

instrumentalization of politics and religion in post-Soviet Central Asia. One of its goals is to study how political discourse uses religious (Muslim, Christian, etc.) phenomena in the framework of nation-state building, and how political powers are attempting to display an image of religious pluralism and freedom. Our present research also examines how religion is viewed by the national minorities, especially in their politico-cultural claims. This question not only concerns minorities of Muslim origin, such as Caucasians or Central Asians living outside their eponymous state, but also the European-Slavic minorities. Since 2003 we have concentrated our work on the Russian minority living in Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan. One of the objectives is to study how Russians are attempting to use the Orthodox Church in defense of their rights in this

republic and how the Church replies in the framework authorized by the political power.

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The Role of the Pilgrimage in Relations between Uzbekistan and the Uzbek Community of Saudi Arabia

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This report presents the results of my study of a Central Asian community — Uzbeks in today's terminology — who settled in Saudi Arabia in several successive waves starting from the early 1940s, and who are identified by Saudis as Turkistani or Bukhari, according to the regions of their origin. Given Uzbekistan's independence, Saudi Uzbeks today define themselves as Turkistani or Uzbek, depending on the situation.

The study was conducted during two two-week pilgrimages (*umra*) with Central Asian pilgrims and Saudi Uzbeks at the time of Ramadan in December 2000 and November 2001 in Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina. I also conducted several field visits among the Uzbek community in Turkey and in Uzbekistan, where I followed Saudi Uzbeks visiting their relatives. The findings of this study are based on regular contacts with 15 families who invited me to their homes, on interviews with more than 80 individuals during each pilgrimage, and on family archives, i.e., pictures, letters and videos. The research was supported by the Centre Français de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC, located in Beirut and Amman) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

In this report I argue that the pilgrimage plays an important role in preserving Uzbek identity on the

ground. The Uzbek community (with Uyghurs, another Turkic community exiled in Saudi Arabia, not studied here) is one of only two national groups that have succeeded in achieving relative integration in Saudi Arabia without being completely assimilated. This is notable, since the kingdom makes it difficult for immigrants to preserve their identities.

Before Russian colonization in the 19th century, Central Asians had multiple identities — familial, tribal, regional, and religious. When needed, one would refer to one or all of his/her identities. According to scholars and old refugees in Mecca and Medina, in the early 1930s when Soviet control over the region of Central Asia grew stronger and more violent, the term "Uzbek," that already existed at the time had no real meaning for the exiles. Synonymous with "confederation of tribes," it was of secondary importance for the people who preferred to be identified as "Kokandi," "Namangani," "Marghilani," "Farghani," etc. The outsiders called them Turkistani or, more frequently, Bukhari, referring to the last local independent Emirate and then Socialist Republic of Bukhara (Shalinsky 1994).

Reasons for Exile: New Political and Economic Order

The existing literature on Central Asian migrations (e.g., Shalinsky 1994; Komatsu, Obiya and Schoeberlein, eds. 2000) and my interviews with elders in Saudi Arabia highlight two main reasons for the Turkistani to leave their homeland. Soviet control over the region, with its new coercive economic structure (collectivization and its rejection by landowners) and social-political order (abolition of religious courts and "Russification" of the educational system) pushed people to exile.

Two directions were chosen — East to Kashgar and South to Afghanistan. Some, after a relatively short stay (a couple of months or years), proceeded farther to Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This route was especially attractive partly because of the holy status of the destination, and also because the young Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was among the few Islamic countries to welcome refugees. For pragmatic reasons the Saudi government viewed the migrants as an opportunity to support the population and development efforts of the kingdom. It was also important for the first Islamic state to prove solidarity with the Muslim population persecuted by a communist and atheist regime. With leadership ambitions over the Muslim world, King Abdel Aziz (1876-1953) was not only in charge of the holy cities but also desired to be considered as the protector of all Muslims. This explains the warm welcome and reception of the Turkistani exiles, even as foreign communities enjoyed no separate existence as national groups in Saudi Arabia.

