questions visitors asked (included as an appendix here). The CRA also sent an Uzbek employee to a trade fair in Baghdad in November 1982, which I have omitted here because of its comparative lack of detail on the Turkish and Iranian episodes.²⁷

These files present historians, at least in theory, with the opportunity to write a microhistory of Muslim encounters across the Iron Curtain. But they also present several methodological issues that readers and future researchers have to at least be aware of. One criticism of the approach taken here is that taking a transnational, microhistorical approach is not helpful for looking at the history of how Soviet modernity was presented to different countries. One might argue, sensibly and in most cases correctly, that in order to understand what “the message” was, one should take a long-term, country-by-country approach that seeks to analyze how propagandists, clerics, bureaucrats,

²⁵ Eren Tasar. The Central Asian Muftiate in Occupied Afghanistan, 1979–1987 // Central Asian Survey. Forthcoming. Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Respubliki Uzbekistan (TsGARU). F. R-2456. Op. 1. D. 611. L. 19-24.

²⁶ My thanks to Krista Anne Goff (University of Michigan) for this information regarding Azerbaijan.

²⁷ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2224. L. 48-50. Otchet starshego inspektora otdela mezh-dunarodnoi informatsii Soveta Asanova Ju. N. o rabote v kachestve stendista razdela “Islam v SSSR” na mezhdunarodnoi iarmarke v Bagdade v noiabre 1982 g.

and the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU changed their tack over time. Taking a momentary, transnational approach, one might argue, is too myopic and superficial. To some extent this is fair enough. Works like the memoirs of Karen Brutents, who served in the International Department, which provide a genuinely global view of how Moscow viewed the world over the course of thirty years offer an infinitely more synthetic approach than the one presented here, and a more discrete focus on one country over a long period of time might prove fruitful, too.²⁸ However, this criticism takes for granted that there was a different vision of modernity presented to different countries, when part of what this research underscores is that “the message” had increasingly become the same, tired thing for a variety of different contexts. Sure, the *policy* toward the PDPA was different than toward Tudeh, but this is a separate issue from how the vision of modernity was presented to different countries.

A second, perhaps more obvious criticism is whether we can take the reports of CRA bureaucrats as a useful source of the thoughts or opinions of Turks or Iranians on Soviet Islam.²⁹ Reports such as these, as criticism of Yaacov Ro'i's and Robert Crews's work on Eurasian Islam has underlined, are limited in their analytical scope. The language of the bureaucrats of the Russian state often crystalized into a Russian of pseudo-concepts describing Islam, belief, and the relationship of believers to the state-building project.³⁰ Indeed, in some obvious sense, looking *only* at Soviet bureaucrats' reports for insights into how Iranians or Turks thought about socialism is a dead end.

That said, the obvious alternatives – piecing together newspaper reports, for example – are also flawed. Neither Iran nor Turkey had a free press, especially during the state of exception that the post-coup/revolution situation represented. Juxtaposing the CRA bureaucrats' reports with the thoughts of, for example, the exiles interviewed in Harvard's Iranian Oral History Project³¹ would be a welcome direction for future work, but given

²⁸ Karen Brutents. *Tridtsat' let na Staroi ploshchadi*. Moscow, 1998; Idem. *Nesbyvsheesia*. Moscow, 2005.

²⁹ For an in-depth discussion of these problems, see: Mark Saroyan. *Rethinking Islam in the Soviet Union // Beyond Sovietology: Essays in Politics and History*. Armonk, NY, 1993. Pp. 23-44.

³⁰ See, for example: Devin DeWeese. *Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: A Review Essay on Yaacov Ro'i's Islam in the Soviet Union // Journal of Islamic Studies*. 2002. Vol. 13. No. 3. Pp. 298-330, as well as Douglas Northrop. *Review of For Prophet and Tsar // Slavic Review*. 2007. Vol. 66. Pp. 550-552.

³¹ For more on the Harvard Iranian Oral History Project, see: http://ted.lib.harvard.edu/ted/deliver/home?_collection=iohp.

the scale of the latter,³² and the microfocus of this piece, is overly ambitious for an article.

More fundamentally, might not the reaction against treating CRA reports as a source for reception studies be a kneejerk reaction? The main protagonists this piece follows were Azerbaijani bureaucrats from an Islamic cultural background and mullahs, not nineteenth-century Slavic Orthodox recent *arrivées* to Orenburg or Almaty. While the fact that Iranians and Turks saw them as “Muslim enough” is itself a story, the fact that the CRA employees were welcomed and confided in by a variety of Iranians and Turks might give us pause to disregard them as expressions of a bureaucratic Soviet Islam. I would agree that we cannot take CRA reports as unproblematic. But the route out of this is less to fall into circular debates about the objectivity of colonial sources that have characterized Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies at times than to understand the institution and its employees better on an individual level.³³ Robust research on the CRA might take up the late Mark Saroyan’s suggestion to see whether Muslim bureaucrats within CRA or SADUM developed any alternative discourse for talking about Soviet Islam different from the stale world of “believers” that Saroyan, Devin DeWeese and others have acerbically criticized.

Keeping these two methodological notes in mind, what we find here, beyond the obvious and interesting fact of Muslim encounters across the “Iron Curtain” in Turko-Persia, is something like our usual picture of late Cold War socialism flipped on its head. Unlike Eastern Europe, where Communism had been discredited in large part owing to its proximity to a booming capitalist Western modernity (most on display in West Berlin), the reports of visitors to the CRA’s international exhibitions suggest something rather different in the Middle East.³⁴ Even as both Turkey and Iran had begun to chart their own new paths to late twentieth-century modernity, many of the citizens of both states still found the Soviet socialist alternative an appealing path.

Soviet bureaucrats presenting a *positive* reaction to socialism to their superiors in Moscow? That is hardly worth further comment. But think back to what we just noted about CRA reports. Maybe the real story here is how

³² For example, 111 of the collection’s 118 available narratives feature the topic “Soviet Union” as indexed in the online catalogue.

³³ Saroyan. *Rethinking Islam in the Soviet Union*. P. 44.

³⁴ For more on East European socialism being discredited, see: Stephen Kotkin, *Jan Gross. Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. New York, 2009; Charles Maier. *Dissolution*. Princeton, 1999.

the CRA bureaucrats and *ulema* described the *montazh* of conceptions about Soviet reality in their Turkish and Iranian interlocutors' heads. According to the reports of these CRA employees, at least three ways of talking about Soviet modernity prevailed. First, many visitors to the exhibitions acted out what one might call "performative anti-Communism." They denounced the Soviet Union with the same vigor that they did Israel and the United States. They acted as if their accusations about Soviet life – that families had been abolished or that every mosque in the country had been demolished – would instantly discredit the so-called "Muslim" presenters at the trade fairs. In this mode of thinking about the USSR, the Soviet Union had never been, and would never become, a normal country (as opposed to, presumably, Kemalist Turkey or the Islamic Republic).

Skeptical anti-Communism was a second way of talking about the USSR. Visitors could view the Soviet Union as a normal country, but one in which Muslims were oppressed. It was difficult for them to imagine how Muslims like the Azeri bureaucrats and *ulema*, whom we will meet shortly, would ever *want* to represent such (from their point of view) an imperial, oppressive, atheistic, murderous, and, not to put too fine a point on it, evil country. And yet the USSR was, in spite of all of this, a normal country, not a dystopia. On a third level, however, others viewed the Soviet Union as not only a normal country (as opposed to a utopia) but one that might have distinct advantages over countries of the Middle East. It had put a man into space. Education might be less expensive, apartments more spacious than in Tehran or Izmir – or so people thought. Most saliently, even as the various religious and ethnic minorities of southwest Asia – Shias in Turkey, Azeris in Iran, Uzbeks like Muhammadjon in Saudi Arabia – might have found little to agree on among themselves, the Soviet Union remained plausible to these different groups, for different reasons, as a civilized place to live.

Without stating the obvious, all of these notions of Soviet modernity were on some level contradictory with one another. But that did not stop them from engaging in many different ways of talking about Soviet life (which few had actually experienced) in the course of a single conversation. Not only that, but few at the exhibitions could coherently articulate what socialism was. Few gave thought to what we might assume to be the fundamental questions: market economy or state-run economy? Pluralism or one-party dictatorship? Instead, all that mattered was that in certain key regards, the USSR seemed like a more plausible way forward than the Iranian, Turkish, or Saudi path to Muslim modernity. Even as waves of change were sweeping the region, the USSR's vision for development and modernity remained, if not dynamic,

then somehow relevant in the eyes of many Muslims. Exploring how they could think so at the same time they thought it to be a dystopia or an evil country – or how CRA employees themselves reconciled this impression – is the mission that has to guide us as we begin our tour of the region with the CRA’s first Tehran exhibition.

