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Languages of Islam and Christianity in Post-Soviet Russia: institutional discourses, community strategies and missionary rhetoric

Sibgatullina, G.

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LANGUAGES OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Institutional Discourses, Community Strategies and Missionary Rhetoric

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LANGUAGES OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Institutional Discourses, Community Strategies and Missionary Rhetoric

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To Alfina and Rifkhat

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Abbreviations

CN	Conversion narrative
DUM	Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul′man*)
DUMER	Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of European Russia (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul′man Evropeiskoi chasti Rossii*)
DUM RF	Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul′man Rossiiskoi Federatsii*)
DUM RT	Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul′man Respubliki Tatarstan*)
ESV	English Standard Version of the Bible
IBT	Institute for Bible Translation in Moscow
IUMS	International Union of Muslim Scholars
NORM	National Organization of Russian Muslims (*Natsional′naia organizatsiia russkikh musul′man*)
NT	New Testament
NWT	New World Translation
OOK	Public Organization of Kräshens (*Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia kriashen*)
RBO	Russian Bible Society (*Rossiiskoe bibleiskoe obshchestvo*)
RCDM	Russian Christian Democratic Movement (*Rossiiskoe khristianskoe demokraticheskoe dvizhenie*)
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
RVS	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SMR	Council of Muftis of Russia (*Sovet muftiev Rossii*)
TsDUM	Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (*Tsentral′noe dukhovnoe upravlenie musul′man*)
Q	Qurʾān
UBS	United Bible Societies

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

For Arabic and Persian names and terms, I adopt a modified transliteration system as used in the third edition of The Encyclopaedia of Islam.[1] When transliterated from Russian and Tatar, these words are also shown in brackets after their Russian/Tatar-based transcription, as given in the quoted source. Thus, I generally use *jihād*, but transliterate it as *dzhikhad* [jihād] when quoting from, for example, a Russian text where the word is mentioned. Titles of newspapers and names of parties and organizations, such as "Ittifak" (Unity), which contain Arabic or Persian words, are given only in their Russian transliteration and English translation.

For transliterations from Russian, a simplified version of the Library of Congress transliteration system is used, except where there is a widely accepted standard English spelling (e.g., Moscow, not Moskva). For Tatar and Kräshen texts written in Cyrillic, I follow the transliteration tables given in *Nationalities of the Soviet East: Publications and Writing Systems* by Edward Allworth.[2]

All translations from languages other than English are mine unless indicated otherwise or quoted from a published translation.

The Qurʾān and Bible translations

Unless stated otherwise:

- English quotations from the Qurʾān are based on the translation by Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem;[3]
- English quotations of the Bible are taken from the English Standard Version;[4]
- Russian quotations of the Bible are from the Russian Synodal Bible.[5]

For Russian translations of the Qurʾān, there is no standard reference source; specific references are provided for individual translations.

[1] K. Fleet et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam. The Third Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Available online at <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).
[2] E. Allworth, *Nationalities of the Soviet East: Publications and Writing Systems* (New York, NY: Columbia Unversity Press, 1971).
[3] M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[4] ESV, *The Holy Bible. English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).
[5] RBO, *Bibliia. Sviashchennoe Pisanie v Sinodal'nom Perevode* (Moscow: Rossiiskoe Bibleiskoe Obshchestvo, 2014).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis combines approaches of sociolinguistics with methods of political and religious studies in order to study how language relates to social and political identities.[1] In a broad perspective, this study investigates how various actors and organizations – including the state – use, shape, translate, invent and interpret linguistic religious repertoires for certain goals, and how these linguistic strategies interact in a competitive struggle for religious authority and political hegemony.

The field that I map and analyse concerns the relationship between Islam and Orthodoxy in Russia. Conventionally, Russian Orthodoxy is linked to the Russian language, which in turn is associated with ideas about Russian national, ethnic and cultural identities. Islam does not have one single vernacular that is used for the communication and religious needs (including preaching) of all Russia's Muslims; there are as many Islamic languages as there are minorities in Russia that see Islam as their identity marker. The Tatar language, which will be a subject of this study, in addition to Russian, is one such Islamic language. In a more narrow perspective, my thesis examines the power inequality between Russian and Tatar – the former being Russia's hegemonic language and the latter being the language of Russia's largest national Muslim minority. However, the examination of this sociolinguistic hierarchy between majority/minority languages also has broader implications, as the relation between languages is mirrored in the interaction between religions, viz. between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Russia's Islamic authorities (the Muftiates), and between Christian communities and Muslim groups.

The chapters of this thesis are about competing discourses. I use the term "discourse" as a convenient designation for pools of spoken and written statements that centre around a particular issue and have a certain span of life, and thus a continuity in which actors react to statements of other actors. I will concentrate on the discourse on

[1] For a comparison of language and religion as politically consequential domains of cultural difference, see R. Brubaker, "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference," *Nations and Nationalism* 19:1 (2013), 1-20; also W. Safran, "Language, Ethnicity and Religion: a Complex and Persistent Linkage," *Nations and Nationalism* 14:1 (2008), 171-90.

religion in Russia; this umbrella discourse covers a huge number of specific discourses that are defined by a given topic, such as the discourse on Islam, on Islam in Russia, on the relation between Islam and Christianity, or on the relation between the ROC and Muftiates, or between the ROC establishment and grassroots missionary movements. Discourses can also be defined by their speakers and writers: there is a discourse of spokespeople of the ROC, or of the Christian Tatar community, or of a certain missionary group. These can be linked to discourses developed in other countries, such as the discourse of Jehovah's Witnesses or the Catholic Church. Defined in this way, discourses always overlap: both Muslim and Christian representatives participate in and contribute to the state discourse on religious identities, national identities and languages.[2]

Discourses by necessity come in the form of particular languages. These must be analysed with the repertoire of linguistics. For instance, in the field of lexicon and semantics, specific concepts and terms can be inherited, coined, borrowed or translated, and in each case the linguist will try to identify the history of the word form as well as the semantic changes that may come over time. In this thesis, the question of situational lexical and semantic change is a recurring topic. The situational aspect revolves around the translation (in terms of different ways of transplantation) of concepts and terms from Tatar into Russian, and from Russian into Tatar. This also involves the spread of terms from Orthodoxy to Islam and, conversely, from Islam to Christianity. Translation is not only about finding the best equivalent of a given concept or term of one language in the lexical stock of another language; it is also about translating the meaning of the term into a new religious, social and political context.

Broadly speaking, my thesis stands in the tradition of Soviet/post-Soviet nationality studies – the field that examines the relation between Russians and non-Russians. I will concentrate on the last twenty years, during which national interests have increasingly been connected to religious identities. This change from the focus on nation to a focus on religion does not mean that national identities are a thing of the

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[2] See, e.g., A. Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gifts: Religious and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Societal Fabric," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53:3 (2001), 473-88; A. Agadjanian and K. Rousselet, "Globalization and identity discourse in Russian Orthodoxy", in *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-first Century*, ed. V. Roudometof et al. (New York, Toronto: AltaMira Press, 2005), 29-57; J. Johnson et al., *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam* (Aldershot, Hants: Routledge, 2005); J. Gerlach, "Religion and State Identity-Building in the New Russia", in *The Role of Religion in Eastern Europe Today*, ed. J. Gerlach and J. Töpfer (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), 103-43; A. Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community: Elaborating Orthodox Identity in Putin's Russia," *Religion, State and Society* 45:1 (2017), 39-60.

past; it just means that in the current context of Russia's re-centralization policies and the Kremlin's promotion of conservative values, national interests are expressed in discourses that include religion among their topics, and religious authorities and bureaucrats among their actors.

At the same time, my work stands in a tradition that goes beyond Russia; the focus on the importance of language has shaped scholarship on colonialism and post-colonialism globally.[3] By applying this linguistic approach to contemporary discourses on religion in Russia, my work is intended to open a new field in which the relevance of linguistic research becomes fruitful for understanding hegemonic power relations in Russia, and for defining the opportunities and limits that govern what can be said about religion in Russia. From this perspective, I combine a study of the "form" – the concepts and terms, their meanings and applications – with the study of the "formers", that is, the actors/shapers of language practices, and of their political and social relevance. The power of the form comes in subtle ways; it needs to be revealed in a painstaking procedure that asks about the genesis of a term, its use in former times and in the present, and the impact a form is assumed to have. Oftentimes, this impact cannot be measured; we can only make assumptions about why a specific author, community or organization decides to employ this or that term, or decides to borrow or create a new form. Our assumptions about the meanings of a given form, and its supposed impact, can be enhanced by studying larger pools of terms and texts, or several auctorial, communal or topical discourses; and they can be further augmented by studying discourses (and their protagonists) in interaction. The latter requires that the identity of the major players/shapers and their biographies are taken into account; linguistic change in the writings and statements of an actor over time goes hand in hand with the change in that actor's opinions and interpretations regarding language, religion and political power. In some cases, the actors demonstrate that the development of their linguistic repertoire is done consciously; this is most visible in cases where actors translate many religious texts from one language into another, or when they translate a language from one religion to another.

1.1 Languages across faith communities

The use of religious vocabulary and allusions to sacred texts outside any specific religious context has increased drastically since the start of President Vladimir Putin's

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[3] See, e.g., S. Bassnett, "Postcolonialism and/as Translation", in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. G. Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 340-58; D. Robinson, *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained* (London: Routledge, 2014).

first presidential term in 2000. This means that narratives that are constructed and presented as religious also frequently dominate contexts that in the past were exclusively secular, such as domestic and international politics, popular culture, or even court hearings. Many lexical items in Russian that are marked as part of the Orthodox Christian religious vocabulary, and during the Soviet period were avoided and rejected for ideological reasons, have "returned with vengeance".[4] Words, such as *altar'* 'altar', *pop* 'priest', *dukhovnik* 'confessor' have not only been reinstated with their religious connotations but have also entered non-religious settings. Journalists who appeal to "the sacred right to vote", or politicians who publicly ask the president for his "blessing" before they launch any project, crucially contribute to the variety of meanings attached to religious vocabulary.[5] As a result, religious concepts receive new connotations not so much within a religious context, for instance during a sermon or a prayer, but increasingly outside of it.

This mobility of religious vocabulary beyond religious settings is inherently connected to the rise of religious nationalism, where nationalist elites mobilize strong religious identities to provide an additional layer of national cohesion. Religiosity, in such cases, is intertwined with the current interpretations of national history – moments of national glory and remembrance. As we will see in the analysis that follows, in the post-Soviet period the two biggest "traditional" religions – Orthodox Christianity and Islam – have notably fallen back on national identities.

Yet in some communities, religion is going through the opposite process, that of "deculturation", where the bonds between national secular identities and religious identities become looser.[6] These religious trends and movements manifest themselves as propagators of "purer" or universalist forms of traditional religions that can function in any cultural context. This transformation is not unique for Russia, but a consequence of the global shift from a traditional form of religious practice – Ḥanafī Islam, Catholicism, classic Protestant denominations – toward more fundamentalist and charismatic forms of religiosity, such as evangelicalism, Salafism, Pentecostalism and neo-Sufism.[7]

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[4] B.P. Bennett, *Religion and Language in Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 31.
[5] G. Sibgatullina and J. Schaeken, "Hoe staat, orthodoxie en islam elkaars taal spreken in Rusland", *Raam op Rusland*, 17 March 2017 <https://www.raamoprusland.nl/component/content/article?id=501:hoe-staat-orthodoxie-en-islam-elkaars-taal-spreken-in-rusland> (Accessed on 10 January 2018).
[6] On the notion of "deculturation", see O. Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[7] Ibid., p. 4.

When religions are "mobile" within contexts and cultures, it also often happens that a language that has historically served one specific religion ceases to be exclusive. Languages such as Arabic and Hindi, which are conventionally used in multi-ethnic and multi-religious areas, have been utilized by several distinct religious communities – pagans, Muslims and Christians – for many centuries. However, for some languages that previously used to be associated with just *one* religious system, the accommodation to other religious systems, with other ethnicities as carriers, can be a daunting process. This thesis examines such transformations by juxtaposing two languages: Russian, which has traditionally been the language of the ROC, and Tatar – one of Russia's Islamic vernaculars.

1.1.1 The Russian language of Islam

Within a religious context, Russian primarily functions as a language of communication and preaching of Orthodox Christians, not only throughout the Russian Federation but also in the post-Soviet states and countries with a large Russian diaspora. The religious variant of Russian has been a marker of Orthodox Christian identity: Orthodox Christians use it to identify themselves in relation to the world around them and describe their religious experience or what they wish to imply by such experience. Russian linguist Irina Bugaeva argues that there is a distinct religious sociolect of Russian, the so-called "Orthodox Christian religiolect", where specific vocabulary, morphological and syntactic features work as indicators of an assumed Orthodox Christian religious mentality.[8] For instance, a speaker of this "religiolect" would say *zhelaiu mnogaia i blagaia leta*, meaning 'I wish you many and happy years'. Here the lexicon (*blag*- for 'happy'), semantics (*leta* for 'years') and grammar (*-aia* as the ending for neuter plurals in the accusative case) are marked as archaic; an ordinary speaker of Russian would nowadays say something like *zhelaiu mnogo schastlivykh let* 'I wish you many happy years'.

Such archaic forms are usually rooted in Russian Church Slavonic, which in its Synodal recension is the official liturgical language of the ROC. Although the idea of one sacred language is inherently alien to Christianity, and "any sacred-profane

[8] I.V. Bugaeva, "Pravoslavnyi sotsiolekt: problemy opisaniia," *Vestnik SibGAU* 6:13 (2006), 258-62; I.V. Bugaeva, "Pravoslavnyi sotsiolekt: Grammaticheskie osobennosti sovremennykh tekstov religioznoi sfery," *Izvestiia Volgogradskogo gos. ped. universiteta* 2:36 (2009), 80-85. In some sources, religious Russian is also referred to as a "spiritual jargon" (*dukhovnyi zhargon*), see S. Panich, "'Zato slova: tsvetok, rebenok, zver': razmyshleniia o religioznom iazyke v 'Dnevnikakh' o. Aleksandra Shmemana", *Russkii Put'*, 2009 <http://www.rp-net.ru/book/discussion/novgorod/panich.php> (Accessed on 20 June 2017).

schematism is an artificial imposition", the traditionalists within the ROC regard Church Slavonic as a sacred language.[9] Used exclusively in a liturgical context, Church Slavonic has become largely incomprehensible for ordinary native speakers of contemporary Russian, whether they are Christians or not. With its archaic vocabulary and script, and deviating grammatical forms and pronunciation rules, it is nowadays regarded as a "verbal icon" (*slovesnaia ikona*) – a mystical and sacred language of Orthodox Christianity.[10]

Recently, however, Russia's Muslims have increasingly contested the exclusiveness of Russian as the language of Orthodox Christianity. They are adapting Russian as their new *lingua franca* to engage in Islamic communication and to produce Islamic literature. Russian, rather than Arabic or any of the Turkic languages, seems to be gradually becoming the language that all Muslims across the vast territories of the former Soviet Union have in common today. The first to analyse this phenomenon in scholarly literature were Alfrid Bustanov and Michael Kemper, who distinguished three variants of this emerging "Islamic Russian": (1) *Russianism,* where Arabic-Islamic terminology is fully translated into Russian; (2) *Arabism*, which conversely is characterized by an excessive use of Arabic loanwords (often without Russian translation); and finally (3) *Academism*, which originates from the language of scholarly works on Islam in Russian.[11] In their research, Bustanov and Kemper focused on the groups that tend to use one of these variants. Russianism, in their opinion, is the variant that dominates the writings and speeches of Russia's Islamic officials, who are trying to reach out not only to Muslims but increasingly to Russian mainstream society and political elites. In doing so, they often use borrowings from Church Slavonic to translate and explain Islamic terminology. The opposite version of Islamic Russian, Arabism, is defined by Bustanov and Kemper as a variant that "leads to the production of insider texts that can hardly be understood by non-Muslims";[12] it is therefore popular in writings of Sufi and Salafī groups in various parts of the Russian Federation, who produce discourse for consumption by in-group members. The third variant, Academism, as the very term suggests, can be found in academic discourse, where Islamic terminology acquires secular meanings; religious concepts are "taken out of the

[9] Bennett, *Religion and Language in Post-Soviet Russia*, p. 75.
[10] See, e.g., G. Trubitsyna, "Razmyshlenie nad tserkovnoslavianskim iazykom", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 15 December 2010 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/43505.html> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).
[11] A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper, "The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages in the Russian Federation," *Slavica Tergestina* 15 (2013), 259-77.
[12] Ibid., p. 269.

original religious and ritualistic frameworks and thereby [obtain] general humanistic connotations".[13]

This thesis focuses on the first variant – Russianism – and offers several case studies, which in Part I (Chapters 3-6) elaborate on and also challenge some of the arguments put forward by Bustanov and Kemper. I follow and provide evidence to support their hypothesis that Russianism is a language variant specific to Russia's institutionalized Islamic authorities. The research will also show that Russianism is not simply about borrowing Orthodox Church religious vocabulary and transplanting it into an Islamic context; the resemblance in speech styles between Islamic and Orthodox Christian leaders goes beyond words and forms and also involves an amalgamation at the semantic level and in rhetorical strategies. For Islam, which Russia's mainstream society sees as the religion of "the Other", this means adjusting to the dominant ideology of Russian nationalism and accepting the hegemonic role of the ROC. Islamic authorities, however, are not the only users of Russianism. I argue that ethnic Russian converts to Islam may also switch to this variant, although they pursue different goals and address different audiences than the official Muftis.

It is important to note that for both groups – institutionalized and grassroots users – Russianism is just *one* variant in the toolbox of available registers to choose from; depending on the context, leaders, elites and ordinary members of Muslim communities can switch between different variants of Russian. That is, there is not a single distinct social group or community that uses only the Russianism variant as its religious language. Thus, this work challenges Bustanov and Kemper's hypothesis that we should study the religious Islamic variants of the Russian language as separate religiolects – i.e. clearly distinguishable religious sociolects that can be associated with a particular religious group. As Kemper already pointed out elsewhere, actors often switch between various codes and variants, depending on their different target audiences.[14] At the same time, I follow Bustanov and Kemper's methodology by examining the meanings and identities that speakers assign to specific variants, and the goals that they try to achieve by using them.

It is also important to note that the various users of Russianism all offer their own definitions of Russia's (*rossiiskii*) and Russian (*russkii*) Islam. The meanings attached to these concepts can be exclusive and may include ultra-nationalist standpoints, with ethnic Russianness being placed above minority identities. These

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[13] Ibid., p. 270.

[14] M. Kemper, "Russkii iazyk islama: fenomen perekliucheniia koda," *Islam v sovremennom mire* 11:1 (2015), 65-74.

actors celebrate the "nobility" and cultural superiority of the "Russian Islam" in comparison with the forms practised by Muslim ethnic minorities (Chapter 4). Other definitions, namely of "Russia's Islam", which I discuss in this thesis, do not address Russia's Muslim community, *umma,* or any of its parts directly; instead, they target the Russian state as the ultimate consumer of its ideologies. In particular, the official Islamic establishments (Chapter 3) as well as individual political actors (Chapter 5) aim to formulate a state-supported ideology of Russia's Islam that will be "both inclusive (acceptable to state, Muslims, and society) and exclusive (opposing what is perceived as radical, dangerous and, from a theological position, as erroneous and unscientific)".[15] The state already indicated the need for such an ideology in the early 2000s, when political technologist Sergei Gradirovskii suggested "an Islam of Russian culture" (*russkokul'turnyi islam*); this project was enthusiastically endorsed by high-ranking politicians, but it caused much controversy among Islamic elites and was later abandoned.[16] Despite this lack of success, Gradirovskii's project identified a niche that many societal actors with various degrees of authority are still trying to fill.

Finally, the dominance of Russian within Islamic settings obviously also influences ethnic vernaculars spoken by Russia's Muslim minorities in the Volga-Ural region, the Caucasus and Siberia. For several centuries these languages have functioned as the primary means to communicate and write about Islam within Russia and beyond. With Russian taking over these functions, Islamic vernaculars are also undergoing change, which I will demonstrate in Part II of this thesis, offering case studies on Orthodox Christian use of the Tatar language.

1.1.2 The Tatar language of Christianity

Today Tatar counts as Russia's second most spoken language;[17] it is also one of the two official languages of the Republic of Tatarstan – Russia's largest "Muslim"

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[15] M. Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology? Damir Mukhetdinov's 'Russian Islam'", *Religion, State and Society* (Forthcoming).

[16] For a detailed analysis of Gradirovskii's project, see K. Graney, "'Russian Islam' and the Politics of Religious Multiculturalism in Russia", in *Rebounding Identities: The Politics of Identity in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. D. Arel and B.A. Ruble (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 89-115. Here pp. 103-06.

[17] As of 2010, nearly 4.3m people reported that they speak Tatar, see Census, "Vladenie iazykami", *All-Russian Population Census 2010,* 2010 <http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-07.pdf> (Accessed on 4 February 2018). On Tatar language proficiency in the republic's population, see E. Khodzhaeva, "Postsovetskaia iazykovaia politika v obrazovatel'noi sisteme respubliki Tatarstan", in *Nastroika iazyka: upravlenie kommunikatsiami na postsovetskom prostranstve*, ed. E. Lapina-Karasiuk et al. (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2016), 282-306.

republic, situated in the Volga-Ural region, with a Muslim population of up to 54 percent (according to the 2002 population census).[18] Up until the nineteenth century, the written Tatar language, the so-called *Törki tel*, was "a more or less tatarized version of the Chaghatay language, that is to say an eastern-Turkic idiom, whose origins were in Central Asia".[19] The Tatar literary language was a highly composite language that contained many elements and vocabulary items from three different stocks: Arabic, Persian and Turkic.[20] Classical Arabic was also taught in Tatar *madrasas* – religious schools and colleges – to enable students to read and comprehend the Qurʾān, although only a small group of the best educated could write and converse in it. Similarly, Persian – another important language of Islamic scholarship – was available to only a few.[21]

By the mid-nineteenth century, Volga Tatars were embarking on language vernacularization: that is, developing a standard literary language from a local vernacular; this language reform was part of the Muslim reformist movement that attempted to face the challenges presented by modernization, and to confront the subordinate position of Muslim minorities in the Russian empire.[22] The aims of the language reform included simplification (liberation from Persian and Arabic elements to develop an intelligible style) and purification (return to what was perceived as genuine Turkic terms). The reformists believed that the new literary form of Tatar would prove to be more comprehensible to even semi-literate Tatars and would provide broader groups with access to education, including secular subjects such as geography and history, and enhance social mobility.[23] Importantly, vernacularization was also coupled with the development of Tatar national consciousness.[24]

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[18] Polit.Ru, "Kolichestvo musul'man v Rossii uvelichilos'", *Polit.Ru*, 17 December 2012 <http://polit.ru/news/2012/12/17/religon/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018). On religious identity and practice of Muslims in Tatarstan, see also FBK, "Musul'mane Rossii. Sotsopros FBK v Tatarstane i Dagestane", *FBK*, 24 December 2015 <https://navalny.com/p/4647/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).
[19] J. Strauss, "Language modernization: The case of Tatar and modern Turkish," *Central Asian Survey* 12:4 (1993), 565-76. Here p. 565.
[20] Ibid., p. 566.
[21] S. Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union: A Historical and Statistical Handbook* (London: KPI, 1986), p. 3.
[22] On the Muslim question in the Russian empire, see, e.g., R. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); E.I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015).
[23] On Tatar language reforms, see Strauss, "Language modernization"; S. Wertheim, *Linguistic purism, language shift, and contact-induced change in Tatar* (PhD thesis, University of California, 2003); also E.F. Lazzerini, "Crimean Tatar: The Fate of a Severed Tongue", in *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages: Their Past, Present and Future*, ed. I. Kreindler (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1985), 109-24.
[24] See Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance*, pp. 73-74.

Throughout the Soviet period, Arabic remained the sacred language of worship but, together with Persian, it disappeared almost completely from Islamic literature written by Tatar Islamic scholars. In 1927, the Arabic script used for written Tatar was replaced by the Latin alphabet; in 1939, Latin was again replaced by a modified version of Cyrillic. Despite Soviet secularization policies and repression of Islam, literary Tatar had strengthened its position in terms of usage for Islamic communication and discussion, and by 1935 the Kazan dialect of Tatar had become one of the languages of Soviet Islam. In the years that followed, however, Tatar rapidly lost its prestige; after the Second World War, Russian increasingly became the instrument of socialization and integration in Soviet society, and was regarded as superior to all other languages.[25]

The status of the Tatar language in the post-Soviet period was secured by bilateral agreements (1994, 2007) between Tatarstan and Moscow that granted the republic exceptional rights and freedoms.[26] In terms of education, the agreement allowed compulsory hours of Tatar language study in local schools in Tatarstan. But neither the agreements between Kazan and Moscow nor educational reforms in Tatarstan were successful in protecting Tatar from losing its symbolic prestige and practical application. Even in Tatarstan, let alone in the Russian Federation as a whole, the Tatar language is overshadowed by Russian and has little to no role in business, higher education and administration.[27] The situation has grown even more complex since 2017, when Tatarstan lost its special status after Moscow refused to extend the bilateral treaty; this made the republic, in fact, a regular subject of the Russian

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[25] T. Wigglesworth-Baker, *Language Policy and Russian-Titular Bilingualism in Post-Soviet Tatarstan* (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2015), 52. On Soviet language policies regarding the Tatar language, see L.A. Grenoble, *Language policy in the Soviet Union* (Dordrecht: Springer 2003), pp. 35-62; also T. Wigglesworth-Baker, "Language Policy and Power Politics in Post-Soviet Tatarstan", in *Language Planning in the Post-Communist Era: The Struggles for Language Control in the New Order in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and China*, ed. E. Andrews (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 119-44; S. Wertheim, "Reclamation, revalorization, and re-Tatarization via changing Tatar orthographies", in *Orthography as Social Action*, ed. A.M. Jaffe et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), 71-108.

[26] The successor of the initial 1994 agreement is "The Treaty on Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects and Powers between Bodies of Public Authority of the Russian Federation and Bodies of Public Authority of the Republic of Tatarstan", which was signed on 26 June 2007. This treaty was valid for 10 years and expired in 2017. Available at <http://portal.tatarstan.ru/eng/documents/polnomochia.htm> (Accessed on 23 January 2018).

[27] See D. Gorenburg, "The Failure of Tatar Language Revival," *Policy* 379 (2005), 77-82; D. Gorenburg, "Tatar Language Policies in Comparative Perspective: Why Some Revivals Fail and Some Succeed," *Ab Imperio* 1 (2005), 1-28; T. Wigglesworth-Baker, "Language policy and post-Soviet identities in Tatarstan," *Nationalities Papers* 44:1 (2016), 20-37; G. Sibgatullina, "The role of religious institutions in Tatar language education and maintenance", in *Language Policy or the Politics of Language: Re-imagining the Role of Language in a Neoliberal Society*, ed. M. Djuraeva and F.V. Tochon (Blue Mounds: Deep University Press, 2018), 75-98.

