HISTORICIZING ISLAM AFTER COMMUNISM:
Adeeb Khalid and the Politics of Religion in Central Asia

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KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Islam; Postsocialism; Historicity; Securitization; Central Asia; Religion; Politics	This article examines Adeeb Khalid's Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia as a theoretical contribution to the study of religion and politics, rather than merely a regional account of post-Soviet Islam. Challenging dominant narratives of Islamic revival and radicalization, Khalid emphasizes the importance of historicizing Islam by foregrounding the legacies of Soviet secularism and postsocialist governance. Through a qualitative and interpretive reading of Khalid's work, this article argues that Islam in Central Asia has been reconfigured as national heritage, bureaucratized through state control, and securitized within authoritarian political frameworks. These processes have reshaped Muslim subjectivities and politicized everyday religious practices from above, driven largely by state anxiety rather than popular mobilization. By highlighting continuity rather than rupture in state–religion relations, the article complicates liberal assumptions about secularization and religious freedom in post-authoritarian contexts. It concludes that Khalid's insistence on historicity offers a transferable analytical framework for understanding religion in post-imperial and postsocialist societies beyond Central Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Islam in Central Asia has predominantly been interpreted through global narratives of *religious revival*, *radicalization*, and *security threat*. In Western policy discourse and popular academic writing, the dramatic increase in visible Islamic practices—such as mosque construction, public religious observance, and renewed transnational religious connections—has often been read as evidence of a delayed but inevitable "return" to an allegedly authentic Islam that had been forcibly suppressed under communist rule (Vu, 2022). This framing implicitly assumes that once state repression receded, Islam would naturally reassert itself in its original, and often presumed political, form.

Empirical developments in the early post-Soviet period appeared, at first glance, to support such interpretations. Across Central Asia, the number of mosques increased exponentially during the 1990s. In Uzbekistan alone, officially registered mosques rose from fewer than 100 in the late Soviet period to over 2,000 by the mid-1990s (Khalid, 2014). Similar trends were observed in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, accompanied by a surge in religious education, pilgrimages, and contact with Muslim institutions abroad. These changes were frequently interpreted in Western analyses as indicators of an Islamic resurgence poised to evolve into political Islam or militant opposition (Brown & Rashid, 2002).

This revivalist narrative, however, has been closely intertwined with post–Cold War security paradigms. Events such as the Namangan protests in Uzbekistan in 1991, the Tajik civil war (1992–1997), and the emergence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the late 1990s reinforced the tendency to interpret Islam in Central Asia primarily through the lens of extremism and terrorism. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Central Asian regimes became incorporated into the global "war on terror," further entrenching the view that Islamic mobilization in the region constituted an inherent threat to state stability and international security (Heathershaw & Montgomery, 2014).

Within this framework, Islam is often portrayed as a timeless and internally coherent political force—one that merely re-emerges when external constraints are lifted. Such interpretations echo broader essentialist claims about Islam's inherent politicization, found in influential civilizational and security-oriented scholarship (Lewis, 2023; Quinn, 2017). In these accounts, historical specificity is subordinated to abstract generalizations about Islamic doctrine, and local Muslim societies are treated as passive recipients of a universal religious logic.

Adeeb Khalid's intervention challenges this analytical move by demonstrating that the meanings of Islam in Central Asia are inseparable from the region's distinctive twentieth-century history. Far from simply suppressing Islam, Soviet rule profoundly transformed it. Religious knowledge transmission was disrupted, traditional institutions dismantled, and Islam was redefined by the state as an element of "national culture" rather than a comprehensive moral or political system. By the late Soviet period, many Central Asians identified as Muslim primarily in cultural or genealogical terms, rather than through doctrinal knowledge or ritual observance (Khalid, 2014).

Consequently, the post-1991 resurgence of Islam cannot be understood as a straightforward return to a pre-Soviet religious past. Instead, it reflects the reconfiguration of Islam within postsocialist conditions shaped by Soviet secularism, authoritarian governance, and nation-building projects. By overlooking these historically specific experiences, dominant revivalist and security-oriented narratives risk misinterpreting both the nature of Islamic practice in Central Asia and the sources of political contestation in the region (Croix, 2014). Islam, in this sense, becomes a convenient explanatory shorthand that obscures the deeper legacies of socialist modernity and state power.