The “Muslims of the Soviet Union” in Tehran, 1980

The CRA-DUMZak nexus responded quickly to the requests for an informational campaign in Iran. Following a visit of several Iranian officials to visit DUMZak officials in Baku in June 1980, the CRA put together an exhibit titled “Muslims of the Soviet Union” to be presented at Soviet Pavilion of the Fall 1980 Tehran International Trade Fair.

These were interesting times to be putting on a trade show, let alone one to which the USSR was invited. Tensions between Iran and Iraq had remained high since April after Iranian-backed Iraqi Shias attempted to assassinate Tariq Aziz, the deputy prime minister of Iraq and a close adviser to Saddam Hussein. On September 17, two days before the commencement of the trade fair, Saddam Hussein declared his intention to capture both the Shatt al-Arab waterway as well as Khuzestan in Southwest Iran. Shortly thereafter, on September 22–23, the Iraqi Air Force launched several strikes and destroyed Iranian airplanes on the ground. The Iraqi Army invaded Khuzestan and northern Iran. Thus began an eight-year conflict that would consume both countries. Tensions were also high between the United States and Iran since the takeover of the U.S. Embassy and the botched U.S. rescue attempt. More than that, the exhibition took place at a time when the Islamic Revolution was being consolidated through the purges and shutdown of universities, the banning of leftist Islamic political parties, and the expulsion of Khomeini’s political rivals from the country. In short, the atmosphere was charged.

The person tasked to oversee the exhibit as the “stand-assistant” (*stendist*) was M.I. Ibragimov, a CRA plenipotentiary for Azerbaijan already on an official trip to Iran from September 11 to October 1.³⁵ A Soviet interpreter of unstated nationality “from Tashkent” accompanied him.³⁶ Ibragimov did not explicitly explain the goals of the exhibit, but he considered it a success, noting that “almost every one of the visitors to our section tried to ask as many questions as possible about the life of Soviet Muslims, about the freedom of conscience, about studies in institutions of higher education as

³⁵ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2221. L. 78.

³⁶ Ibid. L. 82.

well as in schools, about the availability of products of mass consumption and food products, about pay.”³⁷

“The Muslims of the USSR” represents only a small case in the Iranian reception – or the reception of the reception – of the Soviet Union after both the Islamic and April Revolutions. Still, we can read Ibragimov’s extensive notes on it against the grain to develop a picture – however small – of both how CRA bureaucrats wanted to present the “Muslims of the Soviet Union” as a unified group, and the reception of this picture. Ibragimov took close notes on the dimensions and content of the exhibit.

In the Soviet Pavilion of the Tehran Trade Fair, the exhibit “The Muslims of the Soviet Union” occupied an area of 36 square meters in space, and consisted of the following exponents: slides (31), two photographs of Mufti Babakhanov (1 meter by 1.5 meters), a model of the Baku Taza Pir mosque, two exemplars of the Koran published in Moscow and Tashkent, two works of the famous Uzbek scholar-theologian of the thirteenth century Al-Bukhari, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*” and “*Sakhikh Al-Bukhari*, an album *Historical Monuments to Islam in the Soviet Union*, an album *Muslims in the USSR*, Mufti Babakhanov’s book *Islam and Muslims in the Country of the Soviets*, A. Bakhabov’s book *Islam in the USSR*, and an issue of the magazine *Muslims of the Soviet East*. It is worth mentioning that Babakhanov’s and Bakhanov’s, as well as the magazines, were assigned for distribution among the visitors to the fair. However, the local guards hindered this in every way possible, and, further, the visitors reluctantly requested to take literature in Arabic. Many of the visitors requested literature in Farsi or in English on the Soviet Union. In the layout of the Soviet pavilion, the exhibit “The Muslims of the Soviet Union” had a G-shape, while the floor was covered with rugs, the facade and the interior walls had baskets with slides hanging on them, the arc-shaped entrance to the exhibit was banded with Oriental ornamentation (engraving), the floors were covered with hand-woven carpets, all belonging to “Vostoktrade’s” exhibit at the trade fair. Thanks to the excellent lighting, the exhibit noticeably stood out for its beauty and idiosyncratic appearance, which aided the attraction of a great number of visitors.³⁸

The hodge-podge nature of the items presented provided several different possible interpretations of the Soviet Islamic tradition. Exhibit A: dozens of photographs of mosques and Islamic architecture from within the Soviet

³⁷ Ibid. Ll. 78-79.

³⁸ Ibid. L. 78.

Union (Islam as a cultural-architectural heritage); Exhibit B: the works of perhaps one of the greatest Islamic jurists learned in traditions of *hadith* all across the Muslim world of the ninth century reimagined as an Uzbek national scholar (Islam as textual interpretation carried by the *ulema*); Exhibit C: the two copies of the Koran, presumably in Russian and Uzbek (Islam as textual orthodoxy mediated by the imperial and Soviet Muslim centers of Moscow and Tashkent); Exhibit D: the books of Babakhanov and Bakhabov, which are nonetheless merely about Islam in the USSR rather than works of original scholarship or jurisprudence (Islam as a distinctly Soviet institution, with primacy accorded to the Central Asian muftiate); Exhibit E: all of this media framed by a pavilion decorated with “Oriental ornamentation” and “hand-woven carpets” (Islam as “Oriental” [*vostochnyi*] material cultural tradition, reproduced and distributed by the Soviet economic apparatus in Vostoktrade).

Nothing in the files explains the logic behind this selection of “Islamic” items, but this array fits into a pattern that would be followed at further “Muslims of the USSR” exhibitions. Far from essentializing Islam as coming down to “belief” or “believers” as did CRA bureaucrats inside the USSR, the CRA pavilion emphasized the multiplicity of meanings to “Soviet Islam.”³⁹ Still, perhaps the strongest impression here is of the CRA designers merely going through the motions with the stock images and motifs of late Soviet Muslim culture.⁴⁰ Islam had been reinvented as something between a material culture, a Soviet institution, a jurisprudential school, and a religion all with its own history, true, but still very much integrated into the Soviet system.⁴¹

No wonder that the “great number of visitors” approaching the pavilion had such diverse responses. On the one hand, on September 19, the day of the opening of the exhibit, President Banisadr visited the exhibit. He expressed an interest in the location of the Baku mosque as well as the Chair of DUMZak, Mufti A. Pasha-Zade, whose portrait was depicted on one of the slides hanging from the walls. According to Ibragimov, further, “the president was interested in where I had been born, my nationality, in what language I spoke, and whether I was a Turk or not (*ne turk li ia*).” Even as Ibragimov was trying to present a picture of Soviet Islam that emphasized the

³⁹ A theme explored at greater length in Adeeb Khalid. *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley, 2007.

⁴⁰ My thanks to Avner Offer (Oxford) for this observation.

⁴¹ For an eloquent discussion of these issues, see Paolo Sartori. *Towards a History of the Muslims’ Soviet Union: A View from Central Asia // Die Welt des Islams*. 2010. H. 50. S. 315-334.

continuity of the Muslim tradition across Cold War borders, this was not the first time that his Iranian counterparts would focus on nation, language, and Turkicness as the defining qualities of this “Muslim” ambassador’s identity.

Performative anti-Communism also came to Tehran. Ibragimov noted that “among the visitors to the exhibit were people with antagonistic intentions toward the Soviet Union. They tried to attract as many people as possible to an argument in our exhibit, as well as to build up a crowd around themselves.” Still, Ibragimov congratulated himself on having held his own.

In my view, these were specially prepared young people who constantly referred provocative questions to me, tried to force me into an awkward situation. Not having reached their goals and, as a result of my answers, having put themselves in an awkward position, they often resorted to straightforward insult.⁴²

But most visitors had more benign intentions. Ibragimov took copious notes on the questions that regular visitors asked him.⁴³ One group of questions consisted of vaguely hostile questions about Soviet Islam. With the exception of one question phrased in the terms of categorical anti-Communism (“Doesn’t the section seem to you like Red propaganda?”), many of these more hostile questions implied that some sort of Muslim solidarity ought naturally to exist, both across the Shi’a–Sunni divide and national borders. One series of questions went:

“How do Soviet Muslims relate to the Iranian Revolution?

“How do believers in the USSR relate to Ayatollah Khomeini?

“Are there well-known religious authorities in the Soviet Union?

“Can any of these authorities play the same role in the USSR that Khomeini did in Iran?

“What was the mood like among the Soviet people, especially among Muslims, after the Revolution in Iran?”