Federation. In July of the same year, President Putin stated that it was "impermissible" for regions to compel students to learn languages other than Russian, which flared the controversy in Tatarstan over mandatory Tatar language classes. By the end of 2017, Tatarstani officials had to accommodate the legislation: according to the new rules, Tatar language classes are offered as electives and children can only study it for two hours a week, instead of six, as previously.[28]

With Tatarstan losing its special status and, consequently, its privileges, the use of Tatar is becoming even more associated with a nationalist agenda. The abolishment of the compulsory classes makes it seem that Tatars are losing this battle for their native language, which feeds the anxieties of being merged with Russian mainstream society. Language, together with the "traditional" religion of Tatars – Sunnī Ḥanafī Islam – are depicted as inherent and inseparable components of Tatar ethnic identity; and the struggle for the official status of the Tatar language often goes hand in hand with efforts against "non-traditional" forms of Islam spreading among the republic's population. In Tatarstan, Islamic religious settings are becoming a vehicle for language maintenance,[29] and the use of Tatar in religious contexts works as a litmus test to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Muslims; the latter, so the argument goes, show a strong preference for Russian. That is to say, if Russian takes over as the new *lingua franca* of Russia's Muslims, Tatarstani religious authorities will interpret it as a deviation from home-grown forms of Islam. This is a prime example of how ethnic/national agendas are being transformed into religious antagonisms. To prevent any further Russification of the Islamic discourse, Tatarstan has designed policies that strengthen the link between Tatar and Islam: in August 2016, Tatarstani Mufti Kamil' Samigullin issued a decree prescribing that all Friday sermons (*khuṭba*) in the republic are to be delivered exclusively in Tatar. A year later, the Tatarstani Mufti's first deputy, Rustam Batrov, even went so far as to suggest that Tatar Muslims should also be able to conduct their regular prayers (*namāz*) in Tatar, which means that any "foreign" language – whether it be Russian or Arabic – must be removed from the mosque space.[30] As Bustanov points

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[28] Radio Liberty, "Tatar Language Classes Now Optional In Tatarstan, Prosecutor Says", *Radio Liberty*, 29 November 2017 <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tatar-language-classes-optional-putin/2888-6468.html> (Accessed on 22 January 2018). There are still primary schools where education is offered completely in Tatar, but their number seems to be decreasing. See A. Faizrakhmanov, "'Shkola s tatarskim iazykom obucheniia, ne okrepnuv, prakticheski ischezla'", *Business-Online*, 13 January 2018 <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/blog/369357> (Accessed on 31 July 2018).

[29] Sibgatullina, "The role of religious institutions".

[30] L. Kharrasova, "Namazny nindi teldä ukïrga: tatarchamï, garäpchäme?", *Azatlïq radiosï*, 3 March 2017 <https://www.azatliq.org/a/28345106.html> (Accessed on 30 June 2017).

out, delivering Friday sermons in Tatar can, on the one hand, be a positive step in combatting radicalism, which is supposedly being spread by Russian-speaking Salafīs; but on the other hand, it also threatens to isolate Tatar Muslims from Russia's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual *umma*, where Russian, and no longer Tatar, is the language of communication and Islamic education. [31]

We must conclude that the Tatar language today is strongly linked to Tatar nationalism and the Tatar "traditional" forms of Islam. At the same time, Tatar has also been increasingly used in non-typical religious contexts: for instance, evangelical movements that entered Russia's religious market after the relaxation of state policies in the late 1980s have significantly contributed to the Islamic variant of Tatar being used in Christian religious settings. These movements bring with them centuries-long experience, as well as substantial financial means to produce Tatar translations of Christian Scriptures and prayers for the growing Tatar Christian communities. These translations undoubtedly contribute to reviving and enriching the linguistic repertoires of the religious Tatar language, but they also challenge the long-maintained Islamic meanings and cause Islamic symbolic power to become disassociated from Tatar. Today both Muslims *and* Christians in Tatarstan use words such as *Alla(h)* or *Xoda(y)* to refer to the Supreme Being, but this gives little evidence of ecumenical considerations or an attempt to foster Christian-Muslim dialogue. To the contrary, using Islamic terminology in the New Testament translations and preaching is often a powerful instrument in a missionary's toolkit, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

As already argued in the case of Islamic Russian (see Section 1.1.1), there is usually no single, homogeneous community that uses one particular religious language. A similar situation can be observed when we zoom in on the use of Tatar for purposes of spreading the Christian message. In addition to evangelical communities introducing Tatar as their language of worship and communication, a group of Orthodox Christian Tatars claim to have been using Christian Tatar as their native language for several centuries. These are the so-called Kräshens – a community of Tatars baptized in imperial Russia. Their dialect underwent a first process of standardization in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Orthodox Christian missionaries began to use it for prayer books and Bible translations, to furnish the Kräshens with religious literature and to avoid the imminent danger that they might "lapse back" into Islam. While some Tatar linguists regard the Kräshen language as

[31] A.K. Bustanov, "The Language of Moderate Salafism in Eastern Tatarstan," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017), 183-201. Here p. 185.

merely a dialect of Tatar,[32] for Kräshens their language is a distinctive feature of what they see as their national identity, which legitimizes their separation as an ethnic group from the majority of Muslim Tatars (as will be analysed in Chapter 7).

Case studies such as the one on Christian Tatars reveal that Soviet approaches to non-Russian ethnic groups, with their systematic (over-)attention to folkloric traditions, resulted in what Sebastien Peyrouse and Matthijs Pelkmans call the "folklorization" of religion.[33] While religion was central in establishing national identities, the understanding of religious affiliation is increasingly framed around ideas of cultural heritage. On the one hand, this means that many Tatars will claim to be Muslims even if they do not actually profess Islam, simply because Tatars as an ethno-national group are automatically associated with the specific "Tatar" Islamic tradition. On the other hand, any definition of Tatarness through religion, which in the Soviet Union was primarily based on constructed cultural meanings rather than actual theological/moral contents,[34] invites Christian denominations to offer new definitions of what it means to be a Tatar believer. By using the Tatar language in religious rituals and drawing on traditional folklore (including songs, arts and clothing), Christian denominations offer new, attractive content to redefine the concept of the "Tatar" religion. Orthodox as well as various Protestant communities engage their members by promising direct access to the Holy Scriptures (as no knowledge of Arabic is required), and offer them alternative institutional and communal affiliations; as the religious authority of official Islamic institutions in Russia is generally limited, and with Islamophobia in Russian society on the rise, such alternative religious projects that integrate ethnic components become particularly appealing.

1.2 Research questions

To summarize, what we are observing today is that both the Russian and the Tatar languages are moving toward accommodating two separate religious systems –

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[32] See, e.g., F.S. Baiazitova, *Govory tatar-kriashen v sravnitel'nom osveshchenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986); F.S. Baiazitova, *Keräshennär: tel üzenchälekläre häm yola ijatï* (Kazan: Mattbugat yortï, 1997).

[33] S. Peyrouse, "Christianity and nationality in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia: mutual intrusions and instrumentalizations," *Nationalities Papers* 32:3 (2004), 651-74; M. Pelkmans, "Introduction: Post-Soviet space and the unexpected turns of religious life", in *Conversion After Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. M. Pelkmans (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1-16.

[34] As Peyrouse argues, Islam was "inserted into a framework imposed and fully controlled by the Soviet state that aimed to exclude their dogmatic content and to preserve some of their components and ritual practices necessary to their existence. Thus, it enabled the political power to display and to instrumentalize an image of religious tolerance while excluding several religious components viewed as dangerous". See Peyrouse, "Christianity and nationality", p. 661.

both Islam and Christianity – and are thereby serving the needs of several distinctive religious communities. This is the main topic of my thesis.

My first set of research questions, which I will investigate in Parts I and II, includes the following issues: What new meanings are acquired by the vocabularies of these languages when they are used within non-typical religious settings? How do these changes affect the identities that users assign to these languages? And what is the authority that sanctions and conventionalizes these changes? The theoretical framework used to research these questions will be outlined in the next section.

Throughout my thesis, I will further apply the research results gained from this sociolinguistic analysis to study a second set of questions relating to the complex relationship between Islam, Orthodox Christianity and the state in Russia. In the context of unequal power relations between these two religions and their communities, what goals are Islam and Orthodoxy pursuing when they use each other's languages? What are the challenges they face? And finally, are Russia's Islam and Orthodox Christianity transformed when they trespass across linguistic boundaries and, if so, in what sense?

1.3 Religious language

To answer these questions, this thesis examines Islamic Russian and Christian Tatar using the same three-step approach for both. At the first level I analyse changes in the form of these languages, which involves focusing on characteristics such as vocabulary and writing system (script) that distinguish a given religious variant of a language from its non-religious counterparts. The second step is to study the meanings assigned to religious vocabulary, encompassing, for instance, the variety of connotations that the word *Allāh* has in Islamic, Orthodox Christian and Protestant contexts. Finally, the third step involves identifying the authority that sanctions the use of a specific vocabulary (or even language), leading to the analysis of the strategies used by this authority to promote and conventionalize new meanings associated with newly constructed religious vocabulary.

1.3.1 Form

From a sociolinguistic point of view, religious language (also sometimes referred to as "language of religion") is a functional variety, which can be distinguished from its non-religious counterparts by marked linguistic features at the lexical, syntactic,

phonological and stylistic levels.[35] In this thesis, I will mainly focus on the lexical level, although several case studies will also touch upon the adoption of specific scripts and orthographies. I will further concentrate on case studies where religious concepts are *fully translated* into the existing religious vocabulary. As mentioned above (Section 1.1.1), the variant of Islamic Russian to which this applies is Russianism, which mostly translates Arabic-origin Islamic terminology into Russian using Orthodox Christian vocabulary. For instance, *ḥajj* (Arabic, referring to the pilgrimage to Mecca) and *namāz* (of Persian origin, denoting the daily prayer) are rendered as *palomnichestvo* ('pilgrimage', which in Church Slavonic texts, of course, has nothing to do with Mecca) and *molitva* ('prayer', which in the Christian understanding is obviously different from the Islamic concept of five mandatory daily prayers). At the same time, however, the Islamic (Arabic/Persian) terms are also frequently used and widely known, even by non-Muslim speakers of Russian. When we analyse "Christian Tatar", the situation is the other way around: speakers use Islamic terminology within Christian contexts. Here, a telling example is the Tatar word *fatixa,* derived from the title of the first chapter of the Qurʾān (*sūrat al-Fātiḥa*), which in the new Christian context refers to 'divine blessing' (see the discussion in Section 8.3.2 Use of Arabic and Persian terms). My predominant interest is in the strategies that actors use when translating Islamic and Christian holy books, prayers, greeting formulae and standard expressions, and I examine the lexical choices made to express key religious concepts. In this respect my thesis draws on the scholarship in translation studies, which emphasizes the "cultural turn" and specifically addresses the ideological significance of the act of translation.[36] As rightly summarized by Hephzibah Israel, translation is never "ideologically neutral or transparent, but circumscribed and regulated by various forces at a given historical moment",[37] and it can challenge or reinforce the existing ideologies and power relations.

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[35] For a discussion of religious language as a functional variety, see R. Holt, "A Socio-Linguistic Approach to Religious Language," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 6 (February) (2006), 1-14; B. Hary and M.J. Wein, "Religiolinguistics: On Jewish-, Christian- and Muslim-defined languages," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2013:220 (2013), 85-108; A. Lasch and W.-A. Liebert, "Sprache und Religion", in *Handbuch Sprache und Wissen*, ed. E. Felder and A. Gardt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 475-92.

[36] S. Bassnett and A. Lefevere, *Translation, History & Culture* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990); Bassnett, "Postcolonialism and/as Translation"; also V.L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); T. Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Robinson, *Translation and Empire*.

[37] H. Israel, *Religious Transactions in Colonial South India. Language, Translation, and the Making of Protestant Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.

It is important to note that Islamic Russian and Christian Tatar are developing as we study them, and there are no standardized forms of these languages. It might be some time before the Islamic connotations of Christian concepts, or the Christian meanings of Islamic terms, enter the regular Russian or Tatar dictionary. Moreover, neither of these languages is used in just one religious context or specific community, as already argued above (Section 1.1 Languages across faith communities). Contradicting scholars who argue that religious language is "the language spoken in the religious field",[38] what we are witnessing in present-day Russia is that religious language also operates in secular contexts. And as they are used by a variety of speakers – often with competing agendas and different target audiences – it is problematic to apply terms such as "religious sociolect" and "religiolect" to one of these religious variants of a language. As examples in the following chapters will show, in the cases of Islamic Russian and Christian Tatar the religious communities that use them are extremely heterogeneous: from Islamic elites to converts to Islam, from Tatar Jehovah's Witnesses to Kräshen Orthodox churchgoers – they all claim exclusive rights to these religious languages and mark them as their identity symbols. Moreover, each speech community has its own arsenal of languages and registers, and the choices made are dependent on communication goals and audiences to be addressed.

1.3.2 Meaning

When a language accommodates two or more religious systems, a given term starts to carry multiple meanings. Consider Tatar *uraza*, a Persian loanword that in the Islamic context refers specifically to fasting in the ninth month of the Muslim calendar Ramaḍān; the same word is then also used by non-Muslims to characterize Jesus's abstention from food and water in Mt 4:2 (see Section 8.3.2 Use of Arabic and Persian terms).[39] In her work on the language of Hinduism in the United States, Rajeshwari Pandharipande points out that in such instances the multiple meanings are not mixed but are contextually determined.[40] Various sociolinguistic triggers help to structure a

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[38] H. Knoblauch, "Transzendenzerfahrung und symbolische Kommunikation. Die phänomenologisch orientierte Soziologie und die kommunikative Konstruktion der Religion", in *Religion als Kommunikation*, ed. T. Hartmann et al. (Würzburg: Ergon, 1998), 147-86. Here pp. 175-78. Also F.J.S. Wijsen, *Religious Discourse, Social Cohesion and Conflict: Studying Muslim-Christian Relations* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 144.

[39] This verse reads: "And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he [Jesus] was hungry". For the Tatar translation, see *Injil. Novyi Zavet na tatarskom iazyke* (Moscow: Institut Perevoda Biblii, 2001).

[40] R.V. Pandharipande, "Ideology, Authority, and Language Choice", in *Explorations in Sociology of Language and Religion*, ed. T. Omoniyi and J.A. Fishman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing

given discourse as, in our cases, entirely Islamic or Christian. These triggers can be hidden in the context of the discourse (e.g., a sermon in a mosque), in neighbouring lexicon (that is, in the terminology accompanying a word that can carry both Islamic and Christian meanings) or in inclusions from other religion-specific languages (e.g., Arabic greeting formulae), which have a "radiation effect"[41] and help to separate multiple meanings. For instance, when the Russian word *Bog* 'God' appears in the context of Qurʾān interpretation, it changes from being an Orthodox Christian term into a synonym of the word *Allāh*. As both Islamic Russian and Christian Tatar are in the process of development, speakers are continuing to search for "adequate" translation equivalents. In some instances, however, they may rely unduly on the sociolinguistic triggers and overstretch the discursive boundaries of semantic fields: in Chapter 3, I discuss an example where the Arabic word *mawlid,* which refers to the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, was recently translated into Russian as *Rozhdestvo Proroka*, literally meaning 'Christmas of the Prophet'; this translation variant has provoked much controversy in both Russia's Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities.

Beyond semantics, religious vocabulary and language also symbolize a variety of identities: religious, national and even political. These identities are not stable but are constantly in flux. Speakers can adjust the hierarchy of their identities according to the context and/or their target audience.[42] In the case of Islamic elites, the use of Russianism primarily marks their compliance with the state policies and the embeddedness of their interpretations of Islam in the mainstream discourse on religion (Chapter 3), while in the case of ethnic Russian converts to Islam, the same variant helps to legitimize their conversion and construct a distinctly "Russian Islam" (as will be seen in Chapter 4). Likewise, the Christian Tatar language can serve not only to manifest opposition to the mainstream Muslim Tatar community but also to reinforce a non-Russian (Turkic, Finno-Ugric) identity (Chapter 7); in other instances, however, the same language serves as a tool for Orthodox Christian proselytism and is embedded in practices of Russification, that is, helping to cultivate Russian national identity (Chapter 6).

Company, 2006), 141-64; R.V. Pandharipande, "Authenticating a Tradition in Transition: Language of Hinduism in the USA", in *The Sociology of Language and Religion: Change, Conflict and Accommodation*, ed. T. Omoniyi (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 58-83.

[41] The term was originally coined by J. Barr, "The Language of Religion", in *Science of Religion (Proceedings of the Study of the Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions)*, ed. L. Honko (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 429-41.

[42] On hierarchy of identities, see also the discussion in Pandharipande, "Ideology, Authority, and Language Choice".

1.3.3 Authority

In order to understand these transformations in form and meaning, we also need to look at the authority that has the power to introduce and sanction these changes, and the mechanisms through which the transformations are authenticated. Mainly, it is the authority with power to shape a language for a religious setting, and to label translation equivalents as "adequate" and "acceptable", or as "wrong" and "inadequate". Through the use of languages, vocabularies and expressions, new forms and meanings are established and conventionalized. This takes place in a broader political discourse on religions in Russia, which will be mapped in Chapter 2.

The source of authority varies across religions: it can be embedded in persons and institutions, in sacred writings and traditions (oral and written), and in personal experiences.[43] Although the traditional authority – of religious leaders, mystics, missionaries – continues to play an important role in authenticating the choice of a religious code, the advent of new forms of media (audio recordings, video blogs, social web platforms) contributes to the diversification of religious authority; the new forms of authority gain respect and win audiences sometimes by the very fact of being the first to use new forms of media. Video sermons, theological consultations via Skype, discussions in Facebook communities – these new means and strategies, more than traditional religious practices, are helping to construct, promote and conventionalize new religious languages.

In this thesis I elaborate on three types of authority: (1) official religious institutions and their leaders, (2) communities, and (3) individual religious entrepreneurs. The three can overlap or stand in opposition to each other. At the institutional level, the state has distinguished four religions – Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism – that it nominally considers to be equal in their right to state protection and support, and that deserve preferential treatment. For this to happen, institutions that represent these religions need to shape their agendas and identities according to "a one-size-fits-all definition that applies to all religions".[44] This definition is today encapsulated in the "traditionalism" paradigm, which differentiates between Russia's "traditional" religions – including the ROC and Islam – and their

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[43] See Pandharipande, "Authenticating a Tradition in Transition: Language of Hinduism in the USA", pp. 72-73; M. Waida, "Authority", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1987), 1-7.

[44] Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, p. 9.

"non-traditional" competitors.[45] As many observers note, this differentiation is an artificial enterprise; in the post-Soviet reality it is used to restrict religious freedom and exercise control over religious communities.[46]

In the post-Soviet period, the ROC has gained considerable political influence and it is currently the most powerful religious institution. The ROC implicitly serves as the model in terms of hierarchies, bureaucracy and alignment with the state that the other religions are supposed to emulate. As the state demands a disciplined, reliable and loyal dialogue partner, the other religious institutions follow the example of the ROC and become equally highly bureaucratic – both in their rhetoric and in terms of organizational structure, by expanding their apparatus.

The more the established religious institutions identify the state as their primary communication partner, the more they become ineffective in reaching out to religious communities and in promoting a common religious identity. This creates a fertile ground for the revival of parishes as independent communities that build new churches and provide services according to the needs of their members. This tension will be outlined in Chapter 7.

Discontent with official religious structures also reinforces the attractiveness of decentralized religious networks that challenge the links between national and religious identities. Nationality politics in the Soviet Union established close connections between religious and ethno-national categories: by and large, Orthodoxy signifies the religion of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, but also of the Chuvashes and Mordvins, whereas Islam is part of the ethnic identity of Tatars and also Bashkirs, Chechens and Avars, to mention but a few of the "Muslim" nationalities of post-Soviet Russia. My chapters on communities of ethnic Russian converts to Islam (Chapter 4) and Kräshens (Chapter 7) reveal that any alternative, non-traditional ethnicity-religion set bears in itself a protest energy; by identifying themselves as Russian Muslims or Christian Tatars, individuals willingly or unwillingly engage in a political protest against the dominant discourse on religion.

On several occasions this thesis will zoom in on individuals who establish a niche for themselves as religious authorities or opinion leaders, especially in contexts where religious leadership has so far been either absent or weak; these case studies explore the

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[45] K. Kovalskaya, "The Traditional and the Non-Traditional in the Religious Life of the Russian Federation," *Mundo Eslavo* 12 (2013), 69-78. See also the discussion in the next chapter.

[46] E.g., A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper, "Russia's Islam and Orthodoxy beyond the Institutions: Languages of Conversion, Competition and Convergence," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017), 129-39; S.E. Merati, *Muslims in Putin's Russia: Discourse on Identity, Politics, and Security* (Cham: Springer, 2017).

life paths and strategies of such religious entrepreneurs. They still operate within the official religious institutions, which gives them a certain protection from immediate prosecution, or provides them with financial backing; at the same time, however, these individuals – whether missionaries, *mullā*s or clergymen – are thinkers who operate in the margins of their respective institutions and test the limits of the mainstream discourse.

1.4 Methodological framework

Each step – the examination of the form and meaning, and of the authority that introduces and conventionalizes changes – roughly corresponds to the three levels of discourse analysis, as outlined by Norman Fairclough. These are (1) textual analysis, (2) analysis of discourse practice, and (3) analysis of social practice.[47]

Textual analysis involves studying lexical features of a text;[48] from the practical point of view, in all the case studies the term "text" is broadly defined and includes printed materials such as newspaper texts, blog posts, published speeches, and 'manufactured' data, such as interviews and video transcripts.

The second level is the examination of discourse practices: "how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text", and "how receivers of texts also apply available discourses and genres in the consumption and interpretation of the texts".[49] In this stage, the focus lies primarily on studying the links to other texts (intertextuality) and other discourses (interdiscursivity), which enables us to define the meanings assigned to religious vocabulary. It is by invoking topics, events and actors that religious vocabulary acquires new connotations and becomes associated with particular identities.[50] At this level, I examine various rhetorical and translation strategies of discourse actors and their references to dominant discourses and important texts in the respective religious communities and in Russian society in general.

Finally, the third level comprises the analysis of social practice. As argued by Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee, religious discourse can be described as "the

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[47] N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 73.; also R. Wodak and M. Meyer, *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2009).
[48] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, pp. 76–77, 185–94.
[49] M. Jørgensen and L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 69.
[50] S. Naggar, "Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in the Discourse of Muslim Televangelists: The Case Study of Hamza Yusuf," *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 6:1 (2012), 76-95. Here p. 81; T. Hjelm, "Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion," *Critical Sociology* 40:6 (2013), 855-72. Here p. 863; Wodak and Meyer, *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, p. 90.

rhetorical corollary of struggles for authority".[51] Here the analysis focuses on the social context in which this "corollary" takes place – historical, political and economic circumstances as well as profiles of actors and groups that participate in the discourse and compete for power. All three steps of analysis will be applied in each chapter, with varying focus points.

1.5 Data

In two chapters the analysis draws on two separate linguistic corpora. The corpus for Chapter 3 consists of speeches, interviews and publications by a key figure of Russia's Islamic scene, Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin; these documents are available on the official websites of Islamic organizations represented by the Mufti. Chapter 4 analyses a set of fifty conversion narratives published online by Russian converts to Islam. More detailed information on the collection and analysis of the data is given in the respective chapters. Information about the content of these corpora can be found in the two Appendices at the end of the thesis.

Chapter 8 compares lexical choices made in the New Testament translations in Tatar. Two of the three analysed books are available in digital form on the websites of the organizations that produced these translations. The third book was provided by the head of the Kräshen translation team during my field trip to Tatarstan in 2016.

Broadly defined, the focus of this thesis is discourse on religion, which is in constant change and transformation. In addition to the traditional scholarly literature available in books and articles, the Internet is an indispensable tool and a valuable source of information, recording ongoing developments and new actors that enter this discourse. Fast accessibility of information and the possibility of interaction with social actors allow researchers to conduct what Jannis Androutsopoulos refers to as "discourse-centred online ethnography". This approach combines "the systematic observation of selected sites of online discourse with direct contact with its […] actors".[52] During data collection and analysis I have frequently consulted online media sources – both mainstream outlets (websites of information agencies and newspapers, such as *Interfax*, *Novaia Gazeta*) and less prominent ones (sites that target specific audiences, e.g. the ultra-conservative Orthodox platform *Russkaia narodnaia liniia*).

[51] N. Green and M. Searle-Chatterjee, "Religion, Language, and Power: an Introductory Essay", in *Religion, Language, and Power*, ed. N. Green and M. Searle-Chatterjee (New York: Routledge, 2008). Here pp. 11-12.

[52] J. Androutsopoulos, "Potentials and Limitations of Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography," *Language @ Internet* 5 (2008). Available at <http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2008/1610> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

Additionally, blogging platforms, such as *LiveJournal,* the social networking services *Facebook* and its Russian alternative *Vkontakte*, and video hosting sites, such as *YouTube*, not only served as data sources but also allowed me to establish contacts with my research participants.

I also gathered a large amount of data during periods of fieldwork in Russia in 2015-2017, where I conducted interviews with members of Christian and Muslim communities, with religious leaders, scholars and translators. I gained further valuable insights from participant observation in religious rituals of communities studied in this thesis.

1.6 Outline of chapters

After this first, introductory chapter, Chapter 2, which is of a general nature, explores the variety and limits of the discourse on religions in contemporary Russia, and thus establishes the field in which the current work is situated. The goal is to give a broad overview of the various contributors to that discourse. The chapter introduces the major Orthodox and Islamic establishments, and also the respective fringes and those operating beyond the large confessional bureaucracies. Here I denote the "mainstream" discourse on religions in Russia, and reveal the tensions inherent in this concept. Any such enterprise must by definition reduce the complexity of the issue, and my reason for taking the risk is that this approach offers an explanatory matrix-shaped paradigm for situating various trends, within both Orthodoxy and Islam. The discussion in this chapter is therefore a kind of propedeuticum for readers who are interested in the political relevance of the sociolinguistic case studies that follow.

While Chapter 2 thus covers both Islam and Christian Orthodoxy from a political discourse perspective, with the state as a major bridge between the two confessions, the subsequent six chapters focus on case studies from either Islam or Orthodoxy. These chapters are organized in two parts: Part I (Chapters 3-5) studies the Russian language of Islam, while Part II (Chapters 6-8) presents case studies on the Christian use of the Tatar language.