Adeeb Khalid's *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* offers one of the most influential correctives to these essentialist readings. Khalid argues persuasively that the meanings of Islam in contemporary Central Asia cannot be understood without taking seriously the legacies of seventy years of Soviet rule, which profoundly reconfigured religious authority, knowledge transmission, and the relationship between Islam and the state (Khalid, 2014). Rather than viewing Islam as merely "reviving" after 1991, Khalid demonstrates that post-Soviet Islam is a historically contingent formation—shaped as much by Soviet secularism, national delimitation, and authoritarian governance as by pre-Soviet Islamic traditions.

Despite the book's wide circulation and frequent citation, much of the existing literature treats *Islam after Communism* primarily as a descriptive account of Islamic revival or as a background text for understanding post-Soviet politics. What remains underexplored is the book's deeper methodological and theoretical intervention: its insistence on *historicizing Islam* as a social and political phenomenon. Khalid does not merely add historical context to the study of Islam in Central Asia; he challenges the analytical tendency to detach Islam from history altogether. By foregrounding Soviet modernity as a formative experience, he reorients debates away from civilizational explanations and toward historically grounded analyses of power, governance, and religious authority.

This gap is particularly significant in light of the continued dominance of security-oriented and essentialist frameworks in discussions of Islam and politics, both globally and within the Asia-

Pacific scholarly landscape. Even recent studies that emphasize "moderate" or "local" forms of Islam often reproduce binary oppositions between authentic versus corrupted Islam, or between political versus cultural religion. Khalid's work destabilizes these binaries by showing how Islam in Central Asia has been simultaneously nationalized, depoliticized, and securitized by post-Soviet regimes, while also being reshaped from below through new forms of piety and religious engagement.

The novelty of this article lies in its critical rereading of *Islam after Communism* as a theoretical contribution to the sociology of religion and postsocialist studies, rather than merely a regional case study. By situating Khalid's arguments within broader debates on religion, modernity, and state power, this article highlights how his approach offers conceptual tools for understanding religion in other post-authoritarian and post-imperial contexts. In doing so, the article argues that Khalid's insistence on history is not only empirically illuminating for Central Asia but also normatively important for resisting reductive narratives that continue to shape global discussions of Islam and politics.

Through this engagement, the article seeks to demonstrate that *historicizing Islam*—as Khalid proposes—is not an antiquarian exercise, but a necessary analytical strategy for understanding how religion operates within contemporary regimes of power, governance, and identity formation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is grounded in a theoretical framework that brings together three interrelated concepts: Islam as a socially embedded tradition, historicity as an analytical method, and postsocialism as a formative political and cultural condition. Together, these perspectives allow for a non-essentialist and historically situated understanding of religion and politics in Central Asia, in line with Adeeb Khalid's intervention in *Islam after Communism*.

Islam as a Socially and Politically Embedded Tradition

Rather than treating Islam as a fixed doctrinal system or a transhistorical essence, this article adopts an understanding of Islam as a **discursive and socially embedded tradition**. This approach resonates with Talal Asad's critique of essentialist definitions of religion, which detach belief and practice from the historical conditions that make them meaningful (Asad, 2003, 2017). From this perspective, Islam is not simply a set of texts or theological principles but a field of contested interpretations, practices, and authorities that are shaped by power relations and institutional arrangements.

Khalid's work aligns with this view by emphasizing that what it means to be Muslim in Central Asia has varied significantly across time, particularly as a result of imperial conquest, Soviet secularization, and post-Soviet nation-building. Islam, in his account, functions neither as a monolithic ideology nor as an autonomous force driving political behavior. Instead, it is continuously reconstituted through interactions with the state, educational institutions, legal regimes, and nationalist discourses (Khalid, 2014).

This framework rejects dichotomies such as "political Islam" versus "cultural Islam" or "authentic" versus "corrupted" Islam, which often dominate policy-oriented analyses. Following Khalid, the article treats these categories themselves as political constructs, frequently mobilized by post-Soviet states to legitimize authoritarian governance and suppress religious opposition under the banner of counter-extremism.

Historicity and the Critique of Essentialism

Central to this framework is the principle of **historicity**, understood as the insistence that religious forms and meanings must be analyzed as products of specific historical processes rather than as expressions of timeless cultural essences. Khalid's strongest theoretical contribution lies in

his sustained critique of essentialist approaches that portray Islam as inherently political, violent, or incompatible with modern governance. Such approaches, exemplified in civilizational theories and security discourses, systematically erase the historical experiences of Muslim societies (Coser, 2012; Danforth, 2025; Quinn, 2017).