Evolution of Uzbek Identity in Saudi Arabia

The Turkistanis used different identity strategies to ease their migration. The differences in tribal identities were smoothed away in favor of *muhajir* and Bukhari. On the thorny path of exodus the community considered itself as *muhajir* — refugees fleeing persecution, in the Islamic sense of the word, comparing oneself to the first *muhajir*, the Prophet Muhammad in his *hijra* (exile) from Mecca to Medina. The use of the word *muhajir* probably commanded sympathy among the Saudis; so did the second identification as Bukhari, which bears not only a geographical significance, but most importantly a religious meaning. By calling themselves Bukhari they demonstrated to the Saudi authorities and population their close relationship

with Isma'il al Bukhari, the great Islamic thinker from Bukhara, who was respected in Saudi Arabia.

Like other foreign communities Uzbeks were deprived of the right to create cultural associations and to teach children their native language. Contacts with Turkistan (soon subdivided into five Soviet republics) were made impossible during the Cold War. The community was linguistically Arabized in less than two or three decades. However, contacts with the Uzbeks of Turkey and with Turkish workers or pilgrims in Saudi Arabia facilitated (at least for the community leaders) the survival of Turkic vernaculars that mixed Anatolian and Uzbek languages. In Soviet times the impossibility of visiting the homeland pushed the community leaders closer to Turkey, where exiles established an important Uzbek community.

In 1991 the independence of Uzbekistan brought new hope to the Uzbeks of Saudi Arabia, who were threatened with dilution into the Arab culture. Renewed relationships through the pilgrimage undoubtedly influenced the Saudi Uzbeks' identity.

In the Soviet literature the *hajj*, synonymous with obscurantism, was totally forbidden except for 10 to 15 handpicked loyal officials. Even though forbidden, the institution of the *ribat* turned *hajj* into a cohesion tool within the diaspora. *Ribats*, created by Turkistani sponsors to facilitate the *hajj* of their poor countrymen, had existed even before the Uzbek immigration to Saudi Arabia. They functioned as rest houses for fellow townsmen. Namangan, Kokand Marghilan, and even Kashgar and Khotan had their own *ribats*. Until 1991 these foundations played a crucial role in maintaining the solidarity among the members of the Central Asian community at large. In the absence of legal, cultural, or ethnic associations the *ribats* also functioned as meeting centers for old leaders (*aqsaqal*) of the community with the Turkistani-Uzbek pilgrims exiled in Turkey. Now *ribats* have a chance to evolve into business centers to coordinate cooperation, to develop networks and forums for the exchange of views, and eventually, to redefine the common identity.

Much was expected from the pilgrimage, as Saudi Uzbeks (especially the young ones) do not travel much to Uzbekistan. Pilgrimage had become a source of interest in Uzbekistan long before the end of the Soviet regime (Hayitov, Sobirov and Legai 1992). In 1992 Islam Karimov adopted a more open policy towards Islam after he performed the *hajj* and received an excellent welcome from the Saudis

(thanks to the Uzbek community leaders who had presented him as a descendant of Isma'il al Bukhari). Above all, Uzbekistan's independence marked the reopening of the route to Mecca. From 1992 to 1996 the relationship between the two countries was good and 3,000-4,000 Uzbek pilgrims visited Saudi Arabia annually for the *hajj* or *umra*. After 1996, due to the rise of Wahhabism in the Ferghana Valley with alleged involvement of some Saudi Uzbek leaders, Tashkent decided to tighten its control over religious activity in the country and restrict the entering of Saudi Uzbeks into their homeland. The growing scope of pilgrimage and mutual influence contributed to the transformation of the Saudi Uzbeks' identity.

Independent Uzbekistan and Uzbeks have revived pride among the Turkistani group. While some intellectuals eschew the term "Uzbek" as a pure invention of the Russian colonizers to break the Turkic unity in Central Asia and beyond, today when asked about their identity most Saudi Uzbeks tend to add the term "Uzbek" after "Muslim" and "Turkistani" to indicate their belonging to the broader Turkic family. However, for the Saudi population and authorities nothing has changed as Saudi Uzbeks are still perceived as Turkistani or Bukhari. Furthermore and surprisingly, they do not

differentiate Saudi Uzbeks from the other two Turkic communities exiled in Saudi Arabia — the Uyghurs of Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang) who arrived after the communist takeover in China in 1949, and the Afghan Uzbek refugees who arrived after Afghanistan's invasion by the Soviet Army in 1979. Although all these Turkic groups are called Turkistani in Saudi Arabia, they present significant differences in terms of identity and solidarity. This is a subject which requires further study.

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