Part I

The first chapter of Part I (Chapter 3) explores linguistic and rhetorical strategies of an Islamic official who operates at the federal level and claims the leadership of Russia's entire Muslim community: Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin, chair of the Moscow-based Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF) and also chair of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR). I focus on the sociolinguistic practices of the

Moscow Muftiate, and analyse strategies of "borrowing" Christian terms. The analysis reveals a close resemblance between the lexical choices and argumentation of Gainutdin and those of the ROC Patriarch; the use of Russianism here signals the Mufti's embeddedness in Russia's mainstream discourse on religion and his attempt to comply with the state's domestic and foreign politics. I will demonstrate that the DUM RF leadership offers an interpretation of Russia's Islam, which they themselves define as *Rossiiskoe Musul'manstvo* (lit. 'Russia's Islam/Muslimness').

Chapter 4 shows that the Russianism variant is not only used and standardized from the official top, by the Tatar Islamic elites of Russia's Muftiates: I examine conversion narratives of ethnic Russian Muslims, and argue that converts use vocabulary that is similar to Mufti Gainutdin's, although carrying different meanings. These "new" Muslims employ the Russian language to nationalize Islam; that is, by using Russian that is free of Arabic and Persian loanwords, the converts construct the new *russkii* Islam – more "rational", "pure" and "noble" than the "Islams" of ethnic minorities and Muslim labour migrants living in Russia.

The last chapter of Part I (Chapter 5) is on Viacheslav Polosin, a former Orthodox priest who, after converting to Islam, attempted to occupy an alternative niche of theologically educated and non-systemic Islamic authority. In this chapter I trace the evolution of his interpretation of Russia's/Russian Islam and his use of the Russian language to endorse his projects. Polosin became popular among Russia's Muslims in the early 2000s, initially as an outspoken critic of the Church and the state; within a decade, however, he made his way into Russia's institutionalized Islam and became a mediator between the political elites and major Islamic officials in Russia's regions. This indicates how Polosin's initially marginal views – a definition of Russian Islam that combines elements from both DUM RF and the ethnic Russian converts' rhetoric – gradually became mainstream, in competition with but also closely following the increasingly conservative Church and state agenda.

Part II

The second part of the thesis also consists of three chapters, which present case studies on the Tatar language as used for Christianity.

Chapter 6 analyses texts and speeches by another religious entrepreneur, Orthodox Christian missionary Daniil Sysoev. Reproducing strategies of Orthodox missionaries from the imperial period of Russian history, Sysoev primarily targeted Muslim minorities in the Volga-Ural region, whom he tried to convert to Orthodoxy, but also Muslim migrants in Russia's big cities: together with his disciples, Sysoev

translated religious literature, proselytized on the streets and organized trips to Muslims villages. Like Viacheslav Polosin, Sysoev operated on the fringe of the religious institution, in his case, the ROC. Sysoev was truly the ROC's *enfant terrible*, whose aggressive proselytism strategies ran counter to the rather weak missionary policies of the ROC, although the Church did not in fact denounce him. After the priest was assassinated (arguably by a Muslim extremist) in 2009, the ROC came to adopt some of Sysoev's standpoints and even suggested that he should be canonized. As I will show in this chapter, Sysoev envisioned and pushed the boundaries of the ROC toward a more assertive, and even aggressive modus operandi.

Chapter 7 puts a spotlight on the Orthodox Christian community of Kräshens in Tatarstan, who use a variant of Tatar standardized by the imperial missionaries whose tactics Sysoev tried to reintroduce. Today Kräshen nationalists present this language as a marker of a distinct Kräshen ethnic identity, and as evidence of their own historical and cultural path, which parted from that of Muslim Tatars. This struggle for recognition as an ethnic minority takes place against the background of Tatarstan's attempt to maintain a favourable relationship with Moscow: in this power game, the "Kräshen issue" has become an element of Moscow's political leverage on the (predominantly "Muslim") Tatarstani authorities. This places the Kräshens in a difficult political and historical situation, because for Tatar ("Muslim") elites, the common Tatar community is cherished against a historically uneasy relationship with the dominant Russian state. At the same time, the majority of Kräshens see the revival of their language primarily as an attempt to resist amalgamation into either Muslim Tatar or Russian Christian national communities, and thus as an expression of their emancipation from both.

Chapter 8 compares three recently completed translations of the New Testament into Tatar and traces denomination-specific lexical choices: one of the translations explicitly targets Orthodox Christian Tatar readers, while another addresses Tatar-speaking Jehovah's Witnesses; the third translation was presented as a denomination-neutral translation, made in cooperation with an international organization, the United Bible Societies. In all three cases, I focus on new Christian meanings assigned to Arabic vocabulary that in Tatar often has strong Islamic connotations. This strategy, I argue, helps to produce more natural and easily understood texts; and whereas some translation teams describe their goal as to merely introduce Tatar readers to the Bible – as an important "part of the world's literary heritage" – in the hands of Orthodox and evangelical Christian missionaries, these texts become a tool of successful proselytism.

The religion that these missionaries promote is thus Christian in content, but Tatar in form, which makes the "non-standard" religious affiliation more palatable.

All the case studies therefore have a common linguistic axis: they are grouped into Part I, which analyses Islamic Russian, and Part II, which discusses Christian Tatar. The two parts also have another common thread, related to the preceding discussion of the general religious discourse (Chapter 2) and concerning types of authority that sanction linguistic change. That is, each part looks at how official religious elites and organizations (Chapters 3 and 8), in-between communities (Chapters 4 and 7) and, finally, charismatic individuals (Chapters 5 and 6) exercise their influence to introduce new forms and meanings into religious language. Part I studies these phenomena by starting with the official elites and going down to the grassroots; Part II takes the opposite direction by beginning with a fringe movement and then moving up to the translation projects of major organizations.

At the conceptual level, the focus of this thesis is on translation. In the narrow sense, this means that throughout the chapters I look at how the translation of religious concepts and terms from one language into another serves as a tool to claim and exert religious and political authority by emphasizing or concealing cultural "foreignness", and challenging or reinforcing existing power hierarchies. In a broader sense, I examine how not only terms but also religious knowledge, identities and narratives are "translated" and moved across religions. This point of view entails that most chapters raise questions of mission and religious conversion from and to Orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism and other faiths. These transitions affect the present-day relationship between spiritual communities as well as the interaction with the state and the construction of ethnic and national identities.

By and large, the chapters of this thesis scrutinize the variety of voices in the two biggest and most influential religious communities in present-day Russia. Muslim and Orthodox Christian voices may challenge and jeopardize, or conversely strengthen and contribute to Russia's mainstream discourse on religion. How do we define this mainstream discourse? Who are its key gatekeepers that try to protect it from re-interpretation? And how strong are those who offer alternative meanings and strive to change the current state of affairs? These issues will be raised in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Mapping the Discourse on Religion in Russia

This chapter gives an overview of the discourse on religion in Russia. Here I identify the "mainstream" discourse that is produced and maintained by the state and the major Orthodox and Islamic establishments. The chapter also explores fringes and those operating beyond the large confessional bureaucracies in both Islam and Orthodox Christianity that challenge the authority of the mainstream. The goal of this chapter is to provide a background for situating the various trends that I will discuss in the case studies that follow in Parts I and II of this thesis.

2.1 Introduction

According to its constitution, the Russian Federation is a secular state, which allows no state religion, yet the relationship between the political and religious elites is closer than the formal status suggests. The socio-political transition in the post-Soviet period allowed renewed participation of religion in the public space, which provided the ROC and the Muftiates at both central and republican levels with a significant influence over public discourses and moral and ethical frameworks.[1] Religion has become a matter of public and political discussion, a factor seen as relevant to Russia's development and prosperity. Various actors employ religious arguments: in political speeches and documents that praise Orthodox Christianity as Russia's "spiritual shield"; in *fatwā*s that impose codes of conduct for the country's Muslims; in newspaper articles that lash out at hours-long queues in the centre of Moscow to see holy relics; or in video blogs that encourage *ḥalāl* business models. This discourse on religion is in constant flux, and its malleable boundaries mean that it easily establishes connections to other public discourses.

The core of the discourse on religion is shaped by the state and adjacent official religious institutions that represent Russia's "traditional" religions. The state defines four of them – Orthodox Christianity and Islam as the biggest players, together with Judaism and Buddhism.[2] The respective official religious bureaucracies receive significant political and financial backing, which amplifies their voices and allows them to shape the agenda of the mainstream media.

2.2 Russia's "traditional" Islam and Christianity vis-à-vis the state

The institutions that represent the state, the ROC and Russia's Islam, find themselves in complex relations of collaboration and competition. Yet neither of them is a univocal and homogeneous establishment; rather, they embody a kaleidoscopic combination of actors and factions that offer varying, at times conflicting opinions on religious and political issues.

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[1] See A. Agadjanian, "Exploring Russian Religiosity as a Source of Morality Today", in *Multiple moralities and religions in post-Soviet Russia*, ed. J. Zigon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 16-24; K. Stöckl, "The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur," *Religion, State and Society* 44:2 (2016), 132-51.

[2] For the discussion on how the linguistic construction "Russia's traditional confessions" came into existence, see A. Verkhovsky, "The State Against Violence in Spheres Related to Religion", in *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy*, ed. O. Oliker (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 11-42.

If we take a closer look at the political regime under President Vladimir Putin, we will find several major streams, or what Marlène Laruelle refers to as "ideological ecosystems".[3] Each of the "ecosystems" comprises "specific institutions, funders, patrons, identifiable symbolic references, ideological entrepreneurs, and media platforms"; all of this makes the politico-religious regime a fragmented collection of competing ideologies.[4]

While the state does not proclaim full support for one particular view on the function of religion in post-Soviet society, it often refers to religion in official concepts of state policy.[5] Moreover, the "traditional" Orthodox Christianity and Islam are instruments with which the political elites can regulate interethnic and interreligious tensions and control religious activity in the country. The paradigm of "traditional religions" propagated by the state bears many similarities to imperial and Soviet styles of administering religion. It entails the empowerment of institutionalized religious authorities who are supposed "to limit or silence the expression and practice of alternative views and experiences" that may pose a threat to the dominant political system.[6]

As of 2018, the position of the ROC regarding the state is definitely stronger than at the beginning of the century: the increased support for Orthodoxy in political circles has reinforced the ROC's legal position and its profile in Russian society. The ideological mouthpiece of the ROC is the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus', who articulates its agenda and acts as the negotiation partner with the state. Whereas the former Patriarch Aleksii II (Ridiger, 1929-2008) was strongly influenced by the Russian émigré community and adhered, at least rhetorically, to the principle of separating state and Church affairs, the current Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev, b. 1946) was shaped by the Soviet system and since his enthronement has used his experience in speaking to the state to push forward the political agenda of the ROC. As a large and multifaceted establishment, the ROC leadership is theologically conservative and politically loyal to the state. In the 2000s, the Moscow Patriarchate issued several documents that

[3] M. Laruelle, "The Kremlin's Ideological Ecosystems: Equilibrium and Competition", *PONARS*, Policy Memo 493, 2017 <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/kremlins-ideological-ecosystems-equilibrium-and-competition> (Accessed on 19 January 2018).

[4] Ibid.

[5] A.C. Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy: Keeping God on Our Side* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

[6] Bustanov and Kemper, "Russia's Islam and Orthodoxy beyond the Institutions", p. 131.

developed the ROC's position on a variety of socio-cultural issues;[7] the Church has a say in various issues significant to Russia's domestic and foreign policies,[8] including, but not limited to social challenges,[9] the observation of human rights,[10] and the role of religion in the construction of the national identity.[11] In return, the state backs the ROC policy of *votserkovlenie* (literally 'in-churching'), which involves a rapid expansion of religion into the spheres of private and public life, with the ROC naturally having the casting vote. This includes pastoral care in the army, in hospitals and in prisons, as well as religious education in schools.[12] However, despite major achievements (including the restitution of Church property confiscated by the Bolsheviks), in the long run the Church's relationship with the state remains unstable, as policy in both institutions is overly dependent on the personality of the executive.[13]

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[7] ROC, "The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church", *The website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2000 <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/> (Accessed on 5 July 2017); ROC, "The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights", *The website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2008 <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/> (Accessed on 5 July 2017).

[8] See, e.g., J. Anderson, "Religion, State and 'Sovereign Democracy' in Putin's Russia," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2:2 (2016), 249-66; G. Fagan, *Believing in Russia: Religious Policy after Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2012); B. Knorre, "Rossiiskoe pravoslavie. Postsekuliarnaia institutsionalizatsia v prostranstve vlasti, politiki i prava", in *Montazh i demontazh sekuliarnogo mira*, ed. A. Malashenko and S. Filatov (Moscow: Carnegie Centre, ROSSPEN, 2014), 43-102.

[9] See, for instance, A.D. Krindatch, "Changing Relationships Between Religion, the State, and Society in Russia," *GeoJournal* 67 (2006), 267-82; Z. Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2009); I. Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011); K. Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[10] E.g., K. Stöckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights* (Routledge, 2014).

[11] Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gifts"; A. Verkhovsky, "Ideologiia patriarkha Kirilla, metody ee prodvizheniia i ee vozmozhnoe vliianie na samosoznanie Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi", *Sova*, 17 October 2012 <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2012/10/d25570/> (Accessed on 30 June 2017); G. Evans and K. Northmore-Ball, "The Limits of Secularization? The Resurgence of Orthodoxy in Post-Soviet Russia," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51:4 (2012), 795-808.

[12] The ROC actively lobbied for the full integration of religious instruction into the state school curriculum, which was approved in 2010-2012, see V. Zhdanov, "Religious Education as a Compulsory Subject in Russian Public Schools", in *Religious Education in a Global-Local World*, ed. J. Berglund et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 135-43. The Moscow Office for Human Rights criticized the textbooks designed for the course as "catechetical" and biased against religions other than Orthodox Christianity; see Portal-Credo, "Ekspertnoe zakliuchenie Moskovskogo biuro po pravam cheloveka na kompleksnyi uchebnyi kurs 'osnovy religioznykh kul'tur i svetskoi etiki'", *Portal-Credo*, 13 April 2010 <https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=77269> (Accessed on 15 January 2018).

[13] I. Papkova, "Russian Orthodox Concordat? Church and State under Medvedev," *Nationalities Papers* 39:5 (2011), 667-83; Laruelle, "The Kremlin's Ideological Ecosystems".

The majority of Russia's Muslims are Sunnīs and adhere to either the Ḥanafī school of Islamic law (in the Volga and Urals region, Siberia, Crimea and the Northwest Caucasus) or the Shāfiʿī school of Islamic law (in parts of Dagestan as well as Chechnya and Ingushetia). Sufi Islam – primarily represented by the Naqshbandiyya, Shādhiliyya and Qādiriyya orders – continues to be important in the Northeast Caucasus (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia), and plays a minor role in the Volga region. Since 1985, following increased internal migration of Russia's Muslims and the spread of Islamic trends and schools from abroad, the Islamic scene has become exceptionally complex, with many groups and trends that eschew control by the regional Muftiates.

Whereas the ROC is a unified body with a clear hierarchy, Russia's Islam is highly fragmented. There are about eighty Muftiates (Spiritual Directorates of Muslims; Russian singular *Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man*, DUM) with competing agendas and overlapping geographical coverage.[14] The older generation of religious authorities who today head "the profusion of Muftiates" after the collapse of the Soviet Union are mostly graduates of the Soviet state-administered Mir-i 'Arab Madrasa in Bukhara – one of the only two centres of Islamic religious education that operated in the USSR.[15] This generation also includes the heads of the major DUMs at the federal level, who claim to represent Russia's entire Muslim community.

Chapter 3 will discuss one of them – Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin (b. 1959), the chairman of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation (DUM RF)[16] and the Council of Muftis of Russia (*Sovet muftiev Rossii*, SMR) in Moscow. Gainutdin's major competitor has been Talgat Tadzhuddin (b. 1948), head of the Central Muftiate (with regional affiliates) in Ufa (*Tsentral'noe dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man*, TsDUM). In recent years, however, Tadzhuddin seems to have lost his political clout, which does not, however, immediately make Gainutdin the leader of Russia's Muslims. The latter's position continues to be jeopardized by other competitors, as well as by contesting groups within his "own" DUM RF, especially the young generation.[17]

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[14] On the Islamic scene in Russia, see A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper, *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Sibiria* (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012); G. Yemelianova, "Muslim-State Relations in Russia", in *Muslim Minority-State Relations: Violence, Integration, and Policy*, ed. R. Mason (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 107-32; Merati, *Muslims in Putin's Russia*.

[15] The other institution was the *madrasa* Baraq-Khan in Tashkent (operating from 1956 until 1961). See A.J. Frank, *Bukhara and the Muslims of Russia: Sufism, Education, and the Paradox of Islamic Prestige* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 187.

[16] Prior to 2014, it was called DUMER, *Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Evropeiskoi chasti Rossii* (the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of European Russia).

[17] See Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?".

In addition to the major federal networks, there are many republican Muftiates/DUMs that largely depend on the political administrations of the regions where they operate (especially in the republics of the North Caucasus, in Siberia and the Volga-Ural region). An example of such structures – also to be frequently mentioned in this thesis – is the DUM of the Republic of Tatarstan (*Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Respubliki Tatarstan*, DUM RT) in Kazan, which is closely connected to the leadership of the republic. Since 2013, a young Tatar Mufti associated with Turkish Sufi orders, Kamil' Samigullin (b. 1985), has occupied the chairman's office.

Historically, since the establishment of the imperial Muftiate in 1788 by Catherine the Great, the state-backed Islamic leaders have been expected to follow the blueprint of the ROC. This model seriously limits the room for manoeuvre even for major figureheads such as Gainutdin, let alone regional Muftis. Like the ROC, which presents Orthodox Christianity as the protector of Russia's "traditional values", the leaders of the DUMs also try to define "patriotic", "national" forms of Islam.[18] The "traditionalism paradigm", as Bustanov and Kemper refer to it, requires a strong methodological differentiation between a non-registered, "non-official", "imported", "dangerous" and therefore "bad" Islam, on the one hand, and the "traditional" (home-grown) and officially registered, that is, "good" Islam on the other.[19] For the Russian state, this instrumentalization of Islam through vague categories of the "traditional" Islam and its opposites provides tools for legitimizing state control over religious affairs; Islamic groups and movements that practise their faith outside the state-sponsored religious institutions are often depicted as pseudo-Islamic or even as radical and therefore criminal. In the mainstream discourse (and frequently also in the discourse of the state-supported Muftiates), "non-traditional" Islamic groups and trends are often subsumed under the labels of "Salafism" and "Wahhabism", which are

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[18] The term "traditional values" remains vague and open to interpretation, but there is a consensus, at least within the ROC and among prominent representatives of Islam, that "traditional values" are in fact religious values. See I. du Quenoy and D. Dubrovskiy, "Violence and the Defense of 'Traditional Values' in the Russian Federation", in *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy*, ed. O. Oliker (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 93-116; also Section 3.4.2 of this thesis.

[19] A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper, "Valiulla Iakupov's Tatar Islamic Traditionalism," *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft* 67:3 (2013), 809-35. Here p. 818. A strong sense of obligation to maintain the traditions of forefathers is a broader post-Soviet phenomenon that is characteristic not only of Russia, but also of the Muslim-majority republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

synonymous for violent religious extremism and believed to have been "imported" from the Arab World, Iran or Turkey.[20]

The Islamic elites attached to the major Muftiates attempt to contextualize Islam in the mainstream discourse by presenting their interpretation of Islam as an inherent part of Russia's civilization and glorious history. To do so, they often refer to safely distant historical narratives; for instance, they depict the Golden Horde not as the enslaver of Russia but as its protector; emphasize the role of Tatars in Russia's victory over Polish invaders in the early seventeenth century; and, of course, praise the Muslim contribution to the defence of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany.[21]

That the ROC functions as a model for the new Islamic religious bureaucracies can also be seen from the linguistic strategies employed by the Muftiates in communicating with the Russian state and their efforts to restrain adversaries and obtain leverage over regional authorities. Striking examples are official statements by Muftis who *defrock* (*lishat' dukhovnogo sana*) and expel undesirable *imām*s for heresy.[22] But regional Muftiates can also use ROC jargon to defy republican leaders who pressurize them into conformity, as recently witnessed in Ingushetia, where the Muftiate officially *excommunicated* President Yunus-bek Evkurov, who broke a taboo by trying to establish a dialogue with Islamic oppositionists.[23]

The state, the ROC and major DUMs construct what I refer to as the mainstream discourse on religion; the correlation between these three bodies is shown in Figure 1.[24] The state remains the leading force that indicates to the religious institutions the direction into which the discourse should be expanded; the second biggest actor is the ROC, which stays in close proximity to the state and to a large extent shares the goals

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[20] A. Knysh, "A Clear and Present Danger: 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil," *Die Welt des Islams* 44:1 (2004), 3-26; R. Dannreuther, "Russian discourses and approaches to Islam and Islamism", in *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, ed. R. Dannreuther and L. March (London: Routledge, 2010), 9-25.

[21] G. Sibgatullina and M. Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox: Islamic Eurasianism in Contemporary Russia", in *Eurasianism and the Russian World*, ed. K. Kaminskij et al. (Budapest: Central European University Press, Forthcoming).

[22] See, e.g., Mufti Gainutdin's official letter on the dismissal of *imām* Arslan Sadriev: DUM RF, "Muftii sheikh Ravil' Gainutdin lishil dukhovnogo sana Arslana Sadrieva", *The official website of the DUM RF*, 11 June 2017 <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/event/12483> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[23] On the conflict between the head of Ingushetia, Yunus-Bek Evkurov, and the leadership of the local Muftiate, see I. Reprintseva, "Vlasti Ingushetii nazvali provokatsiei otluchenie Evkurova ot musul'manskoi obshchiny", *Novaia Gazeta*, 28 May 2018 <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2018/-05/28/142030-vlasti-ingushetii-nazvali-provokatsiey-otluchenie-evkurova-ot-musulmanskoy-obschiny> (Accessed on 29 May 2018).

[24] Figure 1 merely shows the state of affairs in a schematic way. No further conclusions should be drawn on the basis of this figure regarding the actual size of discourse participants.

of the state. However, they do not always have the same agenda and collaboration depends on the benefits they might gain from cooperating with each other. Finally, the official Islamic establishments – represented by "DUMs" in Figure 1 – are in the position of the "younger brother" to the ROC, which forces them to follow the ROC discourse, albeit with Islamic arguments, references and symbols. Occasionally, the Patriarchate and major Muftiates make alliances to pursue common goals, but as Islam's prominence in the public sphere is growing, and the Muslim population of Russia expanding, tension and competition between the two religious bureaucracies is also increasing.[25] In the present thesis, this will be discussed in the case of missionary work "among the other's flock" and the growing role of converts (see Chapters 4, 6 and 7 in particular).

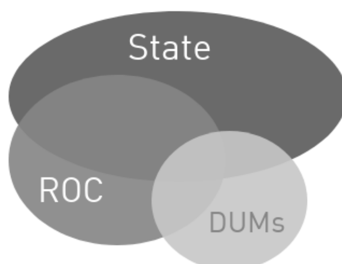

Figure 1. Gatekeepers of the mainstream discourse on religion

It is important to note that the mainstream discourse does not correspond to what a Western observer might expect to see at the centre of the political spectrum: since the 2000s, Russia's mainstream discourse has gradually been shifting toward the political right, making a conservative agenda, including opposition to "Western" liberal freedoms, the new standard. Alternative voices within both Orthodox Christianity and Islam, which I will discuss further in this chapter, remain on the fringes. This does not mean that the traditionalism paradigm manages to silence and stifle all alternative, "non-traditional" voices; to the contrary, the mainstream discourse is constantly challenged by other participants and sometimes has to adjust under their pressure. On the one hand, these participants find themselves in a "systemic opposition" to the official political and religious institutions; they may challenge the ways and tools to achieve the goals of the institutions involved but not their existence and course. One example here is the right wing within the ROC, which pushes the Church's agenda

[25] See A.C. Curanović, "Relations between the Orthodox Church and Islam in the Russian Federation," *Journal of Church and State* 52:3 (2010), 503-39.

toward a fundamentalist stance. On the other hand, the manufacturers of the mainstream discourse are also confronted with social actors who operate outside of the official political establishments and aim at total transformation of the dominant system. In general, the presence of the ultra-conservative and fundamentalist margins is tolerated or even encouraged – because for the state and official religious institutions, they serve as trial balloons sent out to test the public reaction to proposals that would change the status quo and increase religious discipline, as well as the influence of religion on politics. In contrast, the groups operating outside of the institutions are often demonized or even prosecuted, as they threaten the authority of the discourse gatekeepers. In fact, self-propelled religious entrepreneurs at the grassroots level – especially if endowed with religious charisma and equipped with new media technologies – form a serious challenge to the heavy-handed bureaucratic machines; the latter are often perceived as incapable of accommodating the needs of a modern believer, notwithstanding all their money and connections to the mainstream media and the power-holders.

In both Islam and Orthodox Christianity, it is possible to distinguish at least three side streams that operate alongside the mainstream line, each varying in power and public outreach. In Orthodox Christianity, which I will discuss in the next section, these are monarchists, fundamentalists and liberals. For Islam (Section 2.4), the various groups that oppose the central lines must be analysed at a regional level, as in the case of the republic of Tatarstan, where the Islamic establishment comprises traditionalists, nationalists and moderate Salafī groups.

2.3 The many faces of Russia's Orthodox Christianity

2.3.1 Monarchists

The term "monarchists" here refers to individuals and organizations that advocate Russian nationalism, monarchism and religious traditionalism. They can be labelled as ultra-conservatives, and attack the political status quo in Russia, which in fact makes their agendas revolutionary. Militant and inflammatory in character, their contributions to the discourse on religion constantly provoke public reactions; their views challenge the carefully designed "centralist" position of the ROC leadership without openly opposing the Church hierarchy. This means that they have the potential to push the ROC leadership further to the right of the political spectrum.