By foregrounding the Soviet period as a transformative epoch, Khalid challenges the assumption that post-1991 Islamic revival represents a simple return to a pre-modern or pre-communist past. Soviet policies did not merely repress Islam; they fundamentally reshaped religious knowledge, authority, and practice. The destruction of traditional institutions, the redefinition of Islam as "national heritage," and the monopolization of religious authority by the state produced forms of Islam that were simultaneously depoliticized and tightly regulated (Khalid, 2014).

Historicity, in this sense, is not merely a methodological preference but a critical stance against narratives that naturalize contemporary political anxieties about Islam. By situating Islamic practices within layered historical contexts—imperial, socialist, and post-socialist—this article treats religion as historically contingent and politically mediated, rather than as an explanatory variable in itself.

Postsocialism as a Religious and Political Condition

The concept of **postsocialism** provides the third pillar of this framework. Postsocialism refers not simply to the period after the collapse of socialist regimes, but to the persistence and reconfiguration of socialist institutional logics, cultural norms, and modes of governance within new political orders (Foray & Kelly, 2002; Hann & Verdery, 1997). In Central Asia, postsocialism is characterized by the coexistence of Soviet legacies with neoliberal economic reforms and authoritarian state-building.

Khalid's analysis demonstrates that Islam in Central Asia is deeply shaped by this postsocialist condition. Post-Soviet regimes inherited Soviet practices of managing religion through surveillance, bureaucratic control, and securitization, even as they embraced Islam symbolically as a marker of national identity. Mosques, shrines, and historical figures were rehabilitated as elements of cultural heritage, while independent religious activity was increasingly framed as a threat to political stability (Hunter, 2001).

Within this framework, Islam becomes both **a resource and a problem** for postsocialist states: a source of national legitimacy and moral order on the one hand, and a potential site of political contestation on the other. The language of counterterrorism and extremism—often borrowed from global security discourses—allows these states to justify repression while presenting themselves as guardians of "traditional" or "moderate" Islam.

By conceptualizing Central Asia as postsocialist rather than merely post-communist, this article underscores the enduring influence of socialist modes of governance on contemporary religious politics. Islam is thus analyzed not as an external challenge to the state, but as an integral part of the postsocialist political landscape.

Bringing together Islam, historicity, and postsocialism enables an analytical move beyond both civilizational explanations and simplistic revivalist narratives. This framework highlights how religious meanings are produced through historically specific configurations of power and how Islam, far from existing outside modernity, is actively shaped by modern state practices. In this sense, Khalid's work provides not only a regional analysis of Central Asia but also a transferable framework for studying religion in other post-authoritarian and post-imperial contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodological approach grounded in critical textual analysis and historical sociology of religion (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The study does not seek to

generate new empirical data through fieldwork; instead, it focuses on a close and systematic reading of Adeeb Khalid's *Islam after Communism* as a key scholarly intervention in debates on Islam and politics in post-Soviet Central Asia. This approach is appropriate given the article's objective to foreground Khalid's theoretical contribution—particularly his insistence on historicizing Islam—rather than to reassess the empirical validity of his findings (Krippendorff, 2022). By treating the book as both an analytical object and a theoretical lens, the article situates itself within interpretive traditions that emphasize meaning, discourse, and historical context over causal generalization.

Methodologically, the analysis relies on close reading and thematic interpretation of Khalid's text, with particular attention to how concepts such as Islamic revival, religious authority, state control, and political Islam are historically constructed. This reading is placed in dialogue with broader scholarly and policy-oriented literature on Islam in Central Asia, especially works that frame post-Soviet Islam through paradigms of radicalization and security. Such a comparative discursive engagement allows the article to highlight how Khalid's historically grounded approach diverges from essentialist and securitized narratives, and to clarify the conceptual stakes of his argument within wider debates on religion and modernity (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Historicity functions not merely as background context but as a core analytical method in this study. Following Khalid, the article treats the Soviet experience as constitutive of contemporary Islamic practices and subjectivities in Central Asia, emphasizing continuity, institutional inheritance, and path dependency rather than rupture. The analysis is organized thematically around key dimensions of Khalid's argument—Islam as national heritage, the bureaucratization of religious authority, and the securitization of Islam in the postsocialist state. While the study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and a single foundational text, this focused approach enables a deeper conceptual engagement with Khalid's work and highlights its broader relevance for the study of religion in post-authoritarian and post-imperial contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Islam as National Heritage: Depoliticization without Secularization