According to these questions, Khomeini would serve as a pan-Islamic leader. The Soviet Sunni religious establishment necessarily occupied a similar role to that of the Iranian ayatollahs. The entire Soviet Union was at a stage where it was susceptible to a popular-clerical coup as in Iran. And Soviet citizens and Soviet Muslims would necessarily have an opinion about the Islamic Revolution. All of these questions indicate an expectation among some Iranians that their Revolution would necessarily have an impact on Soviet Muslims across the border, and a curiosity as to whether

⁴² GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2221. L. 79.

⁴³ See Appendix 1 at the end of this article.

Eurasian Muslims’ religious affiliation could in some way be co-opted to overthrow Soviet institutions. That Soviet identity could go hand in hand with Muslim identity, or that “Muslim authorities” could also be part of the Soviet institutional framework, seems to have gone unrealized.

These assumptions echo in the questions concerning Afghanistan. “Why are Soviet soldiers killing the peaceful inhabitants of Afghanistan and exterminating mosques?” asked one visitor. “When are Soviet forces leaving Afghanistan?” followed this question. And finally, “Why are Soviet Muslims not helping their Afghan brothers in faith?” Unarticulated here is the possibility that Soviet Muslims might have wanted to extend Communism to Afghanistan as a socioeconomic system in which Islam would not necessarily be suppressed, or that Soviet-style Muslim institutions might even be a preferable form of Islamic modernity to the Iranian alternative.⁴⁴ Questions, in other words, like “Doesn’t the Soviet Union fear the unrest that could occur among the Muslims living in the USSR?” betrayed an understanding of Islamic identity as something that had to be inherently opposed to the Communist system.⁴⁵

Alongside pointed entries such as “Why is the Soviet MIG violating the aerial borders of Iran?” more genuinely curious queries probed Ibragimov on Soviet Muslim life. Many of these questions, however, betrayed the assumption that Islam in the Soviet Union was necessarily oppressed and that it was holding on to life only in spite of government persecution. “How many mosques are open in the USSR?” asked one visitor. “Are the mosques in the USSR allowed to operate freely?” “Why did they turn mosques into museums?” “Are Muslims in the USSR allowed to adhere to all of the demands of the Sharia?” asked another. Another: “Why isn’t the Koran published on national languages?” These questions demonstrated, if not total ignorance of the CRA–muftiate nexus, an expectation that Muslim life and the fulfillment of religious duty – expressed by adherence to “all” of the demands of the Sharia – was being actively suppressed by the Soviet state and the Party, and that the possibility of a reconciliation or fusion between Communism and Islam was impossible.

If some visitors saw the Soviet system as trampling on Muslim life in Central Asia (because of mosque closings, kidnapping children, forced

⁴⁴ The subject of Eren Tasar’s current project: “The Vanguard Muftiate: A Modernizing Vehicle for Muslim Eurasia.” This was also the subject of a talk by the same name at Harvard University’s Davis Center on November 30, 2010.

⁴⁵ For more on this problem, see Khalid. *Islam After Communism*. See also: Tasar. *Muslim Life in Central Asia, 1943–1991*.

schooling, etc.), other visitors pressed Ibragimov on what they saw as the Soviet state's unwillingness to live up to its constitutional promises: "Is it true that there exists freedom of conscience in the USSR?" asked one visitor. Another asked: "Are there instances of violations of the article in the USSR Constitution about freedom of conscience committed on the part of the organs of power?" Even as virtually every question asked by visitors to the pavilion assumed that Soviet power – distinctly separate from Muslims – was suppressing mosques and believers, the framework of assumptions through which they asked the questions differed. Some took for granted that repression would be arbitrary, while others, viewing the USSR as a normal country, took the system and the Constitution at its word and demanded that the Constitution be respected.

Others asked about everyday life in the Soviet Union. Confusion about what socialism actually meant was rife, echoing earlier debates inside the Soviet Union as to questions like whether unemployment, the family, or the police would exist.⁴⁶ "Do Soviet people have families and their own homes?" asked one visitor. "Are Soviet citizens allowed to carry on conversations on political themes?" "What kind of pay do Soviet citizens receive?" "What is the deal for the receipt of apartments?" "Are there unemployed people in the USSR?" "Are there a lot of factories in the USSR?" "Are there political demonstrations in the Soviet Union?" Many of these kinds of questions were interspersed with more suggestive questions about minority rights, particular among Soviet Azeris, but they spoke to a general ignorance as well as curiosity about what socialism actually looked like, irrespective of its impact on Muslim life. Many visitors were interested in studying in the USSR, entering the country, or receiving citizenship: "I am a foreign student, may I continue my instruction in the USSR?" asked one person. "Do students receive a stipend and in what size?" was the natural follow-up question.

What all of this indicates is the continuing amorphous nature of socialism to those outside of the Soviet Union, at least to those outside of the Western capitalist world (Europe, North America, Japan, South Korea, Australia, etc.). Even as the Islamic Revolution was offering its own answer to what late twentieth-century Islamic modernity could look like – and raising its own questions, such as what the family or employment would look like in an "Islamic Republic" – the Soviet experiment, perhaps precisely because of its ambiguity to these Iranians, retained its appeal. No one inquired as to the key feature of socialism – no private property – even as people asked

⁴⁶ For more on this dynamic, see Stephen Kotkin. *The Search for the Socialist City* // *Histoire Russe*. 1996. Vol. 23. Pp. 231-261.

questions like: “Haven’t the Soviet people gotten fed up with the monotony of the food (the kind they receive with their coupons)?” The broader point, however, is that even though glasnost’ would soon “involve a proliferation of comparisons between socialism and capitalism on all the big questions keyed to notions of social justice” *inside* the USSR, for many visitors in Tehran at least, socialism still evidently had a reason to exist, not only in comparison with capitalism but also in comparison with theocratic republicanism.⁴⁷

Ibragimov underlined this mix of suspicion and interest. Throughout the exhibition, Iranian special services were on hand. Ibragimov noted that many of the young people asking him about visiting the Soviet Union seemed hesitant, as if they were being spied on.⁴⁸ Several of the comments left in the exhibit’s comment book declared “that the prepared exhibits were nothing but Red propaganda.”⁴⁹ At other moments, the environment was even more tense, with protestors storming the Soviet exhibition decrying the Iraqi invasion as a joint American–Soviet–Israeli plot.⁵⁰ But Ibragimov’s conversations with visitors captured not only these idiosyncratic positions but also insights into how Iranians viewed their own Revolution:

Prices are rising in the country. According to the anecdotes of local residents, in the course of the past two years alone prices for groceries and the most basic household needs have gone up by several times. The student youth also accuses the religious leaders and the existing regime of incompetence at developing the revolution further. In one of our conversations, they said that more democratic groups are developing (they regard “Tudeh” as too passive), which will aid the next stage of the development of the revolution.⁵¹

In spite of the moments of chaos, Ibragimov regarded the exhibition as a success. Betraying some of his own – or at least the bureaucracy’s – notions about the state’s relationship with Islam, he wrote, “in my opinion we succeeded in helping the Iranian visitors to the Soviet pavilion get to know the life of Soviet Muslims, their customs, traditions, religious and cultural memorials of Islam, to understand that in the Soviet Union all citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience and profession of belief in

⁴⁷ Ibid., 247.

⁴⁸ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2221. L. 85

⁴⁹ Ibid. Unfortunately, the comment book for this exhibition is not included in the Delo, and there is no indication of where it may be held, if it still exists.

⁵⁰ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2221. L. 82.

⁵¹ Ibid. L. 82-83.

accordance with Article 52 of the Constitution of the USSR.”⁵² There were still some kinks to be worked out, of course, as Ibragimov explained some of his frustrations with certain photographs as well as how his job had been planned:

Some photographs, such as the mosque closed with a lock, the photograph portraying the restoration of a mosque without any workers in the picture, the tall minaret of the Dagestani mosque without a *muezzin* in it, the portrait of Babakhanov in a tie and with government awards on his ritual dress, and so on – all of these brought forward some level of doubt on the part of the visitors as to the reality and authenticity of the photographs.⁵³

“Islam in the USSR” – Izmir, 1982

The CRA exhibits next came to the Fifty-first International Izmir Trade Fair, from August 20 to September 9, 1982. This time, A.F. Akhadov, an Azerbaijani CRA bureaucrat, and Dz. M. Mikhailov, an Azerbaijani mullah, manned the exhibit, titled “Islam in the USSR.” (In spite of both men’s fluency in Azeri, throughout the course of the exhibit, the pavilion employed several Soviet interpreters for translation into Turkish.) More than taking questions from visitors to the exhibit, both Akhadov and Mikhailov would strike off on adventures of their own around Izmir and Turkey, themselves reacquainting a wide variety of inhabitants of Anatolia with two “Muslims of the USSR.”