This camp includes, first of all, the contemporary conservative intellectual thinking that sympathizes with Russia's imperial and Soviet past and aims to "create a

new mythology of the empire that would be able to mobilize the country and its people in a new historical situation", with clear messianistic elements that have a long tradition in Russia.[26] Drawing on the symbolic power of Orthodox Christianity, these politico-religious movements *instrumentalize* religion primarily to attract support and may have no deep connections with Orthodoxy in the first place. By and large, the ideas proposed by these ultra-conservative thinkers manifest a peculiar blend of anti-Western, anti-liberal standpoints mixed with militaristic and apocalyptical rhetoric. One case in point is the ideology of "Nuclear Orthodoxy" propagated by journalist Egor Kholmogorov (b. 1975), who justifies the use of nuclear weapons as a means to protect "Orthodox civilization", hence Russia, against the pernicious influence of the West; both the atom bomb and Orthodox Christianity, according to Kholmogorov, are Russia's main "shields" to protect the moral, political and physical safety of the country.[27] Whereas previously only marginal groups openly exploited Russia's "red" military past and glorified the Soviet Union, now also key figures of the ROC establishment do not shy away from expressing such political views. Kholmogorov's ideas, for instance, resonate with those of Vsevolod Chaplin (b. 1968), who in 2009-2015 served as the head of the Church's department for cooperation with society. In Chaplin's mind, a "nuclear apocalypse" is not only inevitable, but even necessary, as it could be an easy-to-implement measure to free Russia's big cities from what he considers to be malevolent liberal movements,[28] meaning the middle-class population of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg who demonstrate their opposition to the current political structures. Curiously, Chaplin combines "red" standpoints with elements of the "white" ideology, that is, Tsarist Orthodox ideas. For him, Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 and the continuing conflict in eastern Ukraine are "holy wars"; they are no less than a civilizational struggle between "Holy Orthodox Russia" and the overly-secularized, morally decadent West.[29]

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[26] M. Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35:3 (2014), 356-79. Here p. 358; A. Verkhovsky, *Politicheskoe pravoslavie: Russkie pravoslavnye natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995-2001* (Moscow: Sova, 2003); A. Mitrofanova, "Russian Ethnic Nationalism and Religion Today", in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. P. Kolstø and H. Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 104–31.

[27] Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism", pp. 368-69.

[28] E.g., B. Knorre, "The Culture of War and Militarization within Political Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet Region," *Transcultural Studies* 12:1 (2016), 15-38.

[29] P. Coyer, "(Un)Holy Alliance: Vladimir Putin, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Exceptionalism", *Forbes*, 21 May 2015 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/05/21/unholy-alliance-vladimir-putin-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/#3ba852ff27d5> (Accessed on 4 July 2017).

This paradoxical trend of combining the "red" (Soviet) and "white" (imperial Orthodox) elements is also visible in disputes about canonization and sainthood. Since the enthronement of Patriarch Aleksii in 1991, the ROC has initiated a large-scale project of canonizing "New Martyrs", that is, Orthodox Christians murdered by the communist regime; as of 2015, the ROC canonized 1,776 new martyrs, including the family of the last emperor of Russia, Tsar Nikolai II.[30] Although mass canonizations to some extent characterize the general conservative orientation of the ROC, there are also subgroups that stretch the boundaries to the extreme and even argue for the canonization of controversial political figures, such as Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584) and Joseph Stalin (1922-1952). In 2015 the Izborsk Club (*Izborskii klub*), a "conservative Orthodox impulse with reactionary communist elements",[31] commissioned an icon that portrays Stalin – albeit without a nimbus, but standing beneath the Virgin Mary – flanked by Soviet field marshals. The icon was presented to the public by the Club's director, Aleksandr Prokhanov (b. 1938), who stressed that Russia's World War II victory is sacred, as it symbolizes "the triumph of the saints over hell", [32] and Stalin's almost divinely inspired contribution to this success should not be underestimated. Moreover, not only prominent political figures are becoming newly invented saints, but also ordinary soldiers, like Evgenii Rodionov (1977-1996), who was imprisoned by Chechen rebels and later executed in captivity. Likewise, the drowned seamen of the sunken Kursk submarine have been proposed for glorification. [33] These are all attempts to directly connect the cult of war heroes with the tradition of Orthodox holiness, and they are undertaken not only by extravagant publicists but also by some high-ranking officials, such as the incumbent Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii (b. 1970).

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[30] K. Hyldal Christensen, *The Making of the New Martyrs of Russia: Soviet Repression in Orthodox Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 5.

[31] B. Noordenbos, *Post-Soviet Literature and the Search for a Russian Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), p. 176.

[32] The Moscow Times, "Religious Icon Depicting Stalin Elicits Outrage in Russia", *The Moscow Times*, 18 June 2015 <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/religious-icon-depicting-stalin-elicits-outrage-in-russia-47496> (Accessed on 3 July 2017).

[33] Engström, "Contemporary Russian Messianism", p. 366; P.-A. Bodin, *Language, Canonization and Holy Foolishness: Studies in Postsoviet Russian Culture and the Orthodox Tradition* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2009); B. Knorre, "Dvizhenie za kanonizatsiiu Ivana Groznogo i pravoslavno-monarkhicheskii tsezarizm", in *Religiia i rossiiskoe mnogoobrazie*, ed. S.B. Filatov (Saint Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 2011), 503-28; A. Arkhipova, "Stalin bez stalinizma", *InLiberty*, 29 June 2017 <http://www.in-liberty.ru/blog/2616-Stalin-bez-stalinizma> (Accessed on 31 July 2017) On the canonization of new martyrs from the Soviet and post-Soviet Church clergy, see also K. Tolstaya and P. Versteeg, "Inventing a Saint: Religious Fiction in Post-Communist Russia," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion 82:1 (2014), 70–119*, and Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Responding to media reports suggesting that legendary Soviet war heroes were merely a "fiction", Medinskii stated: "[We should treat] epic Soviet heroes […] as the Church treats its canonized saints",[34] thus making them part of the new, post-Soviet mythology, which should be immune to critical examination and discontent.

Despite shared conservative elements – ethnic-nationalism, Russian imperialism, Orthodoxy and anti-Western rhetoric – the official discourse gatekeepers resist extremist narratives. The monarchists, although prominent in the Russian media, remain at the political fringe. Even against the background of a rising positive reinterpretation of the Soviet past, the propagation of Joseph Stalin's sainthood is still regarded as far-fetched and clearly beyond the bounds of possibility: the Kremlin, as Thomas Sherlock argues, is "unwilling to develop and impose on society historical narratives which promote chauvinism, hypernationalism, and re-Stalinization".[35] Those who do advocate these ideas risk at least being labelled as right-wing political eccentrics; if one crosses a vaguely defined red line, the danger of falling into political disgrace is grave. This is what happened, for instance, to Kirill's close aid and ROC spokesperson Vsevolod Chaplin, who was sacked from his crucial position within the ROC in December 2015 after calling for the Church and the Russian government to take a more active role in the conflict in east Ukraine.[36]

2.3.2 Fundamentalists

While the official ROC hierarchy tries to be politically correct in dealing with other "traditional" religious communities – *inter alia* by promoting interreligious dialogue and abstaining from active proselytism policies – there is a strong fundamentalist wing within the Church that puts pressure on the Patriarchate to adopt a tougher stance. This wing demands the Church's pro-active involvement with mission, entailing punishment for anyone who deviates from the ROC-proclaimed "traditional values", such as the rejection of abortion and homosexuality. In relation to other religious groups, including non-Orthodox Christian denominations, the

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[34] Medinskii here refers to the prominent myths that symbolize heroism of Soviet people in protecting their motherland – the stories on the Young Guards, Panfilov's guardsmen and Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia. See BBC, "Medinskii: somnevaiushchiesia v podvigakh panfilovtsev budut goret' v adu", *BBC*, 26 November 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/russian/news-38117988> (Accessed on 3 July 2017).

[35] T. Sherlock, "Russian politics and the Soviet past: Reassessing Stalin and Stalinism under Vladimir Putin," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49:1 (2016), 45-59.

[36] S. Walker, "Russian Orthodox Church sacks ultra-conservative senior priest", *The Guardian*, 25 December 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/25/russian-orthodox-church-sacks-father-vsevolod-chaplin> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

fundamentalists refuse ecumenism, and adhere to evangelical types of mission. Although, ideologically, this wing shares ideas promoted by the monarchists, in practice, it focuses on direct social activism, which often means acts and threats of violence.[37]

In the early 2000s, missionaries and theologians Andrei Kuraev (b. 1963) and Daniil Sysoev (1974-2009, see Chapter 6) challenged the image of the Church as an institute of passive religion, and justified social engagement – often bordering on violence – as a genuine Christian act. Around the same time, groups of Orthodox Christian activists began to speak on behalf of the imagined community of Russia's "Orthodox people" (*pravoslavnaia obshchestvennost'*), protesting against "liberals" who arguably offend the religious feelings of believers. Activists destroyed the art exhibition "Caution, Religion!" at Moscow's Sakharov Centre in 2003, and splattered paint over Oleg Yanushevsky's "Contemporary Icons" in St. Petersburg a year later; these exhibitions attempted to critically assess the growing influence of the ROC in Russian society. In both cases, it was not the activists but the exhibition organizers who had to pay large fines, after being found guilty of "inciting religious hatred".[38] Throughout the following decade, perceived enemies of Orthodoxy were subjected to increasing punishment: the leading members of Pussy Riot were sentenced to lengthy prison terms; blogger Maksim Efimov, who criticized the ROC's political clout in the northern province of Karelia, was arrested and sentenced to forced hospitalization and evaluation at a psychiatric institution.[39] In all these cases, the imagined community of the "Orthodox people" was the aggrieved party and its appointed representatives initiated the legal proceedings and backed them with arguments.

Whereas in the 2000s the fundamentalist camp was still relatively marginal, throughout the 2010s it legitimized its existence with the idea of an "ongoing war against the Church"; the notion of a Church under siege was backed by the Church's high ranks, with Patriarch Kirill stating that the ROC in twenty-first century Russia is "under attack" from within, by "traitors in cassocks" (meaning the ROC's liberal wing); and from outside, by Russia's "fifth column", a catch-all term for a variety of streams

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[37] See O. Oliker, *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy* (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018)

[38] E.g., V. Mal'tsev, "Vera s kulakami", *NG-religii*, 5 September 2012 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2012-09-05/1_druzhiny.html> (Accessed on 31 July 2017); K. Akinsba, "Orthodox Bulldozer", *Artnews*, 5 January 2004 <http://www.artnews.com/2004/05/01/orthodox-bulldozer> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[39] R.L. Schroeder and V. Karpov, "The Crimes and Punishments of the 'Enemies of the Church' and the Nature of Russia's Desecularising Regime," *Religion, State and Society* 41:3 (2013), 284-311.

in political opposition to the current regime.[40] Several Orthodox nationalist groups started to justify violence, both in theory and in practice: at the forefront are groups such as *Bozh'ia Volia* ('God's Will'), led by Sysoev's disciple, Dmitrii Enteo Tsarionov, and *Sviataia Rus'* ('Holy Rus''), organized by Ivan Otrakovskii; also worth mentioning are groups of Cossacks and the so-called "Orthodox squads" (Russian singular *pravoslavnaia druzhina*), all dominated by young men.[41] These groups organize patrols to combat "blasphemy, heresy, defilement and lechery",[42] with an agenda that extends from anti-gay and anti-abortion campaigns to setting up irregular "civil defence" militias. What emerges is "a contemporary Orthodox fundamentalism realm prepared to engage in street violence":[43] in August 2017 the fundamentalists protested against screening of the film *Matilda* about Tsar Nikolai II's affair with a ballerina and attacked cinemas where the movie was to be screened; in May 2018 the Cossacks assisted police in a violent crackdown on an unauthorized anti-Putin rally.[44] The most extreme group so far is the self-proclaimed "Christian State - Holy Russia", which arguably coordinates members across the country who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the "true Orthodox Christian path".[45]

The official Church tries to distance itself from these groups, but the Kremlin continues to give ambiguous responses. By deploying Cossacks to suppress protests in the capital, for instance, the political elites are walking a tightrope, as they "[reap] social benefits from conservative, religious propaganda; but a violent extremist movement is a potential threat to stability".[46] The conservative state agenda creates a "fertile climate

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[40] Knorre, "Rossiiskoe pravoslavie", p. 80.

[41] Ibid., p. 84. Also see J. Tayler, "Russia's Holy Warriors", *The Atlantic*, February 2005 <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2005/01/russias-holy-warriors/303685/> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[42] A. Lobzina, "Orthodox Activists Create Moscow Patrol Squads", *Pravoslavie.Ru*, 22 August 2012 <http://pravoslavie.ru/55638.html> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[43] Laruelle, "The Kremlin's Ideological Ecosystems"; Schroeder and Karpov, "The Crimes and Punishments".

[44] O. Carroll, "Kremlin deploys Cossacks to Moscow for first time in a century to suppress protests", *Independent*, 12 May 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/cossacks-russia-moscow-putin-rally-demonstration-world-cup-a8348221.html> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[45] C. Schreck, "'Christian State': Meet the Hard-Core Russian Religious Activists Making Cinema Owners Tremble", *Radio Liberty*, 14 September 2017 <https://www.rferl.org/a/christian-state-holy-rus-matilda-orthodox-church-tsar-nicholas-ii-threats/28735796.html> (Accessed on 30 April 2018).

[46] T. Vollmer, "Russia's 'Orthodox Crusaders': A growing threat?", *Global Risk Insights*, 29 September 2017 <https://globalriskinsights.com/2017/09/26806/> (Accessed on 30 April 2018).

for those who push a more radically reactionary narrative";[47] of which both groups – the monarchists and the fundamentalists – make use.

2.3.3 Liberals

The increasingly conservative tendencies within the ROC have been challenged to some extent by a minority intellectual movement of Orthodox liberals, who have been operating at the margins and outside of the hierarchies of the Moscow Patriarchate. The "liberalism" of this group should primarily be understood as opposition to the conservative and nationalist ideological standpoints of the mainstream Church; it advocates human freedom as a central element of contemporary Orthodox intellectual thought.[48]

In the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the liberal Orthodox Christians found a guiding figure in Alexander Men' (1935-1990), an Orthodox priest of Jewish descent. He insisted on the Church's independence from the state, demanded social engagement in the world, and supported democratic politics. Men' and his followers stood in the tradition of liberal Orthodoxy as advocated in émigré circles that emerged in the 1920s in the West, with centres in Paris and New York.[49] This tradition reaches back to the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900), who criticized state-Church relations, and to the theologian Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), who was a proponent of a socially engaged Church.[50] Against the background of the transformations undergone by the ROC in the 1980-90s, the liberal camp called for a "modernization of Orthodoxy", with measures including, for instance, laicizing Church administration and reforming religious practice (including the vernacularization of the liturgy).[51]

After Men' was assassinated in 1990, the priest Gleb Iakunin (1936-2014) – a noted dissident and political prisoner under Soviet rule – became the leading figure of

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[47] Laruelle, "The Kremlin's Ideological Ecosystems".

[48] K. Stöckl, *Community after Totalitarianism: The Russian Orthodox Intellectual Tradition and the Philosophical Discourse of Political Modernity* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 23.

[49] On the history of Russian Orthodox liberalism, see A. Kyrlezhev, "Liberal'nye tendentsii v russkom pravoslavii: k postanovke problemy," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 6:32 (2003), 45-50; K. Stöckl, "Modernity and its critique in 20th century Russian orthodox thought," *Studies in East European Thought* 58:4 (2006), 243-69; Stöckl, *Community After Totalitarianism*; V. Shevzov, "The Russian Tradition", in *The Orthodox Christian World*, ed. A. Casiday (London: Routledge, 2012), 15-40.

[50] Stöckl, *Community After Totalitarianism*, p. 122.

[51] G.L. Freeze, "Russian Orthodoxy and Politics in the Putin Era", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 February 2017 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/02/09/russian-orthodoxy-and-politics-in-putin-era-pub-67959> (Accessed on 29 June 2017).

the Orthodox liberal movement. Unlike Men', Iakunin actively engaged in politics.[52] He was a co-founder of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement (*Rossiiskoe khristianskoe demokraticheskoe dvizhenie*, hereafter: RCDM; together with Viacheslav Polosin, who will be discussed in Chapter 5) in 1990, and became a Russian parliament deputy in 1996. Iakunin repeatedly condemned the Church's long association with political authorities: in 1993 he published some documents that exposed the Church's extensive collaboration with the KGB, which brought him into conflict with the ROC and resulted in his excommunication.[53] The priest joined the breakaway Ukrainian Church (the Kiev Patriarchate) and established the Apostolic Orthodox Church, neither of which has been recognized by the ROC. Iakunin's initiatives included replacing Church Slavonic with Russian or another language, determined by the language of the congregation, and reducing the duration of services.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, congregations that adhered to the ideas of Men' and Iakunin continued to attract worshippers, thus contributing to liberal Orthodox lay activism. They included the political dissidents and human rights activists Zoia Krakhmal'nikova (1929-2008) and Aleksandr Ogorodnikov (b. 1950), who encouraged a form of Orthodoxy that could support the development of democracy in post-Soviet Russia.[54] During the tenure of Patriarch Aleksii II – who was a supporter of ecumenism[55] – the liberal wing also attempted to push for a theological dialogue with Catholic and Protestant Churches. However, their efforts were blocked by traditionalists, who regarded ecumenism as heresy. Since the death of Patriarch Aleksii II in 2008, the pro-democratic and liberal forces within the ROC have lost ground to the conservative and fundamentalist wings.[56] Against the background of an anti-Western discourse, Orthodox liberalism has been depicted as a threat to Russia's "traditional values" and to the country's integrity. Supporters of Church modernization have been portrayed as

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[52] Judith Devlin describes Iakunin's political views as "radical democracy"; see J. Devlin, *Slavophiles and Commissars: Enemies of Democracy in Modern Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 1999), p. 62.

[53] C. Clover, "Putin and the monk", *Financial Times*, 25 January 2013 <https://www.ft.com/content/f2fcba3e-65be-11e2-a3db-00144feab49a> (Accessed on 19 January 2018).

[54] Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*, p. 96. On Ogorodnikov, see K. De Wolf, *Dissident for Life: Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).

[55] In 1964-1992 Aleksii II was the president of the Conference of European Churches; see Knox, Russian Society and the Orthodox Church, p. 96.

[56] See Stöckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*, p. 34; Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*; Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. One of the few exceptions is Men''s disciple, Iakov Krotov (b. 1957), a Moscow-based priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who continues to publish on a regular basis. For Krotov's political essays, see his personal website <http://yakov.works/russian_oglavleniya/3_politics_oglav/vvedenie_v_politiku.htm> (Accessed on 4 March 2018).

part of Russia's "fifth column" – the multi-faceted group of oppositional forces whose political and historical ideas are regarded by ultra-patriots as coming from the West.

Thus, the Orthodox Christian discourse today is rediscovering and strengthening connections with the discourses on Russian nationalism and messianism, and with anti-Western sentiments, leaving the Orthodox liberals on the fringe. This conservative shift, which promotes the narrowly defined Russianness and Russian culture, obviously has the effect of excluding the country's minority groups, whose identities differ from the majority in terms of ethnic self-perception, religious affiliation and language. What narratives do Russia's Muslims adopt to create a legitimate space for themselves in the mainstream discourse on religion? How do they define what Islam in Russia is and what it is not? These questions will be addressed in the next section.

2.4 Competing definitions of the Tatar Islam

In the post-Soviet period, Russia's Islamic scene has undergone major developments. Traditional forms of Islam that were conventionally defined as "North Caucasus" or "Tatar" Islam, have been eroded, leading to new mixed and hybrid practices. As a result, the authority of institutionalized Islam has also been in decline – particularly among young people – and the official Islamic elites are having to compete with alternative, non-systemic groups for the "souls" of believers. Importantly, new technologies have facilitated the creation of online communities, which enables the rapid spread of ideas across vast territories, creating global networks and allowing charismatic leaders to rise to authority.[57] The Russian language has been a vehicle for these transformations, for it greatly facilitates offline and online communication among the multinational Muslims of the former Soviet space for whom Russian is the common language. Islamic elites (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), grassroots communities (of which Chapter 4 offers a case study) and alternative Islamic networks that function across the former Soviet Union have to compete for authority in the Russian-speaking Islamic community. At the same time, regional Islamic establishments tend to resist the trend toward Russification of Islam. Taking Tatarstan as an example, this section discusses the construction of national forms of Islam and the role played by ethnic vernaculars in this process.

The Tatar language has long ceased to be an Islamic *lingua franca*: language proficiency levels are in decline even among Tatars themselves, let alone among other

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[57] A. Yarlykapov, "Russian Islam and the Situation in the Middle East", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 14 June 2016 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/valday/Russian-Islam-and-the-Situation-in-the-Middle-East-18211> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

Muslim ethnic groups. Since the 1980s, the use of Tatar has developed into a marker of a distinct ethnic (Tatar) identity and into a building block of the "Tatar Islam". We can distinguish three camps that offer alternative definitions of the Tatar Islam: (1) Tatar traditionalists, (2) Tatar nationalists and (3) moderate Tatar Salafīs. These are not necessarily self-designations. All three connect the use of Tatar to piety, and while they differ in their ideological standpoints, all three emphasize their opposition to attempts to homogenize Russia's Islam not only linguistically but also theologically. They also oppose the mainstream discourse of the DUM RT, which presupposes a simple binary opposition according to which Islam in Russia is either "traditional" (and hence Tatar) or "Salafī" (and hence "Russian", "foreign"); they see the Russian language as a conductor of hegemonic interpretations, which Tatar traditionalist, nationalist and Salafī leaders try to withstand.

2.4.1 Traditionalists

In 1990, Tatarstan declared itself a sovereign state; however, since the republic is located in central Russia, independence from Moscow was never a realistic option for the Tatar national elite. In 1994, then President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev (b. 1937) signed a power-sharing treaty with Moscow, which provided Tatarstan with generous privileges compared with other constituent regions and republics of the Russian Federation, including promotion of the Tatar language and control over natural resources. With Vladimir Putin's presidency since 2000, Tatarstan has been pressed into a "vertical of power" – an increasingly centralized administrative system that has secured Moscow's far-reaching control over regional political and economic elites. Putin renewed the agreement with Tatarstan in 2007: the republic maintained its rights to make its own decisions on regional economic, ecological and cultural policies, but only with the consent of the Kremlin.

In the first post-Soviet decennia, Tatar political elites – a "fundamentally secular oligarchy interested in preserving the republic's ethnic and religious diversity"[58] – creatively utilized references to their Islamic heritage for the benefit of nation-building purposes. On the ideological level, they were continuing the trend set by post-Stalinist Tatar intellectuals, who tried to create a meaningful Muslim cultural heritage for the

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[58] M. Laruelle, "The Struggle for the Soul of Tatar Islam," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideologies* 5 (2007), 26-39. Here p. 34.

Tatar nation.[59] Already by the late 1980s, the Golden Horde period, which had been denounced as barbaric in the Stalinist period, began to be depicted in a favourable light; equally, a Muslim modernist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jadīdism, was praised as a pioneering attempt to reject "benighted" Islamic fanaticism and embrace Western education. The post-Soviet secular intelligentsia implicitly acknowledged the role of Islam in preserving the coherence of the Tatar nation under Tsarist and Soviet rule, portraying it "as a sort of 'preservative agent' that kept the Tatar people intact until they could be 'enlightened' by modernism".[60] The elites' support for Jadīdism, however, focused on only one aspect of the movement: they interwove the modernist tradition into Tatar national mythology, presenting it as a uniquely Tatar heritage of enlightenment, which attempted to radically reform Islam to make it compatible with modernity and secular liberal values.[61] Thus, the religious content of Jadīdism remained beyond the focus of the elites.[62] In their worldview, Islam is limited to a defining element of Tatar national identity and a pillar in maintaining national culture and moral frameworks.[63]

The most extreme form of this Soviet and post-Soviet secularization of the Islamic tradition came in the form of a "Euro-Islam" project, which was proposed and defended by Rafael Khakimov (b. 1947), a major Tatar historian who also served as a political advisor to the Tatarstani administration. Khakimov stressed the cultural aspect of Islam: by rejecting all normative religious aspects of the Tatar Islam (which he relegated to the private sphere), Khakimov, in fact, suggested an Islam serving the secular state, in line with the new democratic and liberal political system. The role of

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[59] M. Kemper, "Ijtihad into philosophy: Islam as cultural heritage in post-Stalinist Daghestan," *Central Asian Survey* 33:3 (2014), 390-404. Here p. 400; also E.F. Lazzerini, "Tatarovedenie and the New Historiography in the Soviet Union: Revising the Interpretation of the Tatar-Russian Relationship," *Slavic Review* 40:4 (1981), 625-35; S.A. Dudoignon, "Djadidisme, mirasisme, islamisme," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 37:1-2 (1996), 12-40.

[60] A.J. Frank, *Tatar Islamic Texts* (Hyattsville: Dunwoody Press, 2008), p. xiv.

[61] M. Bilz-Leonhardt, "Islam as a Secular Discourse: the Case of Tatarstan," *Religion, State and Society* 35:3 (2007), 231-44. Here p. 240; Dannreuther, "Russian discourses and approaches to Islam and Islamism", p. 20.

[62] Frank, *Tatar Islamic Texts*, p. xvii.

