

Book Review

Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis

By Dale F. Eickelman (ed.), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 244 pp.

The sudden independence of five Muslim Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—and one Muslim country in the Transcaucasus region—Azerbaijan—has surprised even the international scholarly community. When the former Soviet Union was alive and well, there were “Soviet scholars,” a rubric that largely included specialists on Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. Western scholars were almost never inclined to specialize in, or to give any serious attention to, the Muslim regions of the Soviet Union. This neglect was also reflected in their evaluations of the problems of this region, as can be seen by the uncritical acceptance of the Soviet vocabulary. For instance, the Qorabashi armed resistance in Muslim Central Asia was labeled the “Basmachi” (or bandit) movement by the Soviet Union and its scholars. This phrase was also used by western scholars.

Now there is no more Soviet Union, the cold war has entered history, and there are six new Muslim republics. These developments have engendered a renewed interest in these republics, as can be seen by the number of recently published books that have been devoted to them. Although some of them have been hurriedly compiled, others have been written with a lot of forethought and balanced analysis.

Eickelman's present anthology definitely falls into the latter category. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, his anthology is one of the first books that raises the question of whether the above-mentioned Qorabashi movement was indeed an armed struggle against the Soviet imperial masters or was a “bandit” movement as portrayed by Soviet scholars. This book comprises four parts: “International and Regional Perspectives,” “Central Asia,” “Afghanistan and Iran,” and “Pakistan.” The first two sections formulate the essence of this study. Eickelman's introduction, in my estimation, is certainly one of the best chapters. It is unfortunate that he did not include more of his writing in this book. His review of the literature on modernization theories and orientalism in this chapter will be read by students of Central Asia and the Middle East with interest.

Other noteworthy contributions are the two essays by Richard Cottam and Gregory Korniyenko. It is refreshing to read Cottam's schol-

arship after a long prelude, as he is one of the very few specialists on the Middle East who can lucidly apply some arcane theories of political science to the republics' intricate politics. Cottam's discussion of the "spiral conflict model" is highly intriguing, especially since his Russian counterpart agrees with his analysis of this model as an explanation of the role of the Soviet Union in the Middle East during the cold war years.

Alexi Malashenko's essay, "Islam vs. Communism," is an interesting and accurate interpretation of the role of Islam in the former USSR. The author writes: "It is clear that the 'Islamic line' was never broken in Islamic society . . . Islam remained the preserver of spirituality, the framework of a worldview, and to a significant extent, the regulator of relations between people."

There are a number of articles on Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. However, they contain few new insights. In summary, despite the fact that this book contains a number of thoughtful and well-written essays, it falls short of achieving the purpose stated in its subtitle: "New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis."

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