As in Tehran, the exhibit took place at a tense moment in Turkish history. Starting in the late 1960s and early 1970s, extraparliamentary politics in Turkey took on a heated and often violent key. Within the Turkish left, factionalism and radicalism grew as it supported the Kurds and Alevi religious minorities, students seized the Istanbul universities, and Marxist-Leninist-inspired terrorists kidnapped U.S. soldiers stationed with the Sixth Fleet in Istanbul.⁵⁴ On the right, ultranationalist groups formed “Hearths of Ideals” and commando squads and assassinated leftists at counterprotests. Turanist ideas gained in influence with the rise of Alparslan Türkeş and the Nationalist Movement Party. A specifically Islamic politics took shape in the late 1960s with Necmettin Erbakan’s Milli Nizam Party. Throughout the 1970s, political coalitions between Süleyman Demirel’s pro-NATO Justice

⁵² Ibid. L. 86.

⁵³ Ibid. L. 85-86.

⁵⁴ Carter V. Findley. *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity*. New Haven, 2010. P. 315.

Party and Bülent Ecevit’s Republican People’s Party could not resolve the tensions within Turkish society. The Turkish left remained split between independent, Maoist, and pro-Soviet groups, and throughout the country, political violence between left and right, Kurds and Turks, Sunnis and Alevis, and different tribes led to several massacres and 2,812 people killed in the twelve months prior to September 1980.⁵⁵

In that month, a military coup led by Kenan Evran overthrew Demirel’s government and placed the country under a military dictatorship for three years. Many members of extremist parties either on the socialist left, the ultranationalist right, or ethnoreligious separatist groups (the PKK and Alevis) were arrested and tried. In some cases they were executed. A new constitution with restrictions on freedom of the press, organized labor, and the political representation of smaller parties was promulgated. Turkey was soon on its way toward a blend of neoliberal economics and global integration on the one hand, and a “Turkish–Islamic” synthesis on the other. Hence the challenge for the CRA employees: how to market their vision of Islam and socialism in a multiethnic country to a population increasingly exposed to ideas of monoethnicity, specifically Turkic Islam, and free market economics and global trade?

The exhibit began inauspiciously. The CRA had told Akhadow that they were sending eleven large poster-size photographs of Soviet Muslim life to Izmir. Of these, only six actually arrived, and the directors of the Soviet trade pavilion nixed displaying one of them that “depicted the praying of school-age children.”⁵⁶ One of the photographs depicting a *muezzin* caused some problems. “It’s absolutely necessary that qualified coworkers, along with the help of specialists, from the section for the Muslim religion on the Council select the exponents. Showing photographs of a *muezzin* calling out the *azan* (the call to *namaz*) from the roof of a half-destroyed mosque, or a mosque under reconstruction, brings forth skepticism.”⁵⁷ Nor did a photograph of depressed-looking Uzbek old men in disheveled outfits listening to the imam at the Tashkent Telyashayakh mosque help. The Azeri Akhadow suggested bringing in students from the Tashkent Al-Bukhari Islamic Institute to be photographed, and added, “there’s no reason why we have to only show photographs of the mosques of Central Asia – it might be possible to photograph and show the process of collective *namaz* of respectably dressed believers from Moscow, Kazan, Ufa, Baku, and the mosques of other

⁵⁵ Ibid. Pp. 320-321.

⁵⁶ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid. L. 8.

cities.” Specifically, Akhadov suggested bringing photographs of “one of the Bukhara mosques,” the Baku Taza-Pir and Ajdarbey mosques, Derbent’s Mosque, Ufa’s Central Mosque, and Kazan’s Dzhuma Mosque as examples of “Muslim architecture” (*musul’manskogo zodchestva*).

Beyond the photographs, eight works of “religious literature” made it to the exhibit, along with several issues of *Muslims of the Soviet East*. Akhadov noted that “of the expected fifty copies of the Koran [published in the Soviet Union] only eighteen were ever received at the exhibit.” Finally, two enormous posters, one of Article 52 of the Soviet Constitution⁵⁸ and the other of Lenin’s November 24, 1917 message to the “Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East,” hung on the walls of the exhibition space in both Russian and Arabic. Unfortunately, the model of the Baku Taza-Pir Mosque, while intended for delivery, never arrived in Izmir, nor did two short films “of religious content” intended for viewing. Here was what Akhadov and Mikhailov had to work with: a visual reinvention of Soviet 1920s pro-Islam anticolonialism reinvented for a Cold War landscape – in languages that few people at the exhibition could actually read.⁵⁹

But Akhadov viewed the exhibit as a success. Thousands of Turks visited. “Some of the visitors,” he noted,

regarded the photographs of mosques, the servants of cults and those praying, with a certain disbelief, and they listened to the stand-operator with doubt. It became clear that the majority of visitors have deceitful information about the Soviet Union, about its citizens, and especially about the place of religion in our country. Almost all of the visitors were surprised by our information about how mosques operate freely in the Soviet Union, that believers have the right to visit mosques for the exercise of their religious demands, and that Muslims execute their religious funerals, execute the *nikah*, and celebrate religious holidays, and so on.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The article in question read: “Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited. In the USSR, the church is separated from the state, and the school from the church.” Akhadov noted, however, that “for some unknown reason” the second part of the article (the sentence about the separation of church and state) was missing from the poster. GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 1.

⁵⁹ Akhadov himself noted that “one after the other, visitors to the exhibit told us that that they could not understand the meaning of the poster’s message [...] it would be desirable to depict this message in the Turkish language.” Ibid. L. 9.

⁶⁰ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 2.

As in Tehran, many of the basic questions about what socialist society would look like – which had basically been resolved by the era of stagnation – were thought by the Turkish public to have been resolved in the most extreme variant possible. Performative anti-Communism was on display once more, with questions like: “Do you have a family?” “Is the *nikah* read at marriages?” “Doesn’t Communism not recognize the family?” and “They say that the government takes away your children in order to educate them in the Communist spirit, what do you have to say about that?”⁶¹

While the Turkish police kept a low profile around the Soviet exhibit, many roving bands of youth gave Akhadov and Mikhailov a hard time. Akhadov wrote:

Several people behaved themselves balefully – brazenly manipulating untruthful information, they tried to awaken in the visitors to the exhibit feelings of distrust in the theme of the exhibit, contesting the information of the stand-operator. Groups (around ten to fifteen people) of young people (twenty to twenty-five years old) were occupied with this indecent business, gathering in front of the exhibit “Islam in the USSR,” attempting to argue with the stand-operator about “the Afghan Question,” “the Iranian Question,” “the Crimean Question,” and other invented political “Questions.” For example, one of these groups demanded to tell to everyone about the fate of the Tatar nationalists Mustafa Abdülcemil Qırımoğlu⁶² and Faizulla Kari, calling these criminals the leaders of the Muslims of the Crimea. The stand-operator gave the necessary response to the lovers of “truth” about the indecent activity of the indicated nationalities that had endured their well-deserved punishment. I should point out that these groups of youth were, as a rule, directed by middle-aged men who were suggesting provocative questions and directing these groups to yell again and again: “Afghan refugees coming to us from Pakistan tell us about the horrors forced on them by the Soviet occupants! How can you, as a Muslim, *not* protest against these evil deeds?”⁶³

This encounter shows the limits of pan-Islamism on both sides of the exhibit. The Turkish youth, or at least the older men who provoked the youth, expected that a Soviet Muslim would ipso facto oppose the war

⁶¹ Ibid. L. 11.

⁶² Mustafa Abdülcemil Qırımoğlu (1943–present) is a Crimean Tatar who was best-known in the Soviet Union as a dissident protestor for the right of return of the Crimean Tatars. He remains a leader of the Crimean Tatars today and is a representative in the Ukrainian parliament with *Nasha Ukraina*.