[63] Nation-branding activities in Tatarstan also involved massive construction projects. Shaimiev's administration sanctioned the building of a brand-new modern mosque in the historical centre of the republic – the Kazan Kremlin complex. The Kul-Sharif mosque was designed to symbolize and promote Tatar cosmopolitan, Westward-looking Islam. See, e.g., C. Noack, "Eine Moschee für den Kremlin Kazan' oder: 'Invention of Tradition' auf Tatarisch," *Osteuropa-Archiv* 48 (1998), 189-99; N.V. Kinossian, "The Politics of the City Image: The Resurrection of the Kul-Sharif Mosque in the Kazan Kremlin (1995-2005)," *Architectural Theory Review* 13:2 (2008), 188-205.

religion was thus to help to modernize, not re-traditionalize society.[64] The advocates of the project envisioned it as an example for all European Muslims; but even in Tatarstan, the "Euro-Islam" model came under fire and gained little support among the Muslims of the republic.[65]

The official Islamic establishment – the DUM RT – has been aligned with the regional government from the time of its establishment in 1992. The DUM RT is one of the autonomous spiritual directorates that emerged along ethnic and territorial divisions after the collapse of the Soviet Union; it supported the national movement of the late 1980s that strove for unification of the Tatar nation.[66] From a theological perspective, Tatarstani Islamic officials have been navigating between "modernism" and "traditionalism", with several changes of course. For instance, Valiulla Iakupov (1963-2012), a prominent Muslim leader and deputy to the Tatarstani Mufti in 1997-2011, suggested considering both Jadīdism and its conservative counterpart Qadīmism as equally valuable aspects of the Tatar Islamic heritage; "just different sides of one and the same 'progressive' trajectory".[67] Traditionalism, which adhered to religious conservatism and emphasized the national aspects of the Tatar Islam, was presented as a fortress against Islamic extremism, which Tatar Islamic leaders regarded as including reformist trends that originated outside of the Tatars' religious milieu.[68] In terms of political authority, the DUM RT limits itself to the boundaries of the republic; in the power game at the federal level, the DUM RT first sided with Gainutdin's DUM RF in Moscow but then with Gainutdin's major competitor Talgat Tadzhuddin, the head of the TsDUM in Ufa. At the same time, the DUM RT maintained its independence from both "federal Muftis". Since 2013 a new young Mufti – Kamil' Samigullin – has been in charge of the DUM RT; under his leadership Tatarstan has conceptualized the Tatar "traditional" Islam by issuing a social doctrine *Islam häm tatar dönyasï: üseshneng kontseptual' nigezläre* ("Islam and the Tatar world: the conceptual bases of development", 2013),[69] which is similar to documents initiated by other DUMs at both

[64] R. Khakimov, *Gde nasha Mekka? Manifest evroislama* (Kazan: Magarif, 2003).
[65] Laruelle, "The Struggle for the Soul of Tatar Islam".
[66] D. Usmanova et al., "Islamic education in Soviet and post-Soviet Tatarstan", in *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States*, ed. M. Kemper et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 21-66. Here p. 51.
[67] Bustanov and Kemper, "Valiulla Iakupov's Tatar Islamic Traditionalism", p. 823.
[68] Ibid.
[69] DUM RT, "Islam häm tatar dönyasï: üseshneng kontseptual' nigezläre", *The official website of the DUM RT*, 2013 <http://dumrt.ru/concept/ > (Accessed on 11 July 2017).

the local and federal levels (see also Section 5.5 of this thesis).[70] In the 2013 document, the DUM RT defines the "traditional" Tatar Islam in terms of the moderate school of Ḥanafī law, respecting local rites, pilgrimages and Sufi traditions.[71] The DUM RT document also emphasizes the role of Islam in establishing and consolidating the Tatar nation throughout its past: from the adoption of Islam in the tenth century through the Golden Horde period to imperial and Soviet Russia.[72]

In this analysis we have to keep in mind that official Islamic structures – at both the federal and regional levels – cannot be studied in isolation from the Russian historical and political context. The case of Tatarstan fits the state paradigm for administering Islam, because Islamic officials have a long history of close relationship with and dependence on secular authorities. The same applies to the two Muftiates in Ufa and Moscow, but on a larger scale. The difference is, however, that the Tatarstani political establishment is not independent but is subordinated to a higher echelon – the Russian state – and has to satisfy the expectations of both Kremlins: the one in Kazan and the one in Moscow. Under Putin the autonomy of the regional elites, and consequently of the respective spiritual directorates, has been severely curtailed. Against the background of an increasing fear of religious extremism cultivated in the mainstream discourse, both the religious and the political elites in Tatarstan have to remain united in condemning any form of Islam that challenges the governing system, and in emphasizing the loyalty and patriotism of Tatar Muslims.

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[70] See SMR, *Osnovnye polozheniia sotsial'noi programmy rossiiskikh musul'man* (Moscow: Dukhovnoe upravlenie musu'man Evropeiskoi chasti Rossii, 2001); also Islam Today, "Sotsial'naia doktrina rossiiskikh musul'man", *Islam Today*, 14 June 2015 <http://islam-today.ru/socialnaa-doktrina-rossijskih-musulman/> (Accessed on 11 July 2017); TsDUM, "Fetva o neot"emlemykh priznakakh otlichiia istinnogo Islama ot zabluzhdenii", *The official website of the TsDUM*, 2016 <http://cdum.ru/gallery/documents/fetva.php> (Accessed on 11 July 2017); SMR, "Fetva ob opasnykh sektakh. O priznakakh psevdoislamskogo radikalizma", *The official website of the SMR*, 21 October 2016 <https://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/16317/?sphrase_id=10215> (Accessed on 11 July 2017).

[71] The Russian state supports this definition because it regards the Ḥanafī school as a suitable way to safeguard Islam's cultural influence. See A. Malashenko, "Islamic Challenges to Russia, From the Caucasus to the Volga and the Urals", *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, 13 May 2015 <http://carnegie.ru/2015/05/13/islamic-challenges-to-russia-from-caucasus-to-volga-and-urals-pub-60334> (Accessed on 17 January 2018).

[72] The traditional understanding of *Jadīdism* and what has been constructed as its counterpart – *Qadīmism* – in Muslim Eurasia has been challenged in a series of recent works, see, e.g., J. Eden et al., "Moving Beyond Modernism: Rethinking Cultural Change in Muslim Eurasia (19th-20th Centuries)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016), 1-36; P. Sartori, "Ijtihad in Bukhara: Central Asian Jadidism and Local Genealogies of Cultural Change," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59 (2016), 193-236.

On a federal level, but also with the goal of reaching out to an international audience, Tatarstan champions the idea of being a secular republic where the rights and freedoms of believers of any denomination are respected. Tatarstan claims to support constitutional secularism and religious tolerance, in particular regarding Orthodox Christians, who constitute almost half of the republic's population. This strategy helps Tatarstan to avoid accusations from the federal centre of violating Russian citizens' rights, which otherwise might have serious political consequences: the defence of Russian citizens or Russophone populations has been an argument used by the Kremlin to justify its pressure on neighbouring countries.[73] This may explain why in 2010, when the relationship between Tatarstan and Moscow deteriorated and then-president Shaimiev was prompted to resign, the republic began investing heavily in construction projects at religious sites, in order to bolster the image of being a refuge, free of religious and inter-ethnic tension. Shaimiev, who has remained the *éminence grise* in the state apparatus, launched massive government-sponsored restoration projects to promote Tatarstan as the destination for both Muslim and Orthodox pilgrimage; within a few years the ancient Muslim city of Bolghar[74] and its Orthodox Christian counterpart, the island of Sviiazhsk,[75] were transformed from neglected historical sites into major sightseeing locations in Tatarstan. The same approach – to keep both religions on equal footing – was followed when the Tatarstani leadership presented its plan of erecting an Islamic Academy in the village of Bolghar; the Academy, which officially opened its doors in 2017,[76] is envisioned as educating Russia's "own" Islamic scholars, thereby

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[73] To justify intervention in South Ossetia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014, Russia adopted the rhetoric of protecting the rights of compatriots (*sootechestvenniki*), the term being broadly defined, including not only legal but also ethnic, linguistic or cultural interpretations. See P. Casula, "Russia's Foreign Policy from the Crimean Crisis to the Middle East: Great Power Gamble or Biopolitics?," *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2:1 (2017), 27-51.

[74] Located some 200 kilometres from Kazan, Bolghar is promoted as the place where Volga Bulgars adopted Islam as their state religion in 922, thus making the historical site "the cradle of Russia's Islam". To celebrate the date, since 2005 the DUM RT annually hosts "Izge Bolgar Jïenï" ('Gathering in Holy Bolgar'), an event that attracts religious and political elites. Under Shaimiev's supervision, the historical complex has been renovated and today encompasses several museums on Tatar history and folklore, and the brand-new "White Mosque", which houses the world's largest printed Qurʾān.

[75] Sviiazhsk was founded in 1551 as a fortress and became a military base of the Russian army during the siege of Kazan (1552). Tatarstani political elites, however, downplay this connection between the island and the conquest of the region by Russians. Instead, they emphasize the cultural heritage and unique churches and frescos of Sviiazhsk. See O. Pavlov, "The voice of experience: Mintimer Shaimiyev in conversation", *Open Democracy*, 6 September 2011 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/oleg-pavlov/voice-of-experience-mintimer-shaimiyev-in-conversation > (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[76] I. Durnitsyna, "Bolgarskaia islamskaia akademiia torzhestvenno otkrylas' v Tatarstane", *RIA Novosti*, 5 September 2017 <https://ria.ru/religion/20170904/1501751182.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

curbing the import of "foreign" and "dangerous" forms of Islam via students who travel to the Middle East for their theological education, and promoting Tatarstan as the centre of Islamic scholarship in the whole of Russia. The trade-off with the ROC was the reconstruction of the Orthodox Christian Cathedral in Kazan, which was destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1932; in 2016 Patriarch Kirill travelled to the Tatarstani capital for the first time to lay the foundation stone.[77]

Thus, Tatarstan is attempting to keep both Islam and Orthodox Christianity in a favourable attitude. To do so, the republic's leadership follows the same principles of administering religions as the Kremlin, providing financial and political backing to the official religious establishments in exchange for cooperation. These practices undoubtedly bring Tatarstan political gains vis-à-vis Moscow; but they also enhance the ROC-state model as the only proper mode of operation. The previous agreements between Moscow and Kazan left Tatar national elites with a degree of freedom to suggest their own interpretations of the concepts of "traditional" and "Tatar" Islam. Since the last bilateral treaty expired in 2017 and has not been extended, the status quo is likely to change toward increasingly inflexible constraints.

2.4.2 Tatar nationalists

Alongside the development of the largely secular Tatar national movement, the early 1990s also witnessed the rise of movements that coupled extreme nationalism with Islam. One of these is the political party Ittifak (Unity), established in 1991 and led since then by Fauziia Bairamova (b. 1950). The party calls for a Tatarstan independent of Russia, claims the supremacy of Islam over nation, and rejects the ideas of Jadīdism, Sufism and "Euro-Islam".[78] Bairamova has adopted a more fundamentalist vision of Islam compared with the Tatarstani political elites, and advocates the complete Islamization of individual, social and political life, as well as the return to the original and universal rules of Islam as laid down in the Qurʾān.[79]

Ittifak's agenda is also supported by the Tatar youth movement Azatlyk (Freedom, established in 1989), which sees religion as the only way to protect and preserve Tatar identity. Today, Azatlyk is active across the Volga region, engaging with Tatars in the republics of Bashkortostan, Chuvashia and Tatarstan. Since 2008 the

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[77] K. Antonov, "RPTS vziala Kazan'", *Kommersant*, 22 July 2016 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/304-3929> (Accessed on 13 February 2018).
[78] Malashenko, "Islamic Challenges to Russia".
[79] Laruelle, "The Struggle for the Soul of Tatar Islam".

organization has been led by Nail Nabiullin, who is believed to have connections with the Turkish right-wing nationalist organization Bozkurtlar (Grey Wolves).[80] Both Ittifak and Azatlyk denounce the DUM RT, which they consider to be theologically too moderate.

Nationalists also reinforce the link between the Tatar language and Tatar Islam. Language is seen as "the barometer of the nation's health", that is, the impurity and decline of the Tatar language signifies degradation of the Tatar nation as a whole.[81] To practise the "right" and "authentic" form of the Tatar Islam is impossible without using the native language; in this regard the ideas of these nationalists partly overlap with DUM RT's agenda to promote the use of Tatar in Islamic contexts.

Throughout the 1990s, the nationalist movement stood in opposition to the official parliament of Tatarstan and operated on the basis of the Milli Medzhlis (National Assembly) – a self-declared supreme legislative body that was never constitutionally recognized. In 1996 the Milli Medzhlis adopted the "Tatar Kanunï" (Tatar law), an alternative constitution of the republic that included the goal of reviving *Sharīʿa* principles in the region.[82] By the late 1990s, the political elites managed to marginalize the nationalist movement; since then, Ittifak and Azatlyk operate on the fringe of the Tatarstani political scene and do not carry much clout.

Most recently, Tatar nationalists came into the media spotlight after the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Over 13% of the Crimean population consists of Crimean Tatars, who for many reasons opposed the Russian annexation.[83] In the first months after the Russian takeover, the Tatarstani government volunteered to assume the role of mediator in the negotiations between Crimean Tatar leaders and the Russian authorities; these efforts brought no results. Tatar nationalists in Tatarstan, by contrast, used the uprisings in Ukraine to stress the historical and ethnic connections with the vibrant Crimean Tatar community, and called for protests in Tatarstan to demand greater autonomy of the Kazan Tatars from Moscow. The Crimean

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[80] G. Postnov, "Tiurkskomu 'prosvetiteliu' prigotovili ugolovnuiu stat'iu", *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 9 June 2016 <http://www.ng.ru/regions/2016-06-09/5_kazan.html> (Accessed on 25 January 2018).

[81] S. Wertheim, "Islam and the Construction of Tatar Sociolinguistic Identity", in *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam*, ed. J. Johnson et al. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 105-22. Here pp. 109-10; S. Wertheim, "Language ideologies and the 'purification' of post-Soviet Tatar," *Ab Imperio* 1 (2003), 347-69; Wertheim, "Reclamation, revalorization, and re-Tatarization".

[82] R.A. Nabiev, *Islam i gosudarstvo* (Kazan: Izdatel'stvo Kazanskogo Universiteta, 2002), pp. 119-20.

[83] S. Walker, "Crimean Tatars divided between Russian and Ukrainian promises", *The Guardian*, 17 March 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/crimean-tatars-divided-between-russian-and-ukrainian-promises> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

annexation also changed the game in Tatarstan: whereas before 2014 prominent figures of the nationalist and separatist fringes occasionally received conditional prison sentences, after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, several Tatar nationalist organizations were banned as extremist and their leaders served real sentences.[84] This pushed the nationalists' camp further to margins.

2.4.3 Moderate Salafī groups

Until 2012, Russia's mainstream media repeatedly praised Tatarstan as a successful model of combatting radical extremist movements, in comparison with the conflict-torn republics in Russia's North Caucasus. The situation changed when two prominent Muslim leaders and outspoken critics of "non-traditional" Islam – the DUM RT chief Mufti Il'dus Faizov (b. 1963) and his deputy Mufti Valiulla Iakupov – were assaulted in the capital of Tatarstan; the latter died of his injuries.

In Tatarstan – as by and large in Russia's mainstream discourse – the term "Salafism" refers to Islamic fundamentalism, seen as an import from abroad and a gateway to radicalization. The adherents of Salafism seek to restore the form of Islam professed in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, which involves, among other things, overcoming national, ethnic and religious boundaries; these are considered later innovations that contradict the Qurʾān. In general, Salafīs tend to use the Russian language, which helps in going beyond national forms of Islam.

In contrast to the two previous camps, which mainly construct Islam as part of Tatar national identity, moderate Salafī groups in Tatarstan place religious identity above ethnic self-identification. As Bustanov shows on the basis of his case studies from the cities of Nizhnekamsk and Naberezhnye Chelny in Tatarstan, there are a few Tatar Islamic preachers and scholars who promote a nationally oriented and historically informed "Tatar Islam".[85] They see their version as "closer" to the Qurʾān and Sunna, and therefore "purer" than what the political elites present as "national" Islam; yet it is nevertheless grounded in the accepted schools of Islamic law, in particular Ḥanafī orthodoxy. These Islamic activists adopt the Tatar religious language to disseminate moderate fundamentalist rhetoric among well-educated believers and emphasize the strong monotheistic character of Islam. The use of the Tatar language, including

[84] P. Goble, "Kazan Tatar Call for Maidan in Russia Touches Moscow's Deepest Fears", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 11 February 2014 <https://jamestown.org/program/kazan-tatar-call-for-maidan-in-russia-touches-moscows-deepest-fears/> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).

[85] Bustanov, "The Language of Moderate Salafism".

references to the intellectual legacy, is intended to challenge the predominantly Russophone official discourse that strives to monopolize the interpretation of Russia's Muslim legacy.[86] Against the background of international Salafism, however, this nationalistic rhetoric remains a marginal phenomenon.

2.5 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to present an overview and assess developments in Russia's discourse on religion, with a focus on two major religious traditions – Islam and Christianity. The communities that identify themselves with these religious are not monolithic, to say the least; for the purposes of this thesis, I identified the mainstream discourse on religion that is supported and backed by the state and official religious institutions, and also some contributions made by actors who operate on the margins of the religious communities and continuously challenge and influence the mainstream.

In the Orthodox Christian camp, it is possible to distinguish two domains – "red" and "white" agendas, which recur in varying degrees in the narratives of all participants who claim their right to appeal to Orthodox Christianity. The "red" agenda utilizes discursive elements borrowed from the Soviet past, as well as reference to (neo)Eurasianism ideology, military power and anti-Western rhetoric. The "white" agenda includes narratives on emigration, Tsarist Russia and Orthodox Christian philosophy. As the cases of Egor Kholmogorov and Vsevolod Chaplin demonstrate, in their discourses, actors may employ and mix elements from both agendas, but politically the groups that represent each of the two agendas tend to be separate. As Marlene Laruelle argues, the red group "is better structured and integrated into the state administration", whereas "the so-called White nostalgics are less institutionalized and rely mostly on personal connections and affinities".[87]

In the case of contributions of Muslims to the discourse on religion, I zoomed in on the republic of Tatarstan. The Tatarstani political elites largely operate within the same system of administering religions as the one at the federal level; they try to maintain a balance between the Orthodox Christian and Muslim populations and offer equal representation. At the same time, local groups in power, including the DUM RT, try to develop their own interpretations of Islam's place in Russia; to do so, they draw

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[86] Ibid., p. 198.

[87] M. Laruelle, "Putin's Regime and the Ideological Market: A Difficult Balancing Game", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 16 March 2017 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/16/putin-s-regime-and-ideological-market-difficult-balancing-game-pub-68250> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

on Tatar's religious tradition, and navigate between "modernism" and "traditionalism", with several changes of course.

There is also a clear trend of reasserting religious identities, where Islam is brandished more openly as a major criterion of identification and becomes intrinsically linked to ethnic identity. The struggle to preserve a "pure" ethnic and religious identity also has an impact on the symbolic power of Tatar: the language today is strongly related to Tatar nationalism and the Tatar "traditional" forms of Islam. At the same time, extreme Tatar nationalism is being marginalized and weakened.

The Russian state tries to find a balance between promoting the multinationality of the Russian nation and exalting the Russianness that draws on Russia's cultural and historical symbols. The latter involves the risk of mobilizing Russian ethnonationalism.[88] In Part I of this thesis I will demonstrate how Islamic actors utilize this ambiguity, hidden in the very use of the words *russkii* – which may refer to either ethnic Russianness or the Russian nation – and *rossiiskii*, which refers to Russian civic identity.

Prior to the 2000s the mainstream discourse may have focused on the relationship between Russia's majority versus ethnic minorities, but in the decades that followed the situation changed. Russia's majority has become distinctly ethnonationalist, while the minorities no longer represent a single united group. The public discussion has focused increasingly on the interaction and interconnection between Muslims and Orthodox Christian Russians, and the political leadership faces the need to accommodate Islam in the mainstream public discourse.[89]

In the following chapters of this thesis, I examine how the state, religious communities and individuals who claim leadership engage in debates to define what it means to be a Muslim or a Christian. Some of them have already been mentioned in this chapter and will make their appearance again later in the thesis: e.g., the leader of the DUM RF, Ravil' Gainutdin (Chapter 3), Viacheslav Polosin (Chapter 5), Tatar political elites (Chapter 7).

Since ideas on religion are inherently associated and often overlap with ethnicity and culture in the Russian public debate, the following chapters will also zoom in on the place of religion in interpretations of Russianness and Tatarness. This thesis will map out some of the debates on the role of religion in personal, collective and political identities, and examine how these identities are marked and spread discursively.

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

Part I

The Russian Language of Islam

Chapter 3

Translating Islam into the Language of the Russian State and the ROC

This chapter[1] opens Part I of the thesis and introduces the first of three case studies that analyse the Russian language of Islam. The discussion in this chapter centres on how leaders of the official Islamic institutions that operate at the federal level employ the Russian language. With examples from speeches and sermons given by the head of the major Spiritual Directorate in Moscow (DUM RF), Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin, this study supports the claim that on the lexical level, speech styles of Russia's Islamic elites resemble those of the ROC leadership and of political elites; this congruence also stretches across the dominant tropes and narratives. My argument is that Mufti Gainutdin establishes links to prominent patriotic discourses on Russia's culture, history and moral code in order to construct Islam as one of Russia's "traditional" religions. These lexical and discursive practices, I argue, are instruments that Gainutdin uses to offer an inclusive interpretation of Islam for the Russian state and society. As the leader of the DUM RF, he claims to represent and foster *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo* (Russia's Islam), a definition of Islam that cultivates loyalty of Russia's Muslims to the state and portrays them as an inherent and valuable part of Russian civilization.

[1] This chapter is based on G. Sibgatullina (forthcoming). "Translating Islam into the Language of the Russian State and the Orthodox Church", *Religion, State and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1562775.

3.1 Introduction

Ravil′ Gainutdin, born in 1959 in the Tatar Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, belongs to the old generation of the "turbaned" Islamic elites who received their training from Soviet Islamic institutions in the last decade of the Union's existence (in 1984 Gainutdin graduated from the Mir-i ʿArab madrasa in Bukhara). Since its creation in 1994, he has chaired the Moscow-based DUM RF. Both the DUM RF and the SMR (established in 1996) – another large umbrella organization under Gainutdin's leadership – claim to represent Russia's Muslim community as a whole and strive to be recognized as the only official and legitimate Islamic authority in the country. Yet, since religious institutions are heavily dependent on political and financial backing from the Russian state, and Gainutdin's personal relationship with the high ranks in President Putin's administration has been vulnerable to vicissitudes, the Mufti has not succeeded in securing a firm grip on power. His position as head of Russia's *umma* is challenged by the leader of another Muftiate at the federal level (TsDUM), Talgat Tadzhuddin, as well as by chairs of regional spiritual directorates. For the purposes of this chapter, it is relevant that Mufti Gainutdin's discourse does not represent the position of an individual religious leader. Rather, he voices standpoints of two influential official Islamic establishments – the DUM RF and SMR – that have hundreds of local and regional organizations affiliated with them. Therefore, his lexicon and rhetorical strategies potentially give direction to Russia's official Islamic discourse and function as examples that lower ranks of the Islamic elites tend to emulate.

Gainutdin's lexicon has previously attracted the attention of scholars, who stressed the fact that the Mufti practises translation of original Islamic terminology into Russian and avoids or minimizes the use of Arabic and Persian loanwords.[1] A strong reason for the Islamic elites to use this "purified" Russian is that the majority of the Russian-speaking Muslim community can easily understand their writings and speeches. That is, "purified" Russian helps to reach out to believers who may not be familiar with Islamic terminology, and also to those who live outside of Russia but still speak the Russian language. In addition, Gainutdin's speeches also address Russia's non-Muslim population and, most importantly, the state. The Mufti therefore consciously avoids using terms that may not be familiar to his target audience.

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[1] M. Kemper, "Mufti Ravil Gainutdin: the Translation of Islam into a Language of Patriotism and Humanism", in *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, ed. A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 105-41; Bustanov and Kemper, "The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages in the Russian Federation".

The need for an official Islamic discourse to be transparent and understandable, in particular to the political elite, can be traced back to the practices introduced by Empress Catherine the Great, who created the very institute of state-appointed Islamic leaders by establishing the first imperial Muftiate in 1788. In the Soviet Union, although Islamic officials wrote primarily in ethnic vernaculars, communication between Islamic leaders and secular authorities also had to be conducted in Russian, including regular translations into Russian of official documents issued by the Muftiates, which could be surveyed by the Communist Party. In the post-Soviet context, where numerous Muftiates have been in competition for power and recognition, the language that communicates embeddedness in the mainstream discourse on religion also yields political advantages.[2]

In essence, Gainutdin's Islamic Russian draws primarily on translation – a translingual adaptation of sacred terminology derived from Arabic or Islamic. Some terms can be translated easily and find common acceptance, while for others there is a wide spectrum of possible translations. By opting for a full translation of Islamic terminology into Russian, Gainutdin prioritizes the strategy of "domestication" – sometimes referred to as "acculturation".[3] The concept of the domestication strategy, first formulated by the American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in contrast to "foreignization", means assimilation of a text to target cultural and linguistic values, whereby the signs of otherness are blurred and disguised.[4] In the Russian context, this strategy minimizes the perception that the Islamic discourse is inherently "foreign" to the Russian culture, which helps to construct an image of a "familiar", "loyal" and "peaceful" Islam that accords with the Russian system of values. By and large, translation here is not so much a technical act of communication between two languages, but more a kind of complex negotiation between two cultures – Russian and non-Russian (i.e., Islamic, ethnic minority culture). These cultures are obviously not equally powerful. It is the Islamic elites who have to adapt their texts to the specific audience – high-ranking politicians, Church clergy and the Russian ethnic majority – according to the norms defined by that audience. By formulating an identity that is acceptable to the dominant culture, the translator – in this case, the Mufti – uses only those terms and concepts that help to construct a positive image of Islam and to argue

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[2] Kemper, "Mufti Ravil Gainutdin".

[3] S. Bassnet, "Bringing the News Back Home: Strategies of Acculturation and Foreignization," *Language and Intercultural Communication* 5:2 (2005), 120-30.

[4] L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995); also S. Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 47.

that this religion has been an important part of Russian culture over the centuries. The flip side of these practices is that they inevitably involve manipulation and simplification for the sake of gaining recognition by the dominant culture.

Figure 2. Ravil' Gainutdin (right) and Damir Mukhetdinov

In fierce competition with a kaleidoscope of Islamic trends, local and imported from abroad, Gainutdin claims to represent a religion that is free of "foreign" elements and built into patriotic rhetoric. Gainutdin's deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov (see Figure 2),[5] coined the expression *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo* (Russia's Islam)[6] in his programme essay[7] to refer to the form of Islam that incorporates the historical heritage of Russia's Muslims, although it has been modified to suit the social and political context of present-day Russia. As the analysis below will show, Mukhetdinov's project did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather summarized standpoints that the DUM RF leadership had been pushing forward in previous years.

3.2 Data

The following two sections of the chapter examine the discourse of Mufti Gainutdin using techniques of quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to reveal

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[5] The photo source: Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/license/481837685> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[6] Here I translate *musul'manstvo* into English as 'Islam', although in Russian the term has a broader connotation than just the word *islam.* In various contexts it may also imply the entire Muslim community and/or the essence of being Muslim.

[7] D. Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo: prizyv k osmysleniiu i kontekstualizatsii* (Moscow: Medina, 2016).

and explain the power of certain lexical and rhetorical practices; the methodological framework outlined by Fairclough[8] and discussed in Section 1.4 defines the structure of this chapter.

Section 3.3 analyses the lexical characteristics of Gainutdin's discourse; the focus lies on his choice of particular religious terms. The analysis is based on data from a corpus that consists of seventy texts authored by Mufti Gainutdin (in total 91,048 words).[9] These texts were produced in 2001-2017 and include the Mufti's conference presentations, open letters to public figures and transcripts of Friday sermons. The individual items have been selected from the official website of the SMR (www.muslim.ru) and analysed with the programme *Sketch Engine.*[10] A complete list of the texts that comprise the corpus can be found in Appendix I.

The method of examination that I use in this section, i.e. corpus-assisted discourse analysis, helps to solve the issue of representativeness of the studied texts. By using a random sampling procedure and a large sample size, corpus linguistics makes it possible to highlight lexical regularities and conduct a comprehensive, rather than selective analysis. In this section of the chapter, the number in square brackets that is given next to each analysed word, indicates how many times it occurs in the corpus; e.g., *Vsevyshnii* [231]. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis thus serves to reduce the possible bias of the researcher and prevent cherry-picking.[11]

This section also introduces arguments from scholarly discussions in favour of or against translating Islamic religious terms into Russian. Making reference to academic discourses and scholarly expertise, I argue, is a tool that Gainutdin uses to give greater credibility to his aims and goals.