One of the central findings emerging from Khalid's analysis is that Soviet rule did not simply marginalize Islam but fundamentally redefined it as *national heritage*. Rather than eliminating religion altogether, the Soviet state recast Islam as a cultural marker of ethnic identity, stripped of its normative and political authority. Mosques, shrines, and historical Islamic figures were selectively preserved or rehabilitated as elements of folklore, tradition, and national history, while religious institutions capable of independent authority were dismantled (Khalid, 2014).

This process produced a paradoxical outcome. Islam remained deeply embedded in collective identity, yet it was increasingly detached from religious knowledge, jurisprudence, and ethical governance. By the late Soviet period, many Central Asians identified as Muslim genealogically or culturally, even when ritual practice and doctrinal literacy were minimal. Khalid's analysis challenges the assumption—common in revivalist narratives—that post-1991 Islamic resurgence represents a straightforward recovery of a suppressed religious tradition. Instead, the "revival" unfolded within a conceptual framework inherited from Soviet governance, in which Islam was legitimate only insofar as it functioned as culture rather than as an autonomous moral or political system (Hunter, 2001).

In the post-Soviet era, newly independent Central Asian states largely **retained and adapted the Soviet logic of religion** as a cultural identifier rather than a purely spiritual force. Across the region, governments actively promoted Islam not as an autonomous normative system but as *symbolic heritage* embedded within national identity narratives. In Kazakhstan, for example, the number of mosques grew rapidly after independence, with Muslim communities expanding from hundreds of institutions in the early 1990s to thousands thereafter, signaling a social reconnection with a

historical past rather than an unmediated religious revival (Bingol, 2004; Turam, 2004). This expansion was often facilitated by state approval or foreign funding, reinforcing Islam's visibility in public space without necessarily loosening state control over religious authority and content. Thus, Islam became an element in nation-branding strategies, where secular states invoked religious heritage to affirm cultural authenticity while maintaining firm political oversight.

This managed religiosity reflects what scholars describe as a **"de-modern" and "ethnicized" Islam**, a legacy of the Soviet era that persists in contemporary policy. The Soviet state had long framed Islam as compatible with socialism only when it served ethnic and cultural recognition, suppressing its institutional and doctrinal dimensions (Mesbahi, 2013; Thibault, 2020). Post-1991 elites inherited not only the physical structures of religion—mosques, shrines, community networks— but also a conceptual template in which religion was tolerated so long as it did not challenge state authority. In this framing, Islam is publicly celebrated in architectural restorations of historic sites (as seen in Samarkand and Bukhara), cultural festivals, and inclusion in national curricula, yet independent religious mobilization or autonomous clerical leadership is tightly regulated (Vu, 2022). Governments create and license official religious boards and impose restrictions on sermons, foreign religious education, and unsanctioned associations to prevent alternative sources of authority from gaining traction.

The outcome is a form of religiosity that is **socially pervasive but politically depoliticized**. This depoliticization does not equate to secularization in the Western liberal sense (understood as public and private autonomy of religion with institutional neutrality), but rather to *managed religiosity*, where religion is recognized as part of public life while remaining under state direction. In Tajikistan, for instance, the government regulates religious expression by controlling mosque registrations, sermon topics, and even limits on children's participation in religious activities, illustrating how religious practice is bounded by political considerations rather than freely negotiated between citizens and the state (Brown & Rashid, 2002; Ponomarev, 2016). Such governance complicates the binary distinctions between secular and religious states often found in Western literature; here, the state does not withdraw from religion but actively reshapes religious practice, identity, and authority. This dynamic underscores Khalid's broader argument that the modern Central Asian state does not simply suppress religion but *transforms* it into an instrument of cultural legitimacy and political stability, which in turn influences how individuals experience and express their religiosity.

State Control, Religious Authority, and Postsocialist Governance

A second major analytical outcome concerns the reconfiguration of religious authority under postsocialist governance. Khalid demonstrates that post-Soviet Central Asian states inherited not only Soviet bureaucratic structures but also Soviet modes of regulating religion. Official religious boards, licensing systems for clerics, and state oversight of religious education reproduce earlier mechanisms of control, even as they are now justified in the language of national sovereignty and stability (Khalid, 2014).