⁶³ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 2-3.

in Afghanistan, support the Islamic Revolution, or demand the return of the Crimean Tatars – not because the deportation was unjust, but because they were oppressed Muslims. Islamic identity (and perhaps pan-Turkic solidarity), they assumed, could not overlap with Communist identity. While we can only speculate on the exact identity of these hooligans, their behavior largely fits in with the increased influence of Pan-Turkism on the Turkish Right since the late 1960s.⁶⁴

Contrast this with Mikhailov's response to the question: the Tatars are a "nationality," not Muslims, and he approves of their collective deportation, even though this charge was officially retracted in 1967. Mikhailov may have just been trying to do his job here, but his choice of concepts through which to be a good CRA stand-operator is telling: nationality not religion marks communal identity. The two Azerbaijanis would manage to ward off these groups of hooligans, who repeated, over and over, "their desire to found a global state of Turkic-speaking nations with its head in Turkey, or, alternatively, their desire for a political union and action of the Turkic-speaking nations of the Soviet Union against, as they see it, Russian hegemony."⁶⁵ And they had the crowd on their side. "Every time," wrote Akhadov,

after the departure of the latest provocative group, several visitors to the Soviet Pavilion came up to the stand operator, advising him not to pay attention to the actions of these, as they called them, "bad people among the neofascists and nationalist groupings."⁶⁶

Between the commemoration of Soviet Union Day (August 20) and the giving of several Korans as gifts to Turkish and foreign dignitaries, not to mention many, many questions about the USSR (included in the appendix), Akhadov, Mikhailov, and their interpreters took time out to explore Izmir and Turkey.⁶⁷ Prior to the trade fair, Mikhailov attended the August 20 *namaz*

⁶⁴ Needless to say, Pan-Turkism was not invented only during the Cold War (think Nihal Atsız, Enver Pasha, as well as Jim Meyer's work on Turkic networks across late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Eurasia), but I am thinking here in particular of Alparslan Türkeş and his Nationalist Movement Party.

⁶⁵ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* L. 3.

⁶⁷ Among the famous visitors to "Islam in the USSR" were Mehmet Turgut, the Turkish minister of industry and commerce (given a Moscow edition of the Koran, but also giving the Soviet exhibit a Koran printed in Turkey); İsmail Kılınç, the commander of the Turkish Fleet (given a Moscow edition of the Koran); the mayor of Izmir, Dzhakhis Gunai, and the director of the Izmir Trade Exhibition, Hamdi Asena (also given a Moscow edition of the Koran, a copy of Babakhanov's *Islam and Muslims in the Soviet Country*, as well as a record disk with a recording of the Koran on it).

at Izmir’s Alsancak Mosque. There he had been surprised by the fact that “about 50 percent of those praying (around 500–600 people) were young people from sixteen to thirty years old, among them dozens of children of school age.” Even as he had come to Turkey to extol the vitality of Soviet Muslim life, the number of young people for whom Islam remained an important part of their lives stood out. Akhadov, writing of Mikhailov’s experience, noted:

At the end of the prayer, the mosque’s imam, Khalid Gorkusuz, delivered a sermon in the spirit of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism, with attacks on imperialism and Communism, several accusations regarding the policies of the Turkish leaders, including their supposed diversion from Islamic principles in domestic and international politics. The imam called on the believers not to step away from the Islamic demands in life, to be brave in their defense of their Muslim faith. After *namaz*, Dz. Mikhailov introduced himself with Imam Khalid Gorkusuz, the imam-*khatib* Karim Bati, and the *muezzin* Shiukriu Rawdelen, who all were surprised to find out that their conversation partner was an educated mullah from the Soviet Union and announced this to those praying, who were also surprised and greeted their guest.⁶⁸

Mikhailov may have been taken aback by the content of Gorkusuz’s *khutbah*, but he promised to return to Alsandac shortly. Soon, he was back (with, Akhadov emphasized, “the permission of the leadership of the Pavilion,” just as with the first visit).⁶⁹ There he participated in the morning prayer with “thirty to forty believers,”⁷⁰ after which “in the name of the Muslims of the Soviet Union and the believers of Azerbaijan,” he gave Karim Bati a Soviet Koran. This gift, Akhadov recounted, “gave rise to great excitement in the mosque.” Mikhailov then took questions, surprising the visitors with his emphasis on the freedom of conscience in the USSR. All in all, Akhadov concluded, Mikhailov’s public diplomacy had proved most useful, as

someone’s objective word about Soviet reality was brought into the middle of those praying, along with real material proof (*veschestven-*

⁶⁸ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 4-5.

⁶⁹ Ibid. L. 5.

⁷⁰ The term “believer” appeared frequently in Soviet bureaucratic discourse to describe Muslims and other religious believers, but it stands out here insofar as it was the first time in the CRA report about Izmir that Akhadov used the term to describe Turks. In other words, Akhadov seems to have imagined, or thought of some divide between the space of the mosque and the exhibit, or at least the people present in both settings.

noe dokazatel'stvo) about the freedom of conscience in our country, about which a not-insignificant portion of the population of Turkey possessed a false impression.

Other re-acquaintances followed the mosque visit. On August 20, only the second day of the exhibition, Akhadov and Mikhailov accompanied one of their Turkish interpreters, M.M. Khalmatov, out into Izmir. With him, they visited a 60-year old Soviet Uzbek, Shirmuhammad Karabaioglu Ishyk, who had served in the Red Army in World War II, fallen into German captivity, but, “not having returned to the homeland after military imprisonment,” had made his way to Izmir, where he had been living for the previous thirty-five years.⁷¹ In this one encounter, shared Soviet experiences, seem to have been more important than pan-Turkic sentiments.

Still, nine days later, on the 29th, Akhadov and Mikhailov, accompanied by another interpreter, E. Alekserov, visited Erdrun Keskin, an Azerbaijani young man living in Camdibi (in suburban Izmir), “where, according to our host, there live many Azerbaijanis.” The CRA team had apparently shown up to listen to Keskin and his father complain about the harassment of Azeri Shias in Izmir.

Keskin's father complained about the fact that Turk-Sunnis get along poorly with the Azerbaijanis and Iranians professing Shiism. The local powers don't recognize their Shia *madhhab*, don't pay anything to the *akhund* of their Shia mosque, which was built with the donations of the Shia of Izmir in the village of Bairakly on the side of the city closer to Garshyiakin. In the meantime, all of the imams of the Sunni mosques receive their pay from the government. As far as discrimination based on school (*madhhab*) goes, the Shia *akhund* of his mosque was stripped of this right, which meant that the Shia believers were forced themselves to collect donations for paying for the services of their mullah. At the end of our visit to Keskin's family, the stand operator Dz. Mikhailov read several excerpts from the Koran and read out several lines of poetry (“gasida”) about the Prophet Muhammad and about Imam Ali. Listening to the touching words and the pleasant voice of the mullah, all of Keskin's family began to weep. Upon our departure, we gave this family a Koran published in the Soviet Union, books and brochures exhibited in our exhibit of the Soviet Pavilion, ballpoint pens brought in from Baku, and a block of chocolate.⁷²

⁷¹ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 4.

⁷² Ibid. L. 6.

What Akhadov and Mikhailov were finding, or at least what their report intended to underline, was that there was a serious disjuncture between perception and reality across the Muslim world when it came to Muslims' rights in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Even as Turks disparaged them for being stooges for atheist propaganda and being brainwashed into Communism instead of subscribing to pan-Turkism, there was more than enough discrimination against Muslims to be found in Turkey itself. Shia Turks and Sunni Uzbeks outside of the Soviet Union, meanwhile, looked to the Soviet Union as a land of relative religious and ethnic tolerance. Élite Soviet Muslims like Akhadov and Mikhailov were open to interacting with the other inhabitants of the Middle East on their own terms: whether as Muslims, Turkic-language speakers, Uzbeks, Soviet citizens, or otherwise. Given an award of 1,000 Turkish liras each, they left with their translator Khalmatov for Istanbul where, after a short outing for “obtaining souvenirs, which lasted about five to six hours,” they were back to the Soviet Union. Next stop, Tehran.

Return to Tehran: “The Muslims of the Soviet Union,” 1982

Shortly after his trip to Izmir, Akhadov was called upon again to be the stand-operator for the exhibit “The Muslims of the Soviet Union,” held at the 1982 Tehran Trade Fair from September 20 to October 1, with twenty-three nations participating.⁷³ This time, the exhibit was basically properly put together, although a mistake with visa processing delayed Akhadov's arrival to the third day of the exhibit. Nonetheless, this was perhaps the most catholic CRA display yet:

In the exhibit we displayed twenty-eight photographs: six of active religious organizations in Uzbekistan; eight memorial complexes of the Muslim architecture of the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva; two buildings of old Christian churches; five of industrial enterprises; six of public buildings in Baku, Rostov-on-the-Don, and Riga, as well as photographs showing Soviet and Czech cosmonauts.⁷⁴ The exhibit also had a model of the Tashkent Telyashayakh Mosque.

⁷³ Ibid. L. 16.