Section 3.4 analyses Gainutdin's landmark speech *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* ('Christmas message').[12] The *Poslanie* was delivered on 27 January 2015, on the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Here, I examine Gainutdin's rhetorical strategies; namely, how he employs religious reasoning and authority to enter the public debate. The focus will be on two examples of Gainutdin's references to other prominent discourses: first, his evocation of the popular image of the West being the

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[8] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, p. 73.

[9] The corpus comprises only the Mufti's texts in Russian and leaves out his few publications available in Tatar.

[10] On methods of using the online corpus analysis interface *Sketch Engine,* see A. Kilgarriff et al., "The Sketch Engine," *Proceedings of Euralex* (2004), 105-16.

[11] See also V. Kamasa, "Corpus Linguistics for Critical Discourse Analysis. What can we do better?", in *Language, Corpora and Cognition*, ed. P. Pęzik and J.T. Waliński (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 220-39.

[12] R. Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie Muftiia Rossii Gainutdina", *The official website of the DUM RF*, 27 January 2015 <http://www.dumrf.ru/common/speech/8925> (Accessed on 30 January 2017).

enemy that challenges Russia's integrity and security; and second, his adaptation of the state- and Church-supported narratives on Russia's "traditional religions" and "traditional values".

3.3 Lexical aspects

The analysis of the selected linguistic corpus shows that Gainutdin frequently replaces original Islamic terminology in Arabic and Persian by what he perceives as its Russian equivalents. Based on the frequency with which Arabic and Persian loanwords and their Russian equivalents occur in the analysed corpus, the following examples single out and discuss key strategies used to translate Islamic terms into Russian.

The majority of key Islamic terms have entered the Russian language in the form of loanwords from Arabic and Persian; these loanwords have already been conventionalized in Russian and we can assume that the broader Russian-speaking public, including non-Muslims, are familiar with their meaning. Nevertheless, in Gainutdin's speeches, Arabic and Persian loanwords are used interchangeably with, or fully replaced by their Russian (Church Slavonic) counterparts: e.g., *namāz* is rendered as *molitva* meaning 'prayer', *hajj* as *palomnichestvo* 'pilgrimage'. Although these non-Islamic variants often refer to shared concepts among all Abrahamic religions, their semantic fields in some cases do not cover the whole range of meanings that are present in the original Arabic or Persian words. For instance, Russian *molitva* does not make a distinction between *namāz,* which means obligatory ritual prayer, and *duʿā* – a general term for an act of supplication; in the official Islamic discourse, the word *molitva* is then used for both concepts.

Why does the Mufti prefer to employ Russian words that are connected to the Orthodox Christian discourse, thus running the risk of losing some essential meanings of Islamic terms? Translation rather than simple transliteration of Islamic terminology into Russian yields tangible advantages for the speaker. We have to keep in mind that Gainutdin's audience consists not only of Muslims, but to a larger extent of non-Muslim listeners/readers, many of whom are not familiar with Arabic terms and Islamic theology. To make sure that the broader public understand and accept his message, the Mufti avoids "foreign" words. As a consequence, he also deconstructs the image of Islam as the religion of the "Other".

It is also noteworthy that Mufti Gainutdin prefers to use Orthodox Christian vocabulary instead of introducing or coining confession-neutral terms. There are two possible explanations for this. His strategy could be an attempt to emphasize theological closeness between Islam and Orthodox Christianity, where, as the Mufti suggests, key

notions are full synonyms across languages. Another explanation could be hidden in the symbolic value of Orthodox Christian vocabulary: it is often etymologically linked to Church Slavonic, which many Orthodox Christians perceive as the "sacred" language of the ROC. That is, the use of Church Slavonic is seen as a sacred act in itself and as a form of religious expression.[13] Thus, when the Mufti uses Church Slavonic terms, he also elevates the status of his speeches. In addition, one could argue that the "sacredness" of Church Slavonic words transmits in the best way possible the symbolic value of original Islamic terms in Arabic, which also enjoys the status of the sacred language in Islam.

Gainutdin consciously accepts the risk that this process of "familiarizing" Islam will mute the complexity of original Islamic terms and reduce their meaning when used in the cultural framework of the target language (Russian). Another pitfall of this strategy is of a theological nature. The Mufti implicitly suggests that Islam bears a close resemblance to the Orthodox Christian theological tradition, although he does not elaborate on this. For instance, Gainutdin uses the Arabic word *Allāh* [455] interchangeably with Church Slavonic concepts, such as *Bog* [35] 'God', *Gospod'* [56] 'Lord', *Tvorets* [41] and *Sozdatel'* [34] 'Creator'. Interestingly, the word *Vsevyshnii* [231] 'Exalted', which in Soviet dictionaries was still regarded as part of the Church lexicon, has been completely "hijacked" in the Islamic discourse, since the ROC spokesmen barely use it anymore. Gainutdin also introduces phrases like *edinyi i edinstvennyi Bog* [4] 'the one and only God', to restrict semantic fields associated with the word *Bog* in Russian and avoid the concept of the Holy Trinity:

> "…pilgrims go to the very first temple built on earth to worship the Exalted, with sincere feelings of fulfilled duty, with tears in their eyes […], faithful to the one and only God".[14]

The word *Koran* [158] 'Qurʾān' is another key Islamic term, which in Gainutdin's texts is often rendered by Orthodox Christian notions, some of which bear exclusive Christian meanings. For instance, the Mufti translates the word as *Zakon (Vsevyshnego/Boga/Allakha)* [3] 'Law of God', *Zavet* [2] 'Covenant', *Slovo Bozh'e* [1] 'Word of God':

> "These young people mistook the holiness for aggression and a complete disrespect for the sanctity of human life [and] disrespect for the Law of Allāh".[15]

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[13] For a definition of a "sacred" language, see A.J. Liddicoat, "Language Planning as an Element of Religious Practice," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 13:2 (2012), 121-44. Here p. 122.
[14] Text # 27 as given in Appendix I.
[15] Text # 46.

By using the Russian forms *Zakon* and *Zavet,* Gainutdin attempts to place the Qurʾān in the series of agreements made between God and humanity; for Orthodox Christian speakers of Russian, however, these words primarily refer to the New Covenant (*Novyi Zavet*) that replaced the Old Covenant described in the Old Testament (*Vetkhii Zavet*). In his speeches, the Mufti obviously does not dwell on the relationship between the New Testament and the Qurʾān;[16] although his critics could argue that he implicitly suggests that the Qurʾān must enjoy greater importance, as it was delivered after the NT and, as Muslims believe, through God's last Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad.[17] However, Gainutdin does not use these terms very often, perhaps realizing that he risks arousing resentment. More frequently, we encounter "safer" translation variants, such as *Sviashchennoe Pisanie* [20] 'Holy Scripture' or *Sviashchennaia Kniga* [2] 'Holy Book', which have also been used outside of Islamic contexts to refer to the Sacred Scriptures of all Abrahamic religions.

In some cases, Muslims, as well as Christians, have met Gainutdin's translation choices with harsh criticism. For instance, in his *Poslanie* (to be analysed in the next section), the Mufti translated *miʿrāj* – the Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and thence to heaven – as *voznesenie* 'ascension':

> "After obtaining a better insight into the essence of his [the Prophet Muhammad's] *rozhdestvo* ['birth'], we are called to remember and delve into the events of his life path (in Arabic 'khidzhra'), the culmination, the highest point of which was his ascension [*voznesenie*] (in Arabic 'miradzh') to the Lotus of the Utmost Boundary (sidra al'-muntakha)".[18]

Used in a religious context, the noun *voznesenie* in Russian means "one of the twelve main Christian holidays, which commemorates the ascension of Christ to Heaven".[19] Similarly problematic is another word that appears in the same speech – *rozhdestvo,* which Gainutdin uses to translate *mawlid an-nabī*, meaning the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The word *rozhdestvo* can have two different meanings: 1) one

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[16] See D. Thomas, "Gospel, Muslim conception of", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. K. Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/573-3912_ei3_COM_27508> (Accessed on 19 June 2018). See also the discussion in Chapter 7.

[17] In traditional Muslim belief, the Prophet Muhammad is the "last and greatest of the prophets", which, as Frants Buhl et al. argue, is a concept that "is most likely based on a later interpretation of the expression 'seal of the prophets' (*khātam al-nabiyyin*)", which is applied to Muhammad in Q 33:40. See F. Buhl et al., "Muḥammad", *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0780> (Accessed on 19 June 2018).

[18] Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

[19] S.I. Ozhegov and N.I. Shvedova, *Tolkovyi Slovar' Russkogo Iazyka* (Moscow: TEMP, 2006).

of the Christian holidays, commemorating Jesus Christ's birth; 2) the birth of Christ.[20] To be able to use this word in an Islamic context, Gainutdin coined the phrase *rozhdestvo proroka Mukhammeda,* which in English would be something like 'Christmas of the Prophet Muhammad'.[21] The Mufti himself is aware of the ambiguity of the term and explains his word choice in his speech. He argues that the word *rozhdestvo* used to be neutral in medieval Russian and simply meant 'to be born'. Therefore, Gainutdin continues, the new phrase with an Islamic meaning is "justified" (*zakonno*) in the Russian-speaking space and does not distort the Islamic nature (*sushchnost'*) of *mawlid al-nabī*.[22] Not everyone found this argumentation entirely convincing, and the speech stirred up controversy in the mainstream media.[23]

For terms like *prikhod* [4] 'parish', *prikhozhane* [1] 'congregation', *pastva* [2] 'flock', Gainutdin does not give an Arabic equivalent, implying that these pose no semantic challenges when used in an Islamic context. The concept of 'Muslim clergy', following the imperial and Soviet traditions, is rendered either as *islamskoe dukhovenstvo* [48] 'Islamic clergy', or *sviashchennosluzhiteli* / *sluzhiteli ku'lta* [2] 'servants of the cult':

> "Working with young people, with parishioners, requires a tribune; for clergy [*sviashchennosluzhitelei*], it is a minbar in mosques, the number of which is still catastrophically inadequate in Russia".[24]

It is important to note that most of the DUM RF spokesmen, including Gainutdin himself, translate quotes from *sūra*s and *āya*s without references to the already existing translations of the Qurʾān in Russian. Basically, these speakers use El'mir Kuliev's translation,[25] but do not refrain from also "looking for inspiration" in the Russian Qurʾān translation from 1878,[26] which was the work of the nineteenth-century Orthodox Christian scholar Gordii Sablukov (1803-1880).[27]

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[20] Ibid., p. 682.

[21] Although the Russian word *rozhdestvo* does not contain the word 'Christ' in its root, its semantic links to Christianity are equally strong.

[22] Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

[23] E.g., R. Silant'ev, "Pokhititeli rozhdestva", *NG Religii*, 4 February 2015 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2015-02-04/4_xmas.html> (Accessed on 5 February 2017). Also R.A. Mukhametov, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie Gainutdina. Propoved' dlia elity i obshchestva", *Ansar*, 23 January 2015 <http://www.ansar.ru/analytics/rozhdestvenskoe-poslanie-gajnutdina-propoved-dlya-elity-i-obshhestva> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[24] Text # 22.

[25] E. Kuliev, *Koran. Perevod smyslov i kommentarii* (Moscow: Umma, 2003).

[26] From the author's interviews with DUM RF associates, who prefer to remain anonymous. These interviews were conducted in Russia and Sweden in October 2016.

[27] G. Sablukov, *Koran. Perevod s arabskogo G. Sablukova* (Kazan: Tsentral'naia tipografiia, 1907).

Within the DUM RF and the SMR, Gainutdin's strategies of translating Islamic vocabulary into Russian enjoy support of other prominent figures, who at various points in time have also spoken in favour of "purifying" Russian from Arabic and Persian loanwords. In the early 2000s, Viacheslav Ali Polosin (b. 1956), a former Orthodox Christian priest who converted to Islam, called for new, more "understandable" translations of the Qurʾān, arguing that esthetical features of the text and transparency of meaning should rank above literalness (see Chapter 5).[28] Gainutdin's outspoken and assertive deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov, has also been a keen promoter of the Mufti's approach to using vocabulary shared with the ROC, diligently warding off the critics who disagree with Gainutdin's translation strategies.[29]

By giving priority to the linguistic Russification of Islam, however, Gainutdin faces difficulty reaching out to Muslims in Russia's ethnic republics and to regional Muslim spiritual directorates. The extensive use of Russian, among other factors, alienates those spiritual directorates (DUMs) where Russian is perceived as a threat to the local ethnic identity and vernacular. For instance, the Mufti of Tatarstan, Kamil' Samigullin, went against the Russification trend and determined that all mosques in the republic should conduct Friday sermons exclusively in Tatar, not in Russian.[30] Samigullin's main argument was that Russian has been actively used by adherents of Salafism and serves as a means to promote "non-traditional" forms of Islam in the region.[31] Such tensions with regional Islamic authorities, especially the influential ones like that of Tatarstan, compromise Gainutdin's aspiration to become the undisputed leader of Russia's *umma*.

3.3.1 Meta-discourse: academic discussion on the translation of religious terms

The question of whether Islamic terminology can and should be translated into Russian has also been a subject of discussion in Russia's academic circles. As early as

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[28] E.g., V.A. Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu* (Moscow: Ladomir, 2000); V.A. Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom. Priamoi put' k Bogu* (Moscow: Priamoi put', 2003).

[29] D. Mukhetdinov, "O rozhdestvenskom poslanii muftiia i 'detskikh bolezniakh' riadom s nami", *LiveJournal*, 12 March 2015 <http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/133207.html > (Accessed on 6 February 2017); D. Mukhetdinov, "Razmyshleniia posle Rozhdestvenskikh parlamentskikh vstrech", *LiveJournal*, 22 January 2015 <http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/2015/01/22/> (Accessed on 5 February 2017).

[30] L. Lukmanova, "Kamil' khazrat Samigullin: 'V Tatarstane piatnichnye propovedi dolzhny byt' tol'ko na tatarskom iazyke'", *Tatar-Inform*, 11 August 2016 <http://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2016/0-8/11/515950/> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[31] Such binary oppositions, where Tatar is perceived as the language of "traditional" Islam and Russian as the language spoken only by supporters of "Wahhabi" Islam, are obviously simplified. On challenges of applying the "traditionalism" paradigm to the languages spoken in Tatarstan, see Bustanov, "The Language of Moderate Salafism".

2006, Stanislav M. Prozorov from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg expressed his discontent with the custom of using Christian religious terms in an Islamic context, although without attacking the Islamic officials directly. Taufik Ibragim, a scholar of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow, whose works the DUM RF actively promotes, countered Prozorov's points of criticism.

Prozorov argues that every religion should maintain its specificity. In countries where there is a dominant religion, like Orthodox Christianity in Russia, the "foreignness" of other denominations should be respected. The full translation of Arabic-Muslim terminology into Russian, in his opinion, is not correct from a theological point of view, because "symbols in each religion are not interchangeable". For instance, to replace '*Allāh*' with an abstract '*Bog*', for Prozorov "means to ignore the specificities of Islam as an ideological and theological system". The scholar emphasizes that he supports ecumenism, if the latter means seeing Abrahamic religions as equal to each other; but he does oppose their "unification", where peculiarities of one religion are dissolved into another, more powerful religious discourse.[32]

His opponent in this discussion, Taufik Ibragim, believes that pluralism "will not work" among a single (*edinyi*) monotheistic tradition, and therefore should not be promoted. In his opinion, believers of all Abrahamic religions share the same understanding of the concept of God, and any differentiation, including a variation in terminology, would only distance believers from each other. Instead, he argues, the translations should emphasize that Jews, Muslims and Christians – who make up about half of mankind – believe in the same God; the prevalence of this idea would be an incentive for them to work together and to resist religious confrontation and the growth of atheism.[33]

Translating Islamic concepts into Russian and using this language as the *lingua franca* for Muslims is an adequate practice, continues Ibragim, since the language is already "permeated (*proniknutyi*) by the monotheistic tradition" of Orthodox Christianity, and thus is suitable for meeting the linguistic needs of Muslims.[34]

The cooperation of the DUM RF with Ibragim reflects the trend that the Islamic establishment in Russia increasingly feels the need to embrace academic expertise on

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[32] T. Ibragim and S. Prozorov, "Allakh ili Bog?", *Minaret 1 (8)*, 2006 <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/8/allahgod.htm? > (Accessed on 6 February 2017).
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

Islam. Ibragim's position on translation corresponds with the agenda of the DUM RF to promote Russian as the language of Islamic preaching, education and communication. Using words and images "familiar to the Russian culture", Gainutdin aspires to make the "Islamic message accessible to our contemporaries".[35] Against the background of a growing number of Muslims in Russia who prefer to use Russian as their language of communication, Gainutdin attempts to occupy the niche of the authoritative translator. The DUM RF has been trying to create a canon of Islamic religious texts in Russian, intended to represent the opinion of Russia's "traditional" *'ulamā*, Muslim religious scholars.[36] Among their recent publications is the Qurʾān in Russian,[37] based primarily on the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953). Further, an Islamic encyclopedia and a *ḥadīth* collection in Russian have been part of their roadmap.[38] Gainutdin's deputy, Mukhetdinov, believes that the standardization of Russian terms in the Islamic discourse will put an end to Russia's Muslims being "taught [with the help of] little brochures in bad Russian, which [contain] controversial statements and radical appeals".[39]

3.4 Textual structures

This section of the chapter analyses Gainutdin's *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* (2015). The *Poslanie* 'Message' consists of two parts: first, Gainutdin introduces the term *rozhdestvo*, legitimizes its use in the Islamic context (as discussed above), and explains the value of *mawlid an-nabī* celebrations for Muslims and adherents of Abrahamic religions in general; in the second part of his speech, Gainutdin comments on the attack carried out against editors and journalists of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015.

The title of Gainutdin's speech – *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* – is a direct reference to Christmas messages traditionally delivered by the head of the ROC. In his yearly official Christmas message, the Patriarch addresses primarily the Church clergy and flock; during Orthodox Christmas celebrations, he also gives a speech at the Parliamentary

[35] Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".
[36] D. Mukhetdinov, "Nuzhny klassicheskie i sovremennye tafsiry, sostavlennye nastoiashchimi alimami islama", *Minaret 4 (14)*, 2007 <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/14/muhetdin11.htm> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).
[37] See DUM RF, *Sviashchennyi Koran. S kommentariiami Abdully Iusufa Ali* (Moscow: Medina, 2015).
[38] The DUM RF started these projects in cooperation with the Turkish Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) but after the relationship between the two institutions deteriorated, the projects were put on hold. See Islam News, "Sovet muftiev Rossii obvinil turetskoe upravlenie po delam religii v predatel'stve", *Islam News*, 29 September 2017 <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-sovet-muftiev-rossii-obvinil-turecko/> (Accessed on 12 July 2018).
[39] Mukhetdinov, "Nuzhny klassicheskie i sovremennye tafsiry".

Christmas Readings in the State Duma, where the Patriarch's direct audience is the political leadership of the country.

Gainutdin's text, in fact, combines both types of audiences (which also corresponds to the division of the speech into two parts) and is therefore oriented both inward and outward. On the one hand, the speech is inward-oriented because it addresses primarily the in-group of believers, religious leaders and communities, not only Muslim but also Christian and Jewish. The Mufti uses the occasion of the speech – the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, which in 2015 coincided with Orthodox Christian Christmas celebrations – as a pretext for fostering the interreligious dialogue in which Russia's major religious institutions are expected to be involved.

On the other hand, the text is also outward-oriented and reaches out to secular audiences. By delivering his version of a "Christmas message", Gainutdin claims to be the authoritative leader of Russia's Islamic community. Thus, the Mufti attempts to gain recognition and to secure special treatment, preferably of the kind that the ROC enjoys, for Islamic institutions under his leadership.

If we look at the structure of this speech, the Mufti starts his message with the traditional *basmala*,[40] fully translated into Russian, and ends with a prayer. Throughout the text, he uses references to religious authority, primarily to the Qurʾān, to support his arguments, which allows us to characterize it as a religious speech. Gainutdin's argumentation leaves little room for discussion and excludes those who do not share his religious beliefs and assumptions.[41]

From a perspective of rhetorical strategies, references to the Qurʾān introduce God as the author of the message, while the speaker (Gainutdin) becomes only the utterer. This distribution of roles helps to displace responsibility for what is said from the Mufti to an abstract figure of the Supreme Being.[42] In the context of present-day Russia, actors who enter public debate with religious arguments and advance religious claims, enjoy the support of the conservative political establishment. For instance, the ROC leadership has been actively using religious arguments in public debate: supported by the state, the Church tends to act as a moral entrepreneur that promotes

[40] The word *basmala* refers to the Islamic formula commonly translated into English as 'in the name of God, the Clement, the Merciful'.

[41] J.N. Blum, "Public Discourse and the Myth of Religious Speech," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33:1 (2018), 1-16; A.F. March, "Rethinking Religious Reasons in Public Justification," *American Political Science Review* 107:3 (2013), 523-39.

[42] W. Keane, "Religious Language, Religion and Marked Language Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 47-71. Here p. 58.

conservative norms.[43] In his speech, Gainutdin also attempts to draw on the symbolic power of religion as an unhampered source of truth and moral norms. He uses religious argumentation to comment on the relationship between freedom of religion and freedom of expression within contemporary multicultural societies: in public and political discourses, these two fundamental human rights have increasingly been regarded as contradicting each other. In his speech, the Mufti follows the ROC discourse and introduces the image of the West being the common enemy of Russia's "traditional religions"; Gainutdin then juxtaposes Russia's "traditional values", guarded by its religions, and Western "fundamental", "universal" values.

3.4.1 Meta-discourse: the image of the pernicious West

In 2015, less than a month prior to Gainutdin's speech, the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published a series of satirical cartoons on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. This publication "brought back the spectre of the 'culture wars' that erupted in 2005-2006";[44] back then a Danish newspaper published twelve cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad, which triggered a global controversy and an intense editorial debate. On 7 January 2015, gunmen stormed *Charlie Hebdo*'s office in Paris, killing several journalists and editors; following the assassination, numerous rallies around the world took place for the victims and to support freedom of expression. In Russia, by contrast, protests broke out *against* the practices of European media;[45] Gainutdin's SMR "angrily condemned" the attack, but placed some of the blame for the assault on the magazine's staff who, as Gainutdin put it, committed the "sin of provocation".[46]

In the second part of his *Poslanie*, the Mufti brings this issue into discussion. This part is clearly more emotional than the first one and contains many interrogative and exclamatory sentences. Such an appeal to emotions helps Gainutdin to engage the audience and construct an in-group ("us") – out-group ("them") dichotomy. The in-

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[43] Stöckl, "The Russian Orthodox Church as Moral Norm Entrepreneur".

[44] B. Bergareche, "A Look Back to the 2006 Danish Cartoons Crisis", *Medium*, 7 January 2015 <https://medium.com/@borjabergareche/a-look-back-to-the-2006-danish-cartoons-crisis-34137f714713> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[45] In Chechnya, one of Russia's predominantly Muslim republics, thousands of Muslims joined the protests against the immorality of the French cartoonists, see A. Luhn, "Thousands of Chechens Rally Against Charlie Hebdo Cartoons as Firebrand Leader Attacks the West", *Vice News*, 19 January 2015 <https://news.vice.com/article/thousands-of-chechens-rally-against-charlie-hebdo-cartoons-as-firebrand-leader-attacks-the-west> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[46] SMR, "Terrorizm ne imeet opravdaniia", *Sovet Muftiev Rossii*, 7 January 2015 <http://www.muslim.ru/articles/280/8518/> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

group, which overlaps with Gainutdin's target audience, includes "not only those who are born to Islamic families, [and] who have chosen the path of monotheism on their own, but [also] all honest people, the seekers of truth". The latter, for Gainutdin, are those "who are in Muslim culture called the 'people of the Book', i.e. the believers in the One God, the 'children of Abraham', the Jews and Christians of all denominations".

Thus, Gainutdin presents Russia's Orthodox Christians and Jews as belonging to the same in-group as Muslims; he argues that the anti-religious sentiments in the West also pose a serious threat to Russia's non-Muslim religious groups. Gainutdin further implies that the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad are (or at least should be) equally offensive to Christians and Jews; he supports his claim with the verse from the Qurʾān proclaiming that the Prophet Muhammad is a "mercy to all the worlds" (Q 21:107). Therefore, in Gainutdin's opinion, Russia's Abrahamic religions should join forces to protect the Prophet's image against mockery.

In constructing a negative image of the West, Gainutdin uses a type of argumentation similar to that of Patriarch Kirill, who delivered his speech at the Christmas Readings in the State Duma around the same time.[47] For instance, the "Western" values, according to Gainutdin, are mere "ultraliberal ravishment (*upoenie*) by liberty" and "the utmost egocentrism". Kirill, in his turn, called them "wrongly understood freedom" and contrasted them with what he perceives as Russia's "solidarity society".[48] For Gainutdin, the West is a place full of "grimaces of neo-atheism" and "non-adequate terror", where the most influential mass media support the mocking of religion; for the ROC Patriarch, Russia is challenged by a "dangerous post-Christian and post-religious world" and the West is an embodiment of "chaos and conflict", which is supported by "politically and ideologically biased mass media".[49] The anti-Western and isolationist rhetoric that Gainutdin fully embraces is deeply rooted in Russia's political culture. Rejection of the imagined "Western liberal ethos" is something that the present-day ROC shares with the Soviet ideologized moral code. As Agadjanian argues, in the ROC discourse "such paradigmatic conservatism had been celebrated as constitutive to the Russian civilisation's uninterrupted religious inheritance".[50]

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[47] Patriarch Kirill, "Vystuplenie Sviateishego Patriarkha Kirilla na otkrytii III Rozhdestvenskikh Parlamentskikh vstrech", *The official website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2015 <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3960558.html> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community", p. 43.