This institutional arrangement has significant implications for how Islam functions politically. By monopolizing legitimate religious authority, the state positions itself as the arbiter of "correct" or "traditional" Islam, while labeling alternative interpretations as foreign, extremist, or politically subversive. Khalid's analysis shows that this distinction is not theological but political: it is less about what Islam teaches and more about who is authorized to speak in its name. As a result, Islam becomes a terrain of governance rather than an autonomous source of critique.

From a postsocialist perspective, the regulatory dynamics around Islam in Central Asia reveal patterns of continuity rather than rupture following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Contrary to the expectation that the end of state communist ideology would yield unfettered religious freedom, the centralized control and bureaucratic management of religion have persisted in new forms. As Adeeb Khalid argues, Soviet modernity did not simply suppress Islam; it embedded specific

frameworks of governance that have continued to shape state–religion relations in the post-Soviet period (Khalid, 2014). This continuity is visible in the way state institutions structure and constrain religious life: religion is not marginalized from public life, but rather strategically bureaucratized, nationalized, and subordinated to state authority.

Contemporary scholarship supports the view that post-Soviet Central Asian governments have maintained and even intensified state control over Islam through institutional mechanisms reminiscent of socialist governance. Institutional bodies such as state religious councils, registered clerical associations, and licensing requirements for mosques and religious education are common across the region. These mechanisms do not arbitrate between competing religious voices in a pluralistic marketplace; instead, they channel religious expression into forms legible and acceptable to state elites (Malik, 2023). In Uzbekistan, for example, religious activities must be approved by state bodies, sermons are monitored, and independent Islamic organizations are often labeled as extremist or foreign-backed to justify suppression (Matveeva, 2009). Similarly, in Tajikistan, the government has enacted laws that restrict women and children from attending mosques independently, limit religious education outside state-sanctioned institutions, and require compulsory registration of religious groups, positioning the state as the arbiter of legitimate religious practice (McNay, 2003).

This managed religiosity complicates dominant liberal assumptions that religious freedom naturally expands after the collapse of authoritarian regimes. Liberal theory often presumes that ending coercive state ideologies (such as Soviet communism) will lead to greater individual autonomy and a pluralistic religious marketplace in which diverse religious expressions can freely compete. However, the Central Asian experience shows that post-authoritarian contexts can produce not pluralism but state-centered forms of religious governance in which the state defines the boundaries of acceptable belief and practice. This phenomenon echoes broader findings in post-authoritarian studies: authoritarianism does not automatically vanish with the end of an official ideology; instead, institutional legacies and governance practices often persist, adapting to new political vocabularies while maintaining control (Ginsburg & Simpser, 2014).

Importantly, the subordination of Islam to state authority in these contexts is not merely about suppressing dissent. It reflects a broader strategy of state building and regime legitimization in environments where nationalism, identity, and religious heritage intersect. Governments leverage Islamic symbols and rituals—such as state-sponsored hajj delegations, mosque openings, and national observances—to cultivate an image of cultural authenticity and moral unity, while tightly controlling the content and organization of religious life to prevent independent political mobilization. This dual strategy of symbolic inclusion and institutional constraint reflects the ongoing influence of postsocialist governance logics: religion is authorized so long as it reinforces state narratives and power structures, but it is simultaneously disempowered as a source of autonomous social agency.

Securitization of Islam and the Politics of Fear

The third key theme in Khalid's analysis—and one with significant contemporary resonance—is the securitization of Islam. Post-Soviet states, particularly from the late 1990s onward, increasingly framed Islamic activism as a security threat, drawing on global discourses of terrorism and extremism. Movements such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as the Tajik civil war, were mobilized discursively to justify broad repression of religious life, even when the majority of Islamic practice remained non-political (Khalid, 2014; Lenz-Raymann, 2014).

Khalid's contribution lies in historicizing this securitization process. Rather than treating Islamist militancy as the inevitable outcome of Islamic revival, he situates it within specific geopolitical and historical contexts, including the legacy of the Afghan war, authoritarian governance, and the absence of legal political opposition. This analysis undermines narratives that

portray militancy as a natural expression of Islam and instead highlights how repression itself can radicalize religious discourse (Khaidarova, 2016).