⁷⁴ The Soviet and Czech cosmonauts pictured were (respectively) Aleksei Gubarev and Vladimir Remek, who happened to be the first participants in the USSR's “Intercosmos” program, a socialist internationalist side project of the Soviet space program that paired Soviet cosmonauts with (among other nationalities) North Vietnamese, Bulgarian, Mongolian, Cuban, Syrian, and even Afghan cosmonauts to fly missions to the Mir space station.

The photographs that had arrived were more a mix of the generic triumphs of late Soviet socialism – industrialization, the space program, urbanism – with only half the photos focusing on Muslim life in the Soviet Union. But Akhadov appreciated this decision. “... it played its positive political and propagandistic role. The exhibition was a good arena for the demonstration and propagandization of Soviet reality, about which the Iranian population has very limited information and a false presupposition.”⁷⁵

But there were actually two more serious problems. One, in his mind, was the overwhelming focus on Uzbekistan: “in this case, all fourteen photographs [about Islam] were from Uzbekistan. Several visitors pointed this out and expressed their opinion that in different parts of the Soviet Union, religious sites were destroyed, while only Uzbekistan was left standing for foreigners.” Another issue was that “in Iran, where the official form of religion is Shiism, it’s absolutely necessary to show the socioeconomic life of the Muslims of the Soviet Caucasus, especially Azerbaijan.” It was true, and reflected a real deficiency at the exhibits: even though Akhadov himself was an Azeri, and even though the Soviet Shia Muslim establishment made serious attempts to reach out to international journalists and present itself as flourishing, Uzbekistan dominated the official international picture of Soviet Islam.⁷⁶

As at the other exhibitions, visitors came to ask questions, but this time in Tehran there was a uniquely Azerbaijani flavor to the proceedings. Akhadov, who knew some Persian, noted that more than half of the visitors to the exhibit spoke Azeri, and while many of the questions concerned issues like the Iran–Iraq War, Israel, “the Afghan question,” and the Islamic Revolution, “the majority of the visitors were interested in the life of the Muslims of the Transcaucasus, in other words, Shias.”⁷⁷ Many of the visitors

⁷⁵ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 22.

⁷⁶ This is particularly striking given the rich examples of intercourse between Azerbaijan and the rest of the Muslim world in the CRA files. GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 1971. Ll. 67-90, for example, documents a week-long conference hosted by DUMZak for Afghans in Baku from August 28 to September 5, 1980. D. 2224, Ll. 45-52 documents another Afghan conference held in Baku by DUMZak, as does D. 2223, Ll. 44-66. The latter example, covering a visit in August 1981, was more complicated, as it involved a visit of not only Afghan ulema but also several ministers from the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Finally, one other file, D. 1970, Ll. 5-9, includes a striking interview done for *Time* magazine by the American journalist Strobe Talbott of several Azerbaijani CRA/DUMZak authorities including Akhadov himself. Covering these materials would, however, demand more discussion that would exceed the boundaries of this piece.

⁷⁷ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 16, 17.

were fascinated by Heydar Aliyev, at that time the dynamic first secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party.⁷⁸ “Many visitors (soldiers and private citizens) asked,” wrote Akhadow, “that I pass on their greetings and kind wishes to Aliyev, since, as they said, ‘Aliyev is the head of the Azerbaijani nation (*narod*).’ They also requested (several times) that Heydar Aliyevich see to the increasing of the mega-wattage of the radio and television from Baku, since at the present moment not all Iranians (Azerbaijanis) living far from the Soviet border can listen and watch the Baku radio and television programs.”⁷⁹ Here one had the belief that Azerbaijan was, in effect, not only an Aliyev-run despotism but also something close to the opposite of the Cold War media landscape in parts of Europe. If in East Germany the mountainous regions around Dresden unable to receive West German television broadcasts were dubbed “the valley of the clueless,” in this Southwest Asian case, Iranians were demanding while in their own country that the Iranian “valleys of the clueless” be filled in.⁸⁰

Akhadow found himself turned into a counselor to receive Iranian Azerbaijani grievances, testifying to the linkages that many Iranian citizens felt with what they saw as their homeland.

The majority of Azerbaijanis who visited the Soviet pavilion (they almost represented the majority) expressed their cautious discontent with the existing regime, while the other visitors [i.e., non-Azeri Iranians] openly spoke about the nationalities policy of Persia, depriving the Azerbaijanis of their written language, their studies, their culture, and their communication in the Azerbaijani language.

One visitor who called himself “the poet Savalan” (he said that a professor in Baku, Abbas Zamanov,⁸¹ knows him), told me that the Persians are buying off the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, forcing them to write

⁷⁸ Heydar Aliyev (1923–2003) was an Azerbaijani political figure who dominated Azerbaijani politics from the 1970s until his death. His son, Ilham Aliyev (1961–) is the current president of Azerbaijan as of 2011.

⁷⁹ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 17.

⁸⁰ The German term is *Tal der Ahnungslosen*, although in reality there were at least two major regions of the DDR where access to Western broadcasts was difficult, the other being in what is today northeastern Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Given the presence of the island Rügen in that region of Germany, the major West German television institution, ARD, was sometimes jokingly called *Außer Rügen und Dresden* (“besides Rügen and Dresden”). In 2005 a German filmmaker team, Ute Bönnen and Gerald Endres, produced a short documentary film on this theme, *Im Tal der Ahnungslosen*. For more, see: <http://www.boen-end.de/ahnungslos.html> (last visit: March 19, 2011).

⁸¹ Abbas Zamanov (1911–1993) was an Azeri intellectual and professor.

and speak only in the Persian language. Even the famous Azerbaijani poet Shahriar⁸² recently refused to speak and answer questions in his own language. Recently there was a program on the Tehran television dedicated to the work of Shahriar, who openly refused to speak and respond to questions in the Azerbaijani language. He called his poem “Salam Heydar Baba,” written in the Azerbaijani language, a random occurrence in his work. This poet that I spoke with, Savalan, said that after this television program all 14 million Azerbaijanis living in Iran turned their back on Shahriar – an opium addict and a damned (*proklatiyi*) servant of the Khomeini regime. “It would have been better that Shahriar died before this television program,” said Savalan, “since the Azerbaijani nation would have buried him as their most beloved poet and national hero. Today, however, Shahriar is nothing more than the sold-out dog of Khomeini. It pains me to say that even I once wrote an encomium dedicated to Shahriar in connection with his seventieth birthday.”

The visitors whom I asked about Shahriar had absolutely no opinion on his life. He blemished his name through his connections with the Khomeinist regime, they said. Azerbaijani radio and television ought not to have gotten so carried away with its propagandization of Shahriar’s work, who was spinning himself as a zealous reactionary and a Pan-Islamist who lost his self-love and all technical craft for Azerbaijani national poetry while occupying himself with the praise of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and its Supreme Leader, Khomeini.

Compared with 1980, Iranians’ attitudes toward the Islamic Revolution had taken a critical turn. True, on the one hand, there were still several incidents of anti-Soviet protests. On the eighth day of the exhibit, a group of school-age boys went by shouting out “religious slogans and denunciations addressed to America, Israel, and occasionally the Soviet Union.” Later that day, a group of teenage girls in hijab ran through the hall screaming “*Allāhu Akbar, Khomeini rahbar*” (God is the greatest – Khomeini is the leader), “Death to America!” “Death to Israel!” and – only once, Akhadov noted – “Death to the Soviets!” Bizarrely, while Akhadov was responding to one young man in his twenties who had asked about “the Soviet educational system, health care, and especially about the pension system for workers and vacations for pregnant women,” the young man went berserk, “loudly

⁸² Mohammad Hossein Shahriar (1906–1988) was an Iranian poet of Azeri extraction who is celebrated today as probably the greatest twentieth-century poet to write in the Azeri language.

yelling that I was carrying out Communist propaganda and that I would have to suffer death for this.”⁸³ Telling here was which claims the young man used as the basis of his accusation: not the Soviet Union as the wrecker of capitalists, or as a superpower with international ambitions, but as a welfare state.

But many of the Iranians in the crowd were now on Akhadorov’s side. Following the outburst, “those present did not support this provocation, but rather supported me,” cursing out the young man from the exhibition. Other times, on eight to ten separate occasions, groups of Persian-speaking young men approached Akhadorov to engage in heated conversation with him about “the position of religion in the USSR, the constitutional rights of Soviet citizens, about the equal rights of Soviet citizens regardless of religion, race, gender, and nationality.” After these conversations, several Iranian visitors approached him to tell him that these men “with a reactionary outlook” were indeed Afghan refugees “supported by American imperialism.”⁸⁴ Akhadorov’s report suggested that exhaustion with the revolution had caused this shift. Even as “the official authorities” at the trade fair notified the Soviet pavilion several times regarding the undesirable “political character” of Akhadorov’s answers, he continued to engage in conversation with Iranians who had grown tired of post-1979 life in Tehran. “The people,” wrote Akhadorov,

Have grown tired of the religious demagoguery expressed by the faux-revolutionary phraseology. Orthodox Islamic ideology and the antiquated demands of the Sharia have transformed the everyday life of Iranians into systematic torture and humiliation. Iranian women asked me whether Soviet women and girls have the right to dress in modern clothing and wear high heels. One young woman (an Azeri) said with tears in her eyes, “I surely will not see this free life, but I wish only that my children will not live under these hellish conditions!”