3.4.2 The "traditionalism" discourse

In their response to the *Charlie Hebdo* events, both the Patriarch and the Mufti mobilize the "traditionalism" rhetoric. This rhetoric was first incorporated into the language of the Russian government, and when used by the state, it portrays Russia as the defender of "traditionality" against the country's domestic and foreign enemies. Starting in 2002, attacks on "traditionality" were increasingly interpreted as "religious threats" and led to the introduction of the term "traditional religions" (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism), as entitled to state protection and preference.[51] In opposition to "traditionalism", there are "radicalism" and "extremism". These concepts are relative, but "generally presented as recognizable and concrete evils and threats to Russia"; they are either "inherently violent [or] they seek to change Russia's moral character".[52]

By 2012, another concept, that of "traditional values", had become widespread in the official discourse. Among official representatives of Christianity and Islam, there is a consensus that the concept of "traditional values" has a religious connotation, and these are in fact religious values. In Islamic and Christian discourses, the primary meaning of "traditional values" has revolved around principles associated with morality and family. Like the very institutions that guard them, "traditional values" are also believed to be under (Western) attack and in need of defence.[53]

In his *Poslanie*, Gainutdin refers to the concept of "traditional values", arguing that they are shared by Russia's monotheistic religions and challenged by "pernicious" Western liberties. In the context of the cartoons scandal, the Mufti elaborates on freedom of speech. The French journalists, he argues, have committed the "sin of provocation", condemned in the Qurʾān; they are those, who are mentioned in the Q 4:46, who "twist [the meaning of God's revelation] abusively with their tongues to disparage religion". Gainutdin thereby adopts a standpoint similar to that of the ROC as expressed in the document from 2008 on human rights.[54] The ROC recognizes freedom of speech as very important but assumes that it can be rejected if the spoken word instigates strife in society or spreads a sin. The ROC document places emphasis not on the *right* to exercise this freedom, but "on the *responsibility* of an individual for

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[51] Verkhovsky, "The State Against Violence in Spheres Related to Religion", p. 13.
[52] O. Oliker, "Introduction", in *Religion and Violence in Russia* (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 1-7. Here p. 4.
[53] Du Quenoy and Dubrovskiy, "Violence and the Defense of 'Traditional Values' in the Russian Federation", p. 101.
[54] ROC, "The Russian Orthodox Church's Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights".

his or her speech".[55] In Gainutdin's opinion, it is the task of religious communities and institutions to help those who "went astray (*ostupivshiisia*) and committed a crime", meaning the French journalists.[56] That is, Gainutdin criminalizes the publication of the cartoons in the French magazine. He implicitly refers to provisions of the anti-blasphemy law adopted in Russia in 2013[57] and claims that Muslims are also covered by the right to be protected against critical discourses by "secular and anti-Muslim thinkers" and "those who feel indignation (*negodovat'*) at the belief of Abraham's Children".[58]

Gainutdin also argues that the anti-religious nature of the West is the result of ideas introduced during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods. These ideas, according to Gainutdin, later received a considerable boost in German philosophy, in particular in the works of the "Frankfurt School" of critical philosophy.[59] The "Frankfurt School", in the Mufti's opinion, is responsible for the very concept of ultra-liberalism. This argument may come as a surprise in such a message; and since Gainutdin's deputy, Damir Mukhetdinov, previously expressed similar criticism in his programmatic paper on Russia's Islam (see the following section),[60] he may well be the co-author of this part of Gainutdin's speech. In Russia's religious context, a reference to the "Frankfurt School" is relatively safe, as many people are simply not familiar with this philosophical movement. As a rhetorical tool, the reference helps the Mufti to present himself as a reputable authority not only in theology, but also in secular sciences.

3.4.3 Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo (Russia's Islam)

The critique on Western liberal values in the discourse by the DUM RF leadership should be seen as part of a more complex ideological construction. What we observe in speeches by Gainutdin and his deputy Mukhetdinov is an attempt to offer

[55] Orginial emphasis, A. Agadjanian, "Liberal Individual and Christian Culture: Russian Orthodox Teaching on Human Rights in Social Theory Perspective," *Religion, State & Society*, 38:2 (2010), 97-113. Here p. 101.

[56] Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

[57] The law illegalizes actions that can be regarded as a violation of the religious feelings of believers. It does not provide any definition of "religious feelings", which allows prosecutors to target any critical speech. Moreover, as Alexander Agadjanian rightly argues, the law, in its essence, does not aim to protect the individual against offensive expressions; but it does protect an Orthodox community's negative right not to be offended. See Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community", p. 48.

[58] Gainutdin, "Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie".

[59] The term "Frankfurt School" refers to a group of intellectuals who applied Marxism to a radical interdisciplinary social theory. The group was closely related in origin to the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and included Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Eric Fromm (1900-1980), among others.

[60] Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo*.

an interpretation of Islam that would be approved and accepted by Russian society and the state.

In the last decade, the presidential administration has been sending out clear signals that such an interpretation is urgent. In particular, in 2013 during his meeting with leaders of Russia's Muslim Spiritual Directorates in Ufa, President Putin addressed the need to "socialize" (*sotsializatsiia*) the Muslim community. This "socialization", according to the President, should focus on modernization of Russia's *umma*, meaning that the Muslim way of life and value system should develop in accordance with contemporary social reality. Moreover, Putin encouraged the development of a "political Islam", that is, an interpretation of Islam that does not contradict Russia's political and legal systems but, to the contrary, helps to strengthen the state's agenda. In his speech, which was later referred to as the "Ufa Theses", the President stressed that Russia's Muslim leaders should also contribute to the social adaptation of Muslim migrants coming from Central Asia.[61]

Several scholars have emphasized the fact that in their interpretation of Russia's Islam, the DUM RF leadership draws primarily on (neo-)Eurasianism ideology, or rather on the vague understanding of this ideology in the state discourse.[62] The (neo-)Eurasianism ideology in the interpretation of the DUM RF also falls back on ideas of anti-globalism, and the need to defend "traditional values" and to promote multiculturalism and moderate conservatism. Contrary to the state discourse, however, it places greater emphasis on the role of Islam in shaping Russian civilization.

For instance, in recent years Gainutdin has repeatedly stressed the "large-scale Eurasian culture" (*masshtabnaia evraziiskaia kul'tura*) to which Russia's Islam belongs.[63] The Mufti has also called for a positive reconsideration of the Golden Horde heritage and declared that Russia owes not only its statehood but also its greatness to the Golden Horde, and that the Tatars today embody the historical link to Muslims of the khanate.[64]

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[61] Malashenko, "Islamic Challenges to Russia"

[62] On the critique of DUM RF's instrumentalization of (neo-)Eurasianism ideology, see I.L. Alekseev, "Osmyslenie rossiiskogo musul'manstva – zadacha stol' zhe vozvyshennaia i pokhval'naia, skol' ambitsioznaia i riskovannaya", in *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo: prizyv k osmysleniiu i kontekstualizatsii*, ed. D. Mukhetdinov (Moscow: Medina, 2016), 80-87; R. Bekkin, "Russkoe evraziistvo i islam," *Zvezda* 11 (2017), 135-48; Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?"; also Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

[63] I. Gashkov, "Sheikhi rossiiskogo konservatizma", *NG Religii*, 17 January 2014 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2014-12-17/1_gainutdin.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018); also Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

[64] Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

Damir Mukhetdinov elaborated on the interpretation of Russia's Islam in his programme essay entitled *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo* (2016).[65] In many respects, this essay summarizes ideas that have already been prominent in the DUM RF discourse: Mukhetdinov argues that there is an original (*samobytnyi*) form of Islam practised in Russia, which is called *rossiiskii* Islam, literally 'Russia's Islam'; this includes the adjective *rossiiskii*, which is a broader and more neutral term than *russkii* 'Russian'. This *rossiiskii* Islam *was* shaped by and *has* contributed to the Russian civilization in the past and continues to do so today.[66]

Another cornerstone in the discourse of the DUM RF is the project of "Qurʾānic humanism", which was introduced and supported by Taufik Ibragim.[67] The DUM RF has successfully incorporated this project as a way to modernize Russia's *umma* by fostering the humanist character of Islam.

The DUM RF's promotion of "traditional" and *rossiiskii* Islam, as well as their emphasis on "traditional" Muslim communities, consequently excludes Muslims who do not match this definition. In particular, the problem concerns adherents of "non-traditional" Islamic movements, Muslim labour migrants and, as we will see in the next chapter, ethnic Russian converts to Islam.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the discourse in Russian of Mufti Gainutdin as a representative of Russia's official Islam. On the lexical level, Gainutdin employs the strategy of translating Islamic terminology into Russian using Orthodox Christian religious vocabulary. By avoiding "foreign" Arabic and Persian vocabulary, the Mufti attempts to "familiarize" Islam as a genuinely "traditional" religion, integral to Russian culture. The Mufti thereby assumes that Islamic and Orthodox Christian religious vocabulary can be used interchangeably in the Islamic context; he does not elaborate on theological implications of such translation practices.

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[65] Mukhetdinov, *Rossiiskoe musul'manstvo*. The title of the programme makes direct reference to an essay by the Crimean Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinskii (1851-1915): I. Gasprinskii, *Russkoe musul'manstvo: mysli, zametki i nabliudeniia musul'manina* (Simferopol': Spiro, 1881). In terms of content, these documents also echo each other: both advocate Muslim loyalty to the Russian state and, at the same time, criticize the state's failure to see Russia's Muslims as an asset and not a threat. For a more detailed overview of Mukhetdiov's essay and an analysis of resemblances to Gasprinskii's book, see Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?".

[66] Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?".

[67] T. Ibragim, *Koranicheskii Gumanizm* (Moscow: Medina, 2015); see also M. Kemper and G. Sibgatullina, "Liberal Islamic Theology in Conservative Russia: Taufik Ibragim's 'Quranic Humanism'", in *Islamic Authority in Eurasia*, ed. R. Sela (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univeristy Press, Forthcoming).

A textual analysis of Gainutdin's *Rozhdestvenskoe poslanie* has shown that the Mufti relies heavily on the discourse of the ROC leadership and adopts exclusive Orthodox genres as well as argumentation strategies and references to other dominant political discourses that are prominent in the speeches made by the Patriarch. By employing this strategy, Gainutdin aims to become recognized as an Islamic alternative to the head of the ROC and claims to be the single, most authoritative leader of Russia's Muslim community at the federal level.

It should be noted that the degree of resemblance to the ROC is historically inherent in the very institutions of Russia's official Islam. Today, against the background of the close Church-state relations and the threat of religion-inspired extremism, the Islamic authorities are left with even less room for manoeuvre. In tough competition with other Muftiates, Gainutdin adopts the ROC rhetoric to reach out not so much to broader audiences of Muslims, but rather to political elites, and to promote an interpretation of "traditional" Islam embedded in the mainstream patriotic discourses.

This transformation in Russia partially matches what Niels V. Vinding refers to as "churchification" of Islam in Europe. The term is understood, first of all, as a rhetorical tool, when Islamic institutions, authority and practices are compared to those of Christianity: e.g., mosques to churches, *imām*s to priests. In terms of normativization, the notion of "churchification" is also "associated with modelling of Islam on the Christian example or fitting it in the established framework for state and religion relations";[68] that is, the state tends to format Islam, as well as other religions, to meet the blueprint of a church and insists on assuming a similarity among different religions in the name of equality between believers. Adopting (or deliberately rejecting) the church model can also be a conscious political move on the part of Muslim organizations, continues Vinding. In particular, by building Christian-type structures, Muslims hope to gain recognition in the mainstream society.[69] I will also discuss further attempts to "churchify" Russia's Islam in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The following Chapter 4 will zoom in on a community of ethnic Russian converts to Islam who use strategies similar to Mufti Gainutdin in order to "purify" Islamic discourse in Russian. However, their use of these linguistic tools enables the converts to address different audiences and put forward their own interpretation of Russia's Islam.

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[68] N.V. Vinding, "Churchification of Islam in Europe", in *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe: Essays in Honour of Jørgen S. Nielsen*, ed. N.V. Vinding et al. (Brill, 2018), 50-66. Here p. 59.
[69] Ibid.

Chapter 4

The *Russkii* Islam: Discursive Strategies in Conversion Narratives of Russian Muslims

This chapter continues the discussion about users of the Russian language of Islam and their goals. It is not only Islamic "turbaned" elites who use the Russianism variant to rise in power and ensure their embeddedness in Russia's power structures; a community of ethnic Russian converts to Islam also embody another type of authority that employs this variant of Islamic Russian to pursue a political agenda, and they therefore contribute significantly to the conventionalization of the variant. For these converts, "purified" Islamic Russian is a tool to create a legitimate space and facilitate their acceptance by Russia's mainstream society. By constructing the *russkii* Islam – expressed in familiar (Orthodox Christian) religious terms – these converts aim to distance themselves from prejudices associated with ethnic Muslims. Another result of this discourse is the racialization of Islam, with claims to national, moral and cultural superiority of Russian Muslims over ethnic minorities.

4.1 Introduction

In the post-Soviet period, the renewed interest in Islam affected not only Russia's indigenous Muslim communities, who in the 1990s rediscovered their religious identity; hundreds of ethnic Russians were also exposed to the variety of choices on the thriving religious market and opted for the religion of the Other. For Russians, conversion to Islam even today continues to involve a struggle against the entrenched identity formulae, for in the last two decades Russianness has been increasingly defined by belonging to the ROC. By becoming Muslim, a convert opposes the dominant discourse and is therefore prone to becoming marginalized in the mainstream society; but the risk of social ostracism has risen drastically since the image of Islam and Muslims in the popular perception deteriorated following the launch of the global "War on Terror". Whereas the state praises Russia's multicultural nature with reference to the alleged centuries of peaceful coexistence between Orthodox Christianity and Islam, throughout 2001-2014 public opinion polls registered increased negative attitudes toward Muslims.[1] This caused Russia to experience outbursts of Islamophobia toward groups that have been part of the country for many centuries, as well as toward Muslim labour migrants coming from Central Asia. This chapter explores how, in such an antagonistic climate, Russian Muslims justify their conversion to Islam and accommodate their new religious views to the Russian identity.

To deal with their experiences of exclusion and discrimination, the Russian Muslims construct a kind of Islam that is different from the religion of Russia's Muslim ethnic groups and the Islamic traditions that have been introduced to Russia by immigrant communities. This distinct *russkii* Islam, converts argue, does not contradict Russian culture but, to the contrary, enhances it. Being a Russian Muslim therefore means having a patchwork identity, where the converts stress their self-identification as ethnic Russians and claim to "re-discover" what they perceive as genuinely Russian values that became blurred during the Soviet period. Most of these converts emphasize

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[1] On the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments in Russia, see Sova, "Levada-Tsentr o ksenofobii v 2017 godu", *Sova-Tsentr*, 28 August 2017 <http://www.sova-center.ru/racism-xenophobia/discussions/2017/08/d37-739/> (Accessed on 15 May 2018); also M. Laruelle and N. Yudina, "Islamophobia in Russia: Trends and Societal Context", in *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy*, ed. O. Oliker (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 43-63. As Vera Tolz observes, since 2012 the Russian state broadcasters use more radical, simplistic binary contrasts between the nation and its Others, which continues to jeopardize the societal consensus; see V. Tolz, "From a Threatening 'Muslim Migrant' Back to the Conspiring 'West': Race, Religion, and Nationhood on Russian Television during Putin's Third Presidency," *Nationalities Papers* 45:5 (2017), 742-57.

the moderate character of their newly acquired religious views and insist on the rationality and freedom in their spiritual search.

To examine how this identity is constructed discursively, in this chapter I analyse a corpus of conversion narratives published online. The collected data demonstrate that there are three strategies that the converts use most often in their personal stories: (1) purifying the Russian-language Islamic discourse from Arabic loanwords, (2) emphasizing their intellectual and rational motives for embracing Islam, and (3) defining Russianness beyond the traditional religious boundaries of Christian Orthodoxy.

These strategies manifest the converts' call for a "purified" form Islam. This, first of all, concerns the language they use to communicate with each other and to reach out to non-Muslims: as opposed to the heavily-accented and broken Russian of an imagined ethnic Muslim, the converts avoid using Islamic terminology and fiercely guard the grammatical and syntactic rules of the language. Second, the converts de-traditionalize and de-ethnicize the Islam with which they want to be associated: the *russkii* Islam is free from stigmatized traditions of ethnic Muslims, which makes it appear to be closer to its original intent and more appealing to the rational individual. Russian Muslims reject any association of their conversion to Islam with radicalization or obscurantism ("brainwashing"), emphasizing instead the guide of reason in their spiritual search. Yet implicitly they denounce and stigmatize the "cultural", "ethnic" Islam of Russia's existing Muslim communities and make it subordinate to the "noble" Islam of ethnic Russians.

Moreover, conversion to Islam of an ethnic Russian involves symbolic reversion from Orthodox Christianity – the religion that in the mainstream discourse is seen as the core of being Russian. Therefore, the act of becoming Muslim also looks like a social protest, even if the convert has absolutely no political agenda on his or her mind.[2] By converting to Islam, Russian Muslims challenge the dominant discourses on the Church being the moral pillar and Christianity functioning as a distinctive marker of Russian identity; in a broader sense, the act of conversion symbolizes opposition to the current state regime.

[2] For discussion on a political dimension within the act of conversion to Islam, see the study on German Muslims by E. Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); also the work by W. Jansen, "Conversion and Gender, Two Contested Concepts", in *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*, ed. K.v. Nieuwkerk (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), ix-xii (Foreword).

This symbolic power of conversion significantly increased in the 2000s, when Russian Muslims entered Russia's political scene. Their active presence in social and mass media sparked interest in Islam among many Russians, who felt uneasy about the transformations in society at the turn of the century. The following section will briefly introduce the major landmarks in the process of converts' politicization, when at its peak they were able to contribute to the public discussions on religion, national identity and belonging. A more detailed analysis of the data underlying this study and an examination of the discursive strategies will then follow in the remainder of this chapter.

4.2 Conversion to Islam in the post-Soviet period

Conversion to Islam became a subject of public discussion after the wars that Russia conducted in predominantly Muslim regions: in Afghanistan (1979-1989), and later in the Caucasus (1994-1996, 1999-2009). Narratives of Russian captives who converted to Islam at gunpoint were taken up in several artistic and cinematographic works.[3]

Yet in the 1980s and early 1990s, other Russians were also attracted to Islam far from the battlefields. The works of European Traditionalists – "the fruit of the marriage" between nineteenth-century oriental scholarship and the Western esoteric tradition[4] – found converts in bohemian intellectual circles of Moscow. For these, the search for "another level of reality" and oriental metaphysics, including but not limited to Islamic philosophy, were a response to the degrading Soviet regime.[5] Within the Russian branch of Traditionalism, Geidar Dzhemal' (1947-2016)[6] and Alexander Dugin

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[3] See, for instance, Vladimir Khotinenko's drama film "A Moslim" (1995) and the photo series by Aleksei Nikolaev "Forever captured" on Russian prisoners of war who remained in Afghanistan after the Soviet military withdrawal. See NG, "Navsegda v plenu", *Novaia Gazeta*, 8 July 2015 <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/arti-cles/2015/07/08/64839-navsegda-v-plenu-fotogalereya> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[4] Traditionalism is a twentieth-century anti-modernist movement, with René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon acknowledged as its pre-eminent exponents. See M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[5] M. Laruelle, "The Iuzhinskii Circle: Far-Right Metaphysics in the Soviet Underground and Its Legacy Today," *Russian Review* 74:4 (2015), 563-80; R. Bekkin, "Russian Muslims: a Misguided Sect, or the Vanguard of the Russian Umma", in *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language*, ed. A.K. Bustanov and M. Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 361-401.

[6] On Geidar Dzhemal', see M. Laruelle, "Digital Geopolitics Encapsulated. Geidar Dzhemal between Islamism, Occult Fascism and Eurasianism", in *Eurasia 2.0: Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media,* ed. M. Suslov and M. Bassin (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 81-100; G. Sibgatullina and M. Kemper,

(b. 1962)[7], initially staunch supporters of the Evolian far-right fringe, were the ones who most vocally elaborated on Islam as a potent political force.

The fall of the Soviet regime made room not only for alternative political ideologies; a gradual relaxation of control over the religious market already during Perestroika resulted in new movements entering Russia in the immediate post-Soviet years. As in Western Europe and North America, [8] many ethnic Russians, disenchanted with the Church, embarked on a search for "non-traditional" religious practices. That is, in addition to the politicization of Islam, also many external factors – the emergence of new religious institutions and structures introduced from abroad, as well as the development of new media technologies – also facilitated the encounter with Islam and provided access to sources of information that were previously unavailable.

What makes accounts of conversion of ethnic Russians distinct from those of their Western co-religionists is a continued presence of ideas from Soviet and post-Soviet intellectual thought. Eurasianism, the state-promoted concept of the "Russian World", Marxism and even Russian messianism give a unique twist to the discourse of Russian Muslims. Danis Garaev, in his analysis of speeches by convert Aleksandr Tikhomirov (1982-2010) – better known as Said Buriatskii – argues that the latter can be best "understood as a post-Soviet phenomenon", and not merely as a propagandist of radical Islamic ideas imported from the Middle East.[9] The argumentation, terminology and strategies that Buriatskii used were not merely reflections of commonplace Islamist rhetoric tools, but relied heavily on the Soviet and Russian intellectual tradition.

"Between Salafism and Eurasianism: Geidar Dzhemal and the Global Islamic Revolution in Russia," *Islam and Muslim-Christian relations* 28:2 (2017), 219-36.

[7] M. Laruelle, "Aleksandr Dugin: a Russian Version of the European Radical Right," *Kennan Institute Occasional Paper* 294 (2006), 1-25; Laruelle, "Digital Geopolitics Encapsulated. Geidar Dzhemal between Islamism, Occult Fascism and Eurasianism".

[8] The literature on conversion to Islam in the West deserves a separate study; here I mention only a few sources that are of special importance for the arguments of this chapter: K. van Nieuwkerk, "Gender, Conversion, and Islam: A Comparison of Online and Offline Conversion Narratives", in *Woman Embracing Islam*, ed. K.v. Nieuwkerk (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 95-149; K. van Nieuwkerk, "'Conversion' to Islam and the Construction of a Pious self", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. L.R. Rambo and C.E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 667-86; T.G. Jensen, "Religious Authority and Autonomy Intertwined: The Case of Converts to Islam in Denmark," *Muslim World* 96:4 (2006), 643-60; K. Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008); L. Kong and S. Nair, "Geographies of Religious Conversion", in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. L.R. Rambo and C.E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65-83.

[9] D. Garaev, "Jihad as Passionarity: Said Buriatskii and Lev Gumilev," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017), 203-18. Here p. 203.

However, biographies of Russian Muslims such as Said Buriatskii, who join various radical militant groups, conform to the existing prejudice about the zeal of "new" Muslims, who are believed to follow the dogmas of their new faith with most unrelenting intolerance and cruelty.[10] Although this negative image of a convert is not specific to Russia but also dominates Western European media, some see the roots of the radicalization problem in Russia's Islamic official institutions. A prominent Russian Muslim activist and journalist, Galina Babich, argues that converts face a "double marginalization" in Russian society: after conversion, they are excluded from their former social circles, but native Muslims also remain sceptical about the "new" co-religionists. For this, Babich blames the official Islamic institutions, where all important positions are occupied by "ethnic" Muslims. These institutions, she argues, refuse to bear responsibility for the accommodation of ethnically, and often also ideologically "non-traditional" Muslims; instead, the Muftiates continue to operate within the fixed and artificially created traditionalism framework.[11] This framework remains rigid in its definition of what is considered to be the "good, home-grown" versus "dangerous, Wahhabi" Islam, with clear preference given to the forms of Islam associated with Russia's Muslim-majority ethnic groups. Criticizing the current Islamic elites, Babich also implicitly points at the lack of a strong leader who could reach out to Russia's highly heterogeneous Islamic community.[12]

In fact, there were attempts to create alternative power structures to represent the interests of ethnic Russian converts to Islam. The mid-2000s marked the peak of political involvement of Russian Muslims. Converts were active online in the Russian-language blogosphere, and also offline: in this period they established their own communities, such as "Dagvat al'-Islami" (Islamic Call) in Omsk in Siberia, "Priamoi put'" (The Direct Path) and "Banu Zul'karnain" (Children of Alexander the Great) in Moscow, and the cultural centre "Ikhlas" (Sincerity) in Almaty in Kazakhstan.[13]

Let us now zoom in on the communities in Moscow – "Priamoi put'" and "Banu Zul'karnain". The former was launched by an ex-Orthodox priest, Viacheslav Ali Polosin (b. 1956), who converted to Islam in the late 1990s and became a *murīd*, disciple,

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[10] See, e.g., E. Milashina, "Rossiiskii eksport smerti", *Novaia Gazeta*, 17 March 2016 <https://www.novaya-gazeta.ru/articles/2016/03/17/67822-rossiyskiy-eksport-smerti> (Accessed on 26 April 2018).

[11] G. Babich, "Pravovernye bez ummy", *NG Religii*, 15 December 2010 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2010-12-15/6_umma.html> (Accessed on 4 March 2018).

[12] Ibid.

[13] V. Sidorov, "Russkie musul'mane: fenomen, sostoianie, perspektivy", *Portal-Credo*, 29 March 2012 <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=91105> (Accessed on 10 August 2017).

of an influential Sufi-Sheikh in the North Caucasus, Said Atsaev (Chirkeevskii/Chirkeiskii, d. 2012) (see Chapter 5, which is devoted to Polosin). Polosin's case of conversion to Islam was widely discussed in the Russian media and set the trend of Orthodox clergy "renegades" who followed Polosin's example.[14] In general, from the late 1990s until the death of ROC Patriarch Aleksii II in 2008, the boundaries between major religious communities were exceptionally porous. Polosin participated in religious debates against Orthodox Christians and argued that he represented liberal Islamic intelligentsia in Russia. At the same time, the Church closed its eyes to the practices of aggressive Orthodox Christian missionaries at the grassroots level and did not interfere with controversial practices of charismatic priests, such as Daniil Sysoev, who tried to revive the imperial style of missionizing among Turkic-speaking Muslim people in the Volga region and Central Asia (see further Chapter 6).

The second organization, the "Banu Zul'karnain", operated in the right-wing fringe of the Russian Muslim community. In the early 2000s, some far-right Russian nationalists were attracted to Islam: for them, this religion was associated with rebels fighting against the Russian army in the Caucasus, and therefore symbolized resistance to the ruling elites. They portrayed Islam as the religion of "passionaries'" (*passionarii*) versus Christianity – "the religion of the weak".[15] The idea of a distinct *russkii* Islam was formulated as far back as the 1990s by Geidar Dzhemal'. Dzhemal', a half-Russian, half-Azeri Muslim from Moscow, later became the "Godfather" of Russian right-wing converts and a driving force behind their political manifestos. Like other groups within political Islam of that period,[16] the one around Dzhemal' flirted with the ideas of (neo-)Eurasianism. Dzhemal''s Indo-European Eurasianist project revolved around the figure of Alexander the Great (Dhū al-Qarnayn); according to legend, Alexander built a wall to protect the descendants of Noah from the destruction brought by the hordes of Gog and Magog. In Dzhemal''s project, Islam in Russia again needed to be protected against, or purified from "Turkic elements". The Turks, in his opinion, had brought about the contemporary stagnation in the Islamic world.[17] In 2003, his disciple Kharun

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[14] The ROC media also reported on the conversion to Islam of Orthodox priests Vladislav Sokhin, Sergii Timukhin and Mikhail Kiselev. See Iu. Maksimov, "Anatomiia izmeny", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 21 August 2006 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/put/060821104600.htm> (Accessed on 6 February 2017); G. Maksimov, "Pravoslavnye sviashchenniki pereshedshie v islam", *Pravoslavnyi Vzgliad*, 1 December 2013 <http://orthoview.ru/pravoslavnye-svyashhenniki-pereshedshie-v-islam/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[15] V. Mal'tsev, "Ariiskii dzhikhad", *Lenta.Ru*, 22 February 2016 <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/02/22/nazi_islam/> (Accessed on 26 April 2018).

