

Transformation of the Languages of Islam in Tajikistan

Khashayar Beigi, University of California Berkeley, USA

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Establishing a linguistic identity at the national level has remained a top political priority for the governments of many Central Asian states after independence. In Tajikistan too the official endorsement of Tajiki now rivals those other languages that have been in use more or less interchangeably since the Soviet era such as Russian and Uzbek. On the other hand the secular state in Tajikistan following other modern nation-states defines as part of its mandate to differentiate the sphere of politics from religion through various discursive and material designation of “Islam”. Through extensive and continuing ethnographic research in Dushanbe and other cities of Tajikistan. I will examine various sites and instances where language provides a medium for transition, cohabitation and contestation between the Secular State and Islam. I argue that in response to the state’s policies, those languages that have been historically less associated with Islamic practices could now be driven into new religious horizons with unprecedented sociopolitical consequences. In doing this I will ask how the performance and forms of Islamic practices could be affected and transformed by the re-territorialization of secular languages into the sacred domain in Tajikistan and beyond.