Concluding Thoughts

In this piece, I have argued that when we look at the reports of these Azerbaijani CRA employees traveling around the Middle East in the wake of the Afghan invasion, the collapse of socialist modernity in the Middle East and South Asia, and the reassertion of Turkey and Iran as modern Islamic countries, we find a complicated picture. True, plenty of visitors to the exhibits came to Ibragimov, Akhadorov, and Mikhailov with skeptical

⁸³ GARF. F. R-6991. Op. 6. D. 2475. L. 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid. L. 18.

questions about how the Turkic peoples of the USSR had been “deprived of equal rights to life and freedom with the Russians.” One Turkish visitor could candidly ask Akhadov “under whose supervision [his] wife had been placed” during his absence from the Soviet Union: since extended families had been abolished, to whom would Akhadov give his wife? Performative anti-Communism mixed with more realistic skepticism.

Still, the Soviet vision of modernity and national development remained attractive to different groups in Turkey and Iran, but for different reasons. Some of the Iranian Azerbaijanis in Tehran, as we have seen, viewed Aliyev’s Azerbaijan as a place of national refuge. Keskin, the Shia Turk in Izmir, saw Azerbaijan as a place of confessional rather than national refuge from the Turkish Sunni establishment. Muhammadjon imagined Uzbekistan – “even” a Soviet Uzbekistan – as his real motherland. Other visitors simply viewed the Soviet Union as a place where bread prices were not doubling, where, even if the family had been abolished, they could study for a diploma, have a job, or have an apartment.

It is true that for many of these groups, the USSR’s long-worn reputation as a country hostile to religion lent skepticism to many of these visitors otherwise curious about life in the Soviet Union. And we have to be mindful of the very narrow window that these CRA reports give us. Dozens of anecdotes out of tens of thousands of visitors to a trade exhibition in Tehran and a large provincial Turkish city does not begin to describe the diversity of opinion toward the Soviet plan for modernity in these two countries during the 1980s. The kind of people willing to harass, or make a confession, to a Soviet public diplomacy bureaucrat, can only give us glimpses into broader mentalities.

Still, hopefully the discussion here will spur further historical work on Ankara’s, Tehran’s, and Moscow’s interrelated paths to the future since the early 1980s. Following the oil shock, the emergence of the Islamic factor, and the increasing sluggishness of the Soviet vision, the rules of the game had changed. Mutual copycatting, observation, and anxiety would become commonplace among these regional powers in Eurasia. Looking forward not backward, one might well ask what happened to the attraction of the socialist vision across the region after 1991.

Sure, research into post-1979 Iran remains challenging, and disciplinary ossification may hamper students from plunging into Russian, Persian, and Turkish languages. But students of the Russian Empire have shown great creativity in exploiting the Ottoman archives.⁸⁵ Why not follow their lead

⁸⁵ See, in particular, the work of Eileen Kane, Jim Meyer, and Mustafa Tuna, whose work is cited above.

into the Cold War?⁸⁶ A fuller account of the story sketched here would require research in the archives of Ankara or Cairo – or Beijing or Islamabad, for that matter.⁸⁷ True, we may find that Akhadov’s, Mikhailov’s, and Ibragimov’s thoughts on their travels across the Middle East were largely hallucinatory, unrepresentative of a majority of Muslims across Turko-Persia. Greater in-depth studies of the CRA as an institution and one in which different ways of talking about Islam will add rigor to discussions of this kind. But if we want to understand the broader picture, we must, like the Uzbek Muhammadjon leaving his home in Ta’if in search of what may have been his Soviet mirage, strike out. Only by doing so can we understand where Turko-Persian societies were in the early 1980s, where they were headed across the 1989/1991 divide, and where, if anywhere, they are headed today.

Appendix: Questions Asked at the Various Exhibitions

A) QUESTIONS ASKED AT THE 1980 TEHRAN EXHIBITION

1. How many mosques are active in the USSR?
2. Are all the mosques open?
3. Are the mosques in the USSR allowed to operate freely?
4. Is it true that there exists freedom of conscience in the USSR?
5. How many Muslims live in the Soviet Union?
6. How many Shiite Muslims are there in Azerbaijan?
7. Are there any instances of harassment of believers on the part of the organs of power?
8. Are Muslims in the USSR allowed to adhere to all of the demands of the Sharia?
9. May Soviet Muslims visit the holy sites of Islam located abroad?
10. Why does a relatively small number of pilgrims leave the Soviet Union for Mecca in Saudi Arabia?
11. How do Soviet Muslims relate to the Iranian Revolution?
12. How do believers in the USSR relate to Ayatollah Khomeini?

⁸⁶ One example of fruitful work in this direction is Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge, 2006.

⁸⁷ For links between Egypt and China, Kyle Haddad-Fonda’s work has focused on high-level diplomacy, with some moments of Chinese Muslims’ lives in the Middle East as pawns of 1950s Chinese diplomacy. See Haddad-Fonda. *The Anti-Imperialist Tradition and the Development of Sino-Egyptian Relations, 1955–1956* / A.B. Dissertation; Harvard University, 2009. For the memoirs of a Hui Muslim who traveled to Egypt during the 1950s, see Li Zhenzhong. *Niluo hepan. Yisilan wenming yanjiu*. Zhengzhou, 2006. Pp. 12-21.

13. Are there well-known religious authorities in the Soviet Union?
14. Can any of these authorities play the same role in the USSR that Khomeini did in Iran?
15. What was the mood like among the Soviet people, especially among Muslims, after the Revolution in Iran?
16. Can Soviet citizens consummate religious marriage?
17. Do religious authorities appear on radio or television?
18. May religious authorities occupy leading governmental posts?
19. What is the Soviet Union's relationship to Iraq?
20. Are there religious schools or madrassas in Azerbaijan?
21. May the Muslims of the Soviet Union receive a religious education in Muslim countries abroad?
22. How many servants of Islam are there in the Soviet Union?
23. Is the cult of religious taxes adhered to in the Soviet Union or has the government forbidden it?
24. How many times in the course of a day do Soviet Muslims pray?
25. Do conditions for the execution of religious holidays exist in the USSR?
26. Why did they turn mosques into museums?
27. Do the mosques receive government grants?
28. Why isn't the Koran published in national languages?
29. Why is an insufficient quantity of religious literature published in the USSR?
30. Why is the mosque separated from the government?
31. Why did mosques in the USSR open only after the Iranian Revolution?
32. Why was there no section "Islam in the USSR" at the previous exhibitions?
33. Doesn't the section seem to you like Red propaganda?
34. Doesn't the Soviet Union fear the unrest that could occur among the Muslims living in the USSR?
35. Do Soviet people have families and their own homes?
36. Do Soviet Azerbaijanis speak in their native tongue?
37. In which languages are Soviet children taught?
38. Are there national schools and institutions of higher education in Azerbaijan?
39. Are Soviet citizens allowed to carry on conversations on political themes?
40. Can Soviet citizens criticize those working for government power?

41. Is there creative and other literature in the Azerbaijani language?
42. What kind of pay do Soviet citizens receive?
43. Can Soviet people buy light automobiles?
44. Can Soviet citizens travel beyond the border?
45. Can Soviet citizens change their place of residency within the USSR?
46. How are food products allotted?
47. How much does a kilogram of bread cost?
48. Haven't the Soviet people gotten fed up with the monotony of the food (the kind they receive with their coupons)?
49. Why are the children educated in kindergartens? Isn't that harmful to them? Can't we educate them at home?
50. Why are Soviet soldiers killing the peaceful inhabitants of Afghanistan and exterminating mosques?
51. When are Soviet forces leaving Afghanistan?
52. Why are Soviet Muslims not helping their Afghan brothers in faith?
53. How do the Soviet people relate to the events in Poland?
54. Why is the USSR helping Iraq?
55. Why is the Soviet MIG violating the aerial borders of Iran?
56. Why is the Soviet Union supplying ammunition to Iraq?
57. How is it possible to cross the border?
58. I am a foreign student, may I continue my instruction in the USSR?
59. Do students receive a stipend and in what size?
60. Do students have a right to living space?
61. What is the deal for the receipt of apartments?
62. What kind of institutions of higher education are there in the USSR?
63. Are there political demonstrations in the Soviet Union?
64. Would you like to visit Iran again?
65. How is it possible to receive Soviet citizenship?
66. Do foreign students study in the USSR?
67. What kind of stipend is there for students?
68. Are there unemployed people in the USSR?
69. Are there a lot of factories in the USSR?
70. Is Islam oppressed by other religions or organs of power?
71. What kind of repression do people expect for their religious convictions?
72. Are there instances of violations of the article in the USSR Constitution about freedom of conscience committed on the part of the organs of power?