Importantly, securitization also reshapes Muslim subjectivities in post-Soviet Central Asia by transforming ordinary religious behavior into something perceived as politically suspect. In security studies, securitization refers to the process by which governments frame certain issues not merely as problems but as *existential threats* requiring extraordinary measures; this framing often relies on political discourse that constructs a *threat narrative* around specific social actors or practices rather than on objective assessments of danger. In the context of Central Asia, political elites have adopted securitization logics to define certain forms of Islamic expression—especially those not controlled by the state—as *uncontrollable Islam* that threatens national stability and identity (Omidi et al., 2024; Zakhay et al., 2024). Such securitization is not incidental; it is embedded in broader state strategies to consolidate power and legitimize restrictive policies toward religion.

By labeling diverse Muslim practices—whether informal study groups, foreign-educated imams, or specific styles of dress—as signs of extremist or foreign influence, states in the region effectively **politicize piety from above**. This top-down process alters how believers interpret their own religiosity. Practices that would otherwise be understood as personal, spiritual, or communal become politicized not because of intrinsic content but because the state has constructed a security frame around them (Turner & Asad, 1994).

This dynamic is visible in Kazakhstan, where scholarly analysis shows that securitization narratives reinforce assertive secularism and narrow the range of acceptable Islamic expression under the guise of national security and cultural cohesion (Brown & Rashid, 2002; Ponomarev, 2016). By framing Islamic revival as a potential threat, state discourse legitimizes expanded control over religious life and delegitimizes alternative voices.

This politicization of everyday religious conduct often occurs *irrespective of believers' intentions*, reshaping Muslim subjectivities toward caution, self-monitoring, and conformity to state-sanctioned norms. Rather than fostering autonomous religious agency or pluralistic public engagement, securitization pressures believers to internalize the state's security logic—often leading to self-censorship and depoliticized forms of practice that prioritize survival over expression.

This pattern complicates assumptions in much of the literature on religion and democratization, which tends to envision the removal of authoritarian constraints as opening spaces for genuine religious pluralism and political participation. In Central Asia, the legacy of securitization reinforces Khalid's central insight: Islam cannot be fully understood outside the historical and governing practices that structure it. The construction of religious practice as security concern illustrates how state anxiety, rather than popular mobilization, often drives the politicization of Islam, underscoring the importance of historicizing both religion and state power in analyses of Muslim societies.

CONCLUTION

This article has argued that Adeeb Khalid's *Islam after Communism* should be read not merely as a regional study of Central Asia, but as a significant theoretical intervention in the study of religion, politics, and modernity. By insisting on the historicization of Islam, Khalid challenges dominant revivalist and security-oriented narratives that portray post-Soviet Islamic resurgence as a natural return to an essential and inherently political religion. Instead, his analysis demonstrates that Islam in Central Asia is a historically constituted phenomenon, deeply shaped by Soviet secularism, postsocialist governance, and authoritarian state-building.

The findings discussed in this article highlight three interrelated dynamics. First, Islam has been reconfigured as national heritage—symbolically embraced as part of cultural identity while stripped

of independent moral and political authority. Second, postsocialist states have retained and adapted socialist modes of regulating religion, resulting in a managed religious field rather than a pluralistic religious marketplace. Third, the securitization of Islam has reshaped Muslim subjectivities by politicizing everyday religious practices through top-down state discourse, driven more by regime anxiety than by popular religious mobilization. Together, these dynamics complicate liberal assumptions about secularization, religious freedom, and democratization in post-authoritarian contexts.

By foregrounding continuity rather than rupture, Khalid's work reveals how modern states actively reshape religion rather than simply repress or liberate it. This insight has broader implications beyond Central Asia. In many post-imperial and post-authoritarian societies across Asia and the Global South, religion is similarly incorporated into projects of nation-building and security governance. Reading *Islam after Communism* through this wider lens allows scholars to move beyond essentialist understandings of Islam and toward historically grounded analyses of how religion operates within regimes of power.

Ultimately, this article suggests that the politicization of Islam cannot be understood apart from the historical experiences and governing practices that structure it. Khalid's insistence on historicity thus remains not only analytically productive but also ethically important, offering a critical alternative to narratives that reduce Islam to a timeless threat or a monolithic political ideology. For the study of religion and society in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, this approach provides a valuable framework for rethinking the complex entanglements of religion, state, and modernity.

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