B) QUESTIONS ASKED AT THE 1982 IZMIR EXHIBITION
(NUMBER OF TIMES ASKED)

1. Do mosques really exist in Russia? How many mosques remain in your country? (Asked dozens of times).
2. As we know, the Russians destroyed (*razrushili*) and closed Muslim mosques in order to spiritually wear out and subordinate Muslims – how is it possible under such conditions that religious organizations can exist?
3. Are they building new mosques in the Soviet Union? (5–6 times overall).
4. Are the Koran and other Muslim religious literature published in the Soviet Union? (Often).
5. Is political and atheist pressure exerted on religion and on Muslims? (Dozens of times).
6. Where and how do Soviet Muslims study Islam? Do you have religious schools? (Dozens of times).
7. Do your Muslims observe the ceremony of the *sünnet* (circumcision)? (Every day).
8. Do families exist? Are religious “*nikaks*” read? After all, doesn’t Communism not recognize the family? (Often).
9. They say that in the USSR, the government takes away your children in order to raise them in the Communist spirit (*v kommunisticheskoy dukhe*). What do you have to say to this? (Several times).
10. On what principles is a Muslim family in the Soviet Union founded? Aren’t Muslim traditions forgotten? (Every day).
11. Do your Muslims observe the fast of Ramadan and ceremonial *mawlid*s? Does one there have the right to observe Islamic holidays? (Every day).
12. How many believers of your country go on *hajj* annually? How is this done? (Every day).
13. Which *mazhabs* of Islam exist among the Muslims of the Soviet Union? Do representatives of different *mazhabs* marry among themselves? (Every day).
14. What forms of religion are common (*rasprostraneny*) in modern Russia?
15. Does the Christian religion take advantage of privileges? (Infrequently).

16. Do mullahs receive pay from the government? What sorts of financial opportunities do religious organizations have? On the basis of whose support do mosques exist? (Every day).
17. What is the situation with religious taxes? Are the *humz*, *zakat*, or other religious taxes collected? (Every day).
18. What is the structure of interaction between the government and religious organizations? (Every day).
19. Does the government control life inside the mosque (*vnutrimechet-skuiu zhizn'*)? (Every day).
20. Why is it that, among those praying depicted on the walls of your exhibit, there are hardly any young people? (Every day).
21. When Soviet people receive jobs or are promoted, is attention paid to their religious affiliation? (Almost every day).
22. Is it possible to freely visit mosques in the Soviet Union? Don't the organs of power obstruct the observance of *namaz* in mosques or in the workplace? (Many, many times).
23. How is it possible to permit the coexistence of an antireligious government with the free observance of religion on the part of the citizen? (Every day).
24. Your Lenin called religion an opium of the masses and called for a struggle with religion. How is it possible to speak about the freedom of conscience under these conditions?
25. How are the mullahs of mosques elected and appointed? (Every day).
26. Who precisely directs the mosques, if not the organs of power? (Every day).
27. Is religion studied in Soviet schools? (Every day).
28. Why do so few Soviet tourists travel to Turkey? (Every day).
29. What explains the fact that many artists and athletes who have gone on professional trips to the West refuse to return to the Soviet Union? (4–5 times overall).
30. Do you have the right to freedom of movement within the Soviet Union? (Every day).
31. Does private property exist? Is private enterprise possible in your country? (Every day).
32. Which forms of property exist in the Soviet Union? (Every day).
33. Are you satisfied with your life in the Soviet Union? (Every day).
34. If one fine day the iron gates of the Soviets opened up, wouldn't you want to flee the country? (8–10 times overall).

35. If a general world war were to begin, would you defend the Soviet motherland? (10–12 times overall).
36. If Russia starts a war against Turkey, how will the Turkic-speaking nations (*narody*) of the Soviet Union act? (Once).
37. Why do you so vehemently (*ria'no*) support Soviet construction? What did Soviet power give you concretely? What did it bring for the Azerbaijanis? (4–5 times overall).
38. Where does Baku oil get sent off to? Who uses its energy? (Once).
39. Do the Muslims of your country have equal rights with Russians? (Every day).
40. Do you have the right to speak in your native tongue? (Every day).
41. In which language is radio and television broadcasted in the Muslim republics? (Every day).
42. Do there exist newspapers, magazines, and books in the languages of the Muslim nations? (Every day).
43. Do there exist *mujtahids* in Azerbaijan who also recognize the Shia authorities? What do they think about Khomeini? (8–10 times overall).
44. What do you think about the Iranian events? Did they have any effect on religious life in your country? (8–10 times total).
45. Why did Soviet forces occupy Afghanistan? What do you think about this aggression? (Every day).
46. Afghan refugees arriving in Turkey from Pakistan tell about the terrors of the prisons run by the Soviet occupants. Why don't you act out against these evil deeds? (Almost every day).
47. Is it true that the Soviet army consists of illegitimate children educated by the military organizations of your country? (3–4 times total).
48. Do Azerbaijani youth drafted into the ranks of the Soviet Army serve in the motherland, or are they held in the interior territories of Russia? (4–5 times total).
49. Do any mosques remain in the Crimea? How many of them are currently active? (10–12 times total).
50. Why did the Soviet organs of power exterminate the Muslim leaders of the Crimea: Mustafa Jamil Ogly and Faizullah Kari? (5–6 times total).
51. Do the Muslim Soviet Republics have the right to self-determination? If they do, why were they deprived of the possibility to conduct their own foreign policy? (5–6 times total).

52. Are there representatives of the Muslim regions in the central Moscow administration? (5–6 times total).
53. How many millions of Muslims live in the Soviet Union? Among which territories are they spread out? (Several times every day).
54. How many millions of people of Turkic-speaking nations live in the Soviet Union. Aren't they deprived of equal rights to life and freedom with the Russians? (Several times every day).
55. During the time of your absence from the motherland and your home, under whose supervision has your wife been placed? After all, according to Communist morality, family ties are not especially strong or hopeful. (2–3 times total).
56. What was the point of the exhibit “Islam in the USSR” in the Soviet pavilion? It wasn't here at previous trade fairs. (10–12 times total).
57. Did you get to know the Izmir “brother Muslims”? (Once).

SUMMARY

В статье Тимоти Нунана анализируются отчеты сотрудников Совета по делам религий (СДР), помимо всего прочего функционировавшего как одна из арен холодной войны. Нунана интересуют прежде всего отчеты представителей СДР, сопровождавших выставки “Ислам в СССР” и “Жизнь мусульман в СССР” в турецких городах Техран и Измир в 1980–1982 гг. Реконструируемая по ним история советской пропаганды в странах Востока помещается автором в контекст изменений мусульманской идентичности в Евразии, начавшихся в 1979 г. с ввода советских войск в Афганистан и исламской революции в Иране и продолжившихся поворотом Турции к политике “турецко-исламского синтеза” в 1980-м. Нунан анализирует не столько цель и содержание советской пропаганды в исламских государствах, сколько реакции на нее мусульман — посетителей советских выставок. Подробные отчеты функционеров СДР, содержащие перечни вопросов, задаваемых посетителями, позволяют представить нюансы восприятия СССР на Ближнем Востоке.

Даже в конце 1980-х годов мусульмане Ближнего Востока – не только “иранцы” и “турки”, но также иранские азербайджанцы, турецкие шииты и саудовские узбеки, посещавшие советские выставки, – демон-

стрировали сложное, но в целом позитивное отношение к советской версии мусульманской модерности. Заявляя о дискриминации мусульман и ислама в СССР, осуждая вторжение в Афганистан и поддержку Саддама Хусейна, посетители выставок, тем не менее, проявляли заинтересованность в получении высшего образования в советских вузах, интересовались советской политикой бесплатного предоставления жилья или источниками доходов таких богатых советских мусульман, как Гейдар Алиев. Кроме того, СССР рассматривался как убежище для религиозных диссидентов или групп населения, подвергавшихся преследованиям по этническому принципу.