[16] Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

[17] Sibgatullina and Kemper, "Between Salafism and Eurasianism", pp. 228-29.

ar-Rusi (Vadim Sidorov, b. 1977) announced the creation of the Russian Muslim community "Banu Zul'karnain" – "a Russian 'bastion' of the Aryan race to deter the infernal hordes of Gogs and Magogs";[18] in June 2004, "Banu Zul'karnain" and several other groups of Russian Muslims from Moscow (initially also Polosin's "Priamoi put'") created the National Organization of Russian Muslims (*Natsional'naia organizatsiia russkikh musul'man*, hereafter: NORM). Soon, however, internal disagreements about the ideological orientation of NORM resulted in a rift in its leadership.[19] The Shīʿa branch, headed by Abdulkarim (Taras) Chernienko (b. 1976), withdrew from the organization in 2005-2006; NORM's Sunnīs rallied around ar-Rusi.[20] By 2009 ar-Rusi distanced himself from the ideas of Dzhemal' and became a disciple of Sheikh Abdalqadir as-Sufi (Ian Dallas, b. 1930), the leader of the global network of European converts to Islam – the Murabitun World Movement.[21]

The goal of both "Priamoi put'" and "Banu Zul'karnain" (later NORM) was to create alternative institutions to the numerous "spiritual administrations, *ṭarīqa*s, [and] *jamāʿat*s",[22] which would help ethnic Russian Muslims coordinate efforts to promote *their* rights and interests. The Russian Muslims saw themselves as becoming the intellectual avant-garde that would be at the helm of Russia's *umma*.[23]

The politicization of ethnic Russian Muslims in the 2000s was, however, "largely unsuccessful".[24] Other, less fervent nationalist projects of Russian converts who attempted to construct political Islam within their vision of Eurasianism ideology were also doomed to fail. In 2001, for instance, another Muslim convert, back then a State Duma deputy, Abdul-Vakhed Niiazov (Vadim Medvedev, b. 1969) headed a founding

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[18] Ibid., p. 229.

[19] S.A. Dudoignon, "Russia", in *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, ed. J. Cesari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 517-64. Here p. 546.

[20] A. Evstatov, "Novye musul'mane", *MOST*, 21 June 2016 <http://mostga.am/vzglyad/novye-musulmane-1085.html> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

[21] Around the same time, ar-Rusi and other prominent leaders of the NORM left Russia to escape legal prosecution by the state; in recent years, they have attempted to create new structures to unite European converts to Islam and promote the "White Islam" ideology. See, for instance, Sidorov's website *Islam for Europeans* <http://islam4europeans.com/> (Accessed on 15 May 2018). On the Murabitun movement and its standpoints, see N. Brubandt, "Gold for a Golden Age: Sacred Money and Islamic Freedom in a Global Sufi Order", in *Contemporary Religiosities: Emergent Socialities and the Post-Nation-State*, ed. B. Kapferer et al. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2010), 103-22.

[22] V. Sidorov, "Russkie musul'mane i russkie – musul'mane", *Al'manakh "Iskusstvo voiny"*, 12 December 2012 <http://navoine.info/russian-muslims.html> (Accessed on 26 April 2018).

[23] Ibid.; also Bekkin, "Russian Muslims", p. 381.

[24] M. Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: an Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), p. 155.

congress for the Eurasian Party of Russia; the party participated in the 2003 Duma elections but did not win a seat and soon vanished from the political landscape.[25]

4.3 Data

In parallel with these political projects, a larger share of Russian Muslims, most of whom may have never been in touch with NORM, developed strategies of self-representation that would enable them to participate in Russian mainstream society. In this chapter, I examine the discursive strategies of Russian Muslims by analysing a text corpus of conversion narratives, all published online. This particular genre of spiritual autobiography is selected for two reasons. First, as examples below will show, Russian Muslims tend to produce first-person testimonies when they aim to reach out to broader audiences, i.e., when they reveal their Islamic identity and justify their conversion to non-Muslim readers. Second, this genre is of particular interest because it offers a broad range of tools that allow an author to stress preferred identities and omit undesired aspects and associations.

In 2015-2016, several secular urbanite magazines began to address the issue of Russian Muslims' marginalization. First, an article entitled "How do people come to Islam?" (*Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu?*) appeared in the magazine *Afisha* in 2015; the article shared first-person stories of five ethnic Russians who became Muslims.[26] Later, the magazines *Col'ta* and *Snob* also opted for the format of conversion narratives, giving the floor to "ordinary" Russians – teachers, booksellers, journalists – to explain why they had chosen Islam.[27] By providing personified accounts on conversion (in the case of *Snob* and *Col'ta* also with portrait photos of the "new" Muslims), the magazines aspired to challenge the stereotypically negative image of Muslim converts and to present them as an inherent part of contemporary Russian society.

Here I argue that the genre of conversion narrative was a strategic choice by these media platforms. Such first-person stories presume that the interviewees, who decided to speak about their faith in public, would be sincere in their narrations and tell

[25] Ibid.; also Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".
[26] M. Levin and N. Nazarova, "Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu?", *Afisha*, 2015 <http://mag.afisha.ru/stories/musulmane-v-moskve/kak-lyudi-prihodyat-k-islamu/> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).
[27] S. Mokhov, "Russkie musul'mane", *Col'ta*, 3 June 2015 <http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528> (Accessed on 4 March 2018); V. Prokhorova, "Novye musul'mane: shest' rossiian - o tom, pochemu oni priniali islam", *Snob*, 1 June 2016 <https://snob.ru/selected/entry/110377> (Accessed on 4 March 2018).

the truth.[28] This perceived openness and sincerity of a convert-author helps to overcome the initial scepticism that the reader may have. At the same time, the very nature of this genre gives converts room for expressing their identities in ways that justify conversion to Islam.

Scholars repeatedly drew attention to how identities in first-person accounts, so-called "narrative identities", can be intentionally constructed and modified by an author. "[Conveyed] through the narration of [a person's] past, present and future, formulated at a specific point in time and in a specific situation of social interaction",[29] these narrative identities are *neither stable, nor exclusive*. For instance, in a conversion narrative a Russian Muslim may place her or his ethnic identity (Russian) above a religious identity (Muslim), and then explain the conversion as a return to the genuine monotheism that she or he believes is the core of Russianness. This does not, however, exclude the possibility that in another setting, for instance in a mosque, the same convert will modify this hierarchy and perhaps downplay any ethnic and national identities, emphasizing only her or his belonging to the global or local Muslim community.

Moreover, it is also important to consider that all conversion narratives analysed in this chapter are pre-written; that is, they did not emerge in the interactive context of an interview. This means that, although the data includes personified profiles, the media and the Internet remain a space where "identities can be detached from embodiment and other essentialist anchors".[30] While a few of the narrators are well known to the public, we have no information about the others, except for their names and the biographical details they reveal themselves in their publicized narratives. This relative anonymity provides an opportunity to safely express desired identities.

The implication of these observations is that my focus in this chapter does not lie on actual forms of or conditions for conversion, but on the narrative elements. I examine this corpus to distil common discursive strategies, which in some cases have been standardized by practice, and in others explicitly formulated by converts themselves. One has to consider that reconstruction of the conversion process – that is, telling the story of conversion – never takes place only at the individual level. Converts also share experiences among one another by telling their own and reading others' stories.

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[28] On conversion and performance of sincerity, see W. Keane, "Sincerity, 'Modernity', and the Protestants," *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (2002), 65-92. Here pp. 78-83.

[29] G. Sabirova, "Young Muslim-Tatar Girls of the Big City: Narrative Identities and Discourses on Islam in Postsoviet Russia," *Religion, State and Society* 39:2-3 (2011), 327-45. Here p. 329.

[30] van Nieuwkerk, "Gender, Conversion, and Islam", p. 100.

Thereby, they create the blueprint of a conversion narrative; elements from this blueprint are later incorporated into even more personal stories.[31] The result is a standard that is maintained, but also adapted, as more narratives are shared.

The data for the text corpus were collected in 2015-2016 and are based on fifty conversion narratives, all published online in 2004-2016. The narratives come from various sources: websites that focus exclusively on Islam, as well as media platforms that have a broader thematic coverage and address a broader target audience. To achieve gender balance in my sampling, I have analysed 27 narratives written by female authors and 23 written by male authors. In total, the corpus amounts to about 75,000 words. The list of conversion narratives included in the corpus is given in Appendix II.

The number of conversion narratives considered here does not correlate with the actual numbers of Russian converts to Islam, as there are no accurate statistical data on how many of them currently live on the territory of the Russian Federation. Sources that do provide estimations are often biased toward increasing or decreasing this number. The DUM RF claims that there are "tens of thousands" of ethnic Russian Muslims, and some converts speak more precisely of "fifty to seventy thousand" "new Muslims" in Russia.[32] The ROC leadership, by contrast, prefers to turn a blind eye to the issue and considers "apostasy" to Islam among ethnic Russians as a marginal development that does not deserve any attention of clergymen.[33] The pro-ROC experts on Islam speak of "five to seven thousand",[34] "not more than ten thousand"[35] converts to Islam in the whole country, but they admit that these are merely "personal estimations" not supported by any surveys.

4.4 Discursive strategies in conversion narratives

4.4.1 First strategy: "new" Muslims as speakers of pure and correct Islamic Russian

Russian Muslims employ the ostentatiously "purified" Russian language, eliminating or avoiding what they see as unsuitable and undesirable borrowings from

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[31] Ibid., p. 97-98.

[32] Sidorov, "Russkie musul'mane i russkie – musul'mane".

[33] G. Maksimov, "'Neudobnoe' interv'iu diakona Georgiia Maksimova", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 30 May 2014 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/71036.html> (Accessed on 15 May 2018). See also J. Sweet, "From the Post-Soviet Godless Legacy to Radical Islam: Russian Converts," *Global Security Studies* 7:1 (2016), 21-34. Here p. 22.

[34] R. Suleimanov, "Russkie musul'mane: klassifikatsiia grupp, problema radikalizma, otnoshenie k nim v Rossii," *Musul'manskii mir* 4 (2015), 8-39. Here p. 12.

[35] R. Silant'ev, "Russkikh musul'man malo. No oni radikal'ny", *RusNext*, 16 April 2016 <http://rusnext.ru/recent_opinions/1460810444> (Accessed on 15 May 2018).

foreign languages. This is visible at different linguistic levels, and particularly with regard to orthography and lexicon.[36] Along with the analysis of the corpus, here I also draw on two online publications written by converts themselves; in these publications, Russian Muslims elaborate on ways to keep the language "pure", and discuss common "mistakes" in Islamic Russian, giving advice on how to correct them.[37]

The ultimate goal of this "purification" strategy is to produce an Islamic discourse in grammatically and stylistically correct Russian, without using original Islamic terminology. In the mind of a convert, excessive use of Arabic loanwords leads to "Arabization" (*arabizatsiia*) of the Russian language, which must be avoided for at least two reasons. First, converts see these borrowings as "some sort of linguistic perversion" (*izvrashchenie*) that "pollutes" the language and violates the aesthetic beauty of Russian.[38] Second, in the event that speakers of Russian attempt to integrate an Arabic word into their speech, they transform these borrowings into "ugly creatures" (*urodtsy*), something that should not be done out of respect for Arabic as the sacred language of Islam.[39]

The first argument is usually explained by referring to the historical circumstances in which the Qurʾān was revealed: the converts argue that Muslims should speak to each other using "an easy and understandable language that Allāh and the Prophet […] employed when talking to the Arabs, without jargon and foreignisms [*inostranshchina*]".[40] Translation of some Islamic terms and expressions is straightforward, because their Russian variants are commonly accepted and used;[41] however, the issue of rendering specific Arabic verbs, or verbs that collocate with Islamic terms, remains a sore point. For example, those familiar with the Tatar tradition

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[36] G. Thomas, *Linguistic Purism* (New York, NY: Longman, 1992), p. 2. See also an overview on Linguistic Purism in O. Walsh, *Linguistic Purism: Language Attitudes in France and Quebec* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016), pp. 7-35.

[37] M. Ural'skii, "Eshche o iazyke musul'man", *LiveJournal*, 21 October 2013 <http://russ-muslim.livejournal.com/23609.html> (Accessed on 16 June 2017); A. Kobulova, "Musul'mane i russkii iazyk ('Zametki o musul'manskom russkom')", *Annisa*, 13 December 2013 <http://annisa-today.ru/socium/musulmane-i-russkij-yazyk-zametki-o-musulmanskom-russkom> (Accessed on 7 October 2016).

[38] Ural'skii, "Eshche o iazyke musul'man".

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] These standardized, but still mostly word-for-word, stylistically unsmooth translation variants have also become a subject of criticism, see M.U. Iakh"ia, "Desiat' stilisticheskikh oshibok v islamskikh perevodakh", *Annisa*, 9 November 2017 <http://annisa-today.ru/aktualno/desyat-stilisticheskix-oshibok-v-islamskix-perevodax/> (Accessed on 9 May 2018).

are likely to use in their narratives *chitat' molitvu* 'to read a prayer', while others will choose between *delat'* 'to do' and *sovershat'* 'to perform' a prayer. In the corpus we find:

> "And inside of me a burning curiosity began to kindle, I wanted to know how many times one should perform [*sovershat'*] a prayer, in what language, [and] what all this means".[42]

> "I really liked that before praying, a Muslim should perform [*sovershit'*] ablution [*omovenie*]".[43]

Similarly, when translating the Arabic *ghusl* as *omovenie* 'ablution', the Russian Muslims choose between the verbs *vziat'* 'to take' or *sovershat'* 'to perform' an ablution.

The second argument that the converts often give for not using Arabic words is that in Russian any Islamic loanword becomes an "ugly creature". This argument is related to the fact that there are no commonly accepted rules for transliterating Arabic words, and some speakers tend to introduce additional symbols to transmit the Arabic sound system into Cyrillic, which results in a bulky combination of letters and diacritics:[44]

> "[Some Muslims] write [additional] hard and soft signs or some other marks, which results in transliterations such as "Аллагьу акъбар"[45] or "БисмиЛлагьи ллази ла илагьа илла гьува РрахІману РрахІим, Аллагьумма азгьиб гІаннил гъамма вал хІузна"[46] – to be honest, I still do not understand what these symbols mean, and what Arabic letters they correspond to".[47]

Another convert also recommends using the standard variants of spelling for words that are already rooted in Russian: e.g., 'Qurʾān' should be spelled as *К**о**ран*, but not as *К**у**ран* or *Ку**р'**ан*. Deviations from established orthographic conventions, in his opinion, only place an unnecessary burden on the reader.[48]

The converts acknowledge that from time to time one has to use an original Islamic term in order to maintain nuanced meanings that a Russian word does not transmit. In such cases, it is advisable to use borrowings that are already standardized

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[42] Conversion Narrative (CN) #12 as given in Appendix II.

[43] CN # 50.

[44] Converts also disapprove of practices of code switching in spoken Russian, when Muslims tend to maintain (or imitate) the Arabic pronunciation of Islam.

[45] The standardized version of *takbīr* in Russian is *Allakhu Akbar* 'God is Great'.

[46] Here it seems that the convert is quoting from an entry in an Islamic forum, where participants discuss the trustworthiness of a *ḥadīth*. A quote from this *ḥadīth* is thus given in Arabic, but transliterated into Cyrillic; in English, it would correspond to: 'In the name of God, [I bear witness] that there is no God but Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. O Allāh! Relieve me of grief and distress'.

[47] Kobulova, "Musul'mane i russkii iazyk".

[48] Ural'skii, "Eshche o iazyke musul'man".

in Russian. That is, when there is a synonym pair of an Arabic and a Persian word, the choice is determined by the most commonly used term. For example, in the analysed narratives, the Persian word *uraza* (*rūza*), which entered Russian through the languages of Russia's Muslim minorities, occurs more often than the Arabic *saum* (*sawm*), both meaning 'fasting'. A similar approach is observed in pairs such as *namaz* (*namāz*) and *salat* (*salāt*), meaning 'regular prayer'; and *takharat* (*ṭahāra*) and *vudu* (*wuḍūʾ*), meaning 'ablution'. The first variant of the pair is preferred in both cases. Among the analysed conversion narratives we find a following instance:

> "There [in the city of Noril'sk] I learned to read *namāz*, and it was the beginning of my journey to Islam".[49]

As a note for those who continue using Arabic words, for instance in addressing fellow Muslims, some converts suggest that one should avoid attaching Russian plural endings to Arabic loanwords that are already in their plural form:

> "If a person [already] uses an Arabic word in its plural form, is it necessary to put it again in plural in Russian? Therefore, we have "tullaby" [Arabic ṭullāb plus the Russian plural ending -*y*, 'students'], "askhaby" [Arabic aṣḥāb plus -*y*, 'companions of the Prophet Muhammad'], "ikhvany" [Arabic ikhwān plus -*y*, 'brothers']".[50]

The underlying idea is that the overly "Arabized" Russian of some converts not only grates on the ears of their fellow Muslims, but also makes a conversation with a "new" co-religionist or a non-Muslim almost impossible. One convert complained that as soon as she began conversing with Muslims, no one "bothered to translate" unknown terms to her. The expression *astaghfiru Lllāh* (I seek forgiveness from God) she first mistakenly thought to be a curse.[51] Therefore, the author continues, Muslims should bear in mind that the standard formulae, such as *al-ḥamdu li-Llāh* 'praise be to God' and *in shāʾa Llāh* 'if God wills', are often incomprehensible even to some Muslims, let alone "interlocutors ignorant of religion". She suggests translating *al-ḥamdu li-Llāh* into Russian as *slava Bogu* 'praise be to God' and *in shāʾa Llāh* as *Bog dast* 'God will give, let' or *po vole Bozhiei* 'by the will of God'. The fact that Russian-speaking Orthodox

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[49] CN # 18.
[50] Kobulova, "Musul'mane i russkii iazyk". There is no consensus on the use of singular and plural forms of Arabic words in Russian, even in academic literature on Islamic studies. Most often, Arabic words enter Russian in their singular form and receive standard Russian endings (-*y*/-*i*); very occasionally, the words do not change at all. However, we also infrequently find cases where an Arabic noun in its plural correlates with a Russian verb in the singular, e.g. *tullab delaet* (lit. 'students does'). See also a note on this in A.N. Bakhtiiarova and F.G. Fatkullina, "Arabskie zaimstvovaniia v leksicheskoi sisteme russkogo iazyka," *Fundamental'nye issledovaniia* 2:27 (2015), 6124-28. Here pp. 6126-27.
[51] Kobulova, "Musul'mane i russkii iazyk".

Christians also use the expressions that she suggests, does not seem to be an issue to her. To the contrary, the "purified" Islamic Russian is the right tool to use when engaging in religious mission. One should not construct sentences such as "I have a *niyya* [intention] to do you *daʿwa* [mission]", but something along the lines "I would like to talk with you about religion".[52]

In the analysed conversion narratives we also find hybrid expressions, where the Russian word *Bog* is replaced by 'Allāh'; this enables a convert to differentiate herself or himself from Orthodox Christian speakers of Russian at lower cost than would be the case for using an Arabic formula:

> "We, praise be to Allāh, do not have such problems as Muslims have in other parts of the world";[53]
>
> "And I will – by the will of Allāh – perform my deeds in this world in His name".[54]

The characteristics of this first discursive strategy match the definition that Bustanov and Kemper give to the "Russianism" variant in their classification of Islamic Russian. The authors argue that speakers of this variant render foreign Islamic religious terminology into Russian, and in order to do so, they often resort to the Orthodox Church lexicon.[55] Whereas Bustanov and Kemper mention only Russia's Islamic officials as the main users of "Russianism", I argue that ethnic Russian converts to Islam also tend to employ it actively when talking about their experience of conversion. In addition, while this variant allows the Muftis to reach out to political and Church authorities and place Islam within the "traditional religions" paradigm, Russian Muslims pursue somewhat different goals.

Linguistic purification practices of converts unfold against the background of the popular perception that Russia's ethnic Muslims and labour migrants coming to the country from Central Asia speak "broken", "Arabized" and heavily-accented Russian. Therefore, the grammatically and stylistically correct Islamic Russian of native speakers acquires symbolic prestige and becomes associated with power of the dominant class. Thus, "Russianism" in the speech of converts is an in-group marker, which, on the one hand, facilitates their reintegration in small social circles (e.g., family or networks of friends and colleagues) or Russian society at large; on the other hand, these linguistic

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[52] Ibid.
[53] CN #5.
[54] CN #47.
[55] Bustanov and Kemper, "The Russian Orthodox and Islamic Languages in the Russian Federation", pp. 270-72; Bustanov and Kemper, *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Sibiria*.

practices place an implicit emphasis on the superiority of Russian culture over that of ethnic Muslims.

4.4.2 Second strategy: intellectual motives for conversion to Islam

Another feature that we can observe in the conversion narratives is a recurrent trope about intellectual motives for embracing Islam. Thus, converts deny any external influence on their decision to convert, whether it be adversarial circumstances (prison[56] or war), threat or manipulation, or – in the case of women – the influence of their spouse and family members. According to the categorization by Lofland and Skonovd, who distinguish six types of conversion, the motifs described by Russian Muslims match the definition of the intellectual mode of conversion.[57] Ali Köse, who studied conversion motives among Muslims in the United Kingdom, argues that in this intellectual mode, "a reasonably high level of belief is attained prior to actual conversion".[58]

Explaining how they discovered Islam, Russian Muslims often speak about their journey toward knowledge; a convert usually first becomes acquainted with various religious teachings, for instance by reading books or engaging in dialogue with members of the respective religious communities, and only chooses Islam after comparing them all. Muslim converts frequently emphasize that they accepted Islam "not by heart, but by head", and reports of spiritual or mystical experience are fairly rare. This primacy of reason over tradition is also found in narratives by Muslim converts in the West; converts there likewise argue that they acted primarily as a completely free and rational individual, whose interest in Islam is unbiased.[59] As Esra Özyürek rightly observes, Western European converts in particular often draw on the

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[56] In the media, places of confinement are often presented as an environment where ethnic Russians "become infected" with radical Islamic views; see, for instance, R. Vol'f, "Tiur'ma i lager' – kuznitsa 'russkogo islama'", *Stavropol'skii reporter*, 16 October 2012 <http://vatslav-rus.livejournal.com/2053.html> (Accessed on 9 May 2018); S. Mel'nikov, "Islam strogogo rezhima", *Kommersant*, 26 August 2013 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2259024> (Accessed on 9 May 2018); E. Trifonova, "Tiuremnye dzhamaaty otmeniaiut vorovskie poniatiia", *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 22 August 2017 <http://www.ng.ru/politics/2017-08-22/1_7056_fsin.html> (Accessed on 9 May 2018).

[57] The other five modes are mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalistic and coercive. See J. Lofland and N. Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20:4 (1981), 373-85; also L.R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

[58] A. Köse, *Conversion to Islam: a Study of Native British Converts* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 96.

[59] E.g., J. Aleccia, "Not 'Brainwashed': American Converts to Islam Speak Out", *NBC News*, 3 April 2013 <http://www.islamicity.org/5243/not-brainwashed-american-converts-to-islam-speak-out> (Accessed on 9 May 2018); Köse, *Conversion to Islam: a Study of Native British Converts* pp. 96-101; K. van Nieuwkerk, "The Quest for Peace in Submission: Reflections on the Journey of American Women Converts to Islam", in *Women Embracing Islam*, ed. K. van Nieuwkerk (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 19-47.

Enlightenment ideas about human reason and religion in order to open up a legitimate space for Islam.[60] In their discussion of ethnic German Muslims' attempts to create an Islam that fits into European society, Özyürek and another anthropologist, Ruth Mandel, define discourses of German converts as attempting "the intellectual reappropriation of the Other".[61]

Because many Russian Muslims embraced Islam after disenchantment with institutionalized religion, particularly the ROC, they experience the Orthodox Christian faith as illogical: the Orthodox faith is monotheist and yet Trinitarian, Jesus Christ is both divine and human, Mary is the mother of God and at the same time God's creature; as opposed to "logical" Islam:

> "I was buying all sorts of encyclopaedias on religions, esoteric and other literature, wanting to compare religions and find something that would be closer to reason, because when reading Christian books, more and more [often] I [was feeling compelled] to turn off the mind and perceive what was written as given, without questioning it".[62]

However, despite this general characterization of Christian teaching, we do find attempts to construct bridges between Islam and Christianity, as in the following excerpt, for instance. Here the Islamic concept of *hijra*[63] is linked to 'exodus' and the convert interprets both in terms of an arduous transition, a forced move or journey that, although difficult in the beginning, turns out to be beneficial in the long run:

> "My exodus is my personal *hijra* towards the covenants of God, the Only and Merciful".[64]

In the narratives we also find links to the Russian religious philosophy of *bogoiskatel'stvo.* Translated literally as 'God-seeking', the term *bogoiskatel'stvo* in its broader sense refers to an individual's interest in religious and philosophical problems and search for truth. Originally, the concept emerged in the philosophical circles led by Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) and Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), who suggested not searching for a "new God", but for "new paths towards God".[65] Islam is thus, for ethnic Russian Muslims, one of these paths in search of God: in the narratives analysed here,

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[60] Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim*, p. 49.

[61] R. Mandel et al., "Islamophobia, Religious Conversion, and Belonging in Europe," *History and Anthropology* 26:3 (2015), 362-79. Here pp. 363, 374.

[62] CN #18.

[63] The Arabic term refers to an episode in the early history of Islam, when the Prophet Muhammad and his first followers fled from the persecution of the ruling Quraysh tribe of Mecca to the city of Medina.

[64] CN #16.

[65] G.G. Kirilenko and E.V. Shevtsov, "Bogoiskatel'stvo", in *Kratkii filosofskii slovar'*, ed. G.G. Kirilenko and E.V. Shevtsov (Moscow: AST, 2010), 27-29. Here p. 27.

one convert referred to the actual term *bogoiskatel'stvo* as something "currently central for Russia", and added that Islam helped her to finally reach the goal of this search.[66]

But only a religion that is stripped of the seemingly patriarchal, intolerant and undemocratic cultural traditions attributed to Russia's ethnic Muslims is best suited to the rational mind of a Russian convert:

> "The Russian Islam is pure Islam. There are no national customs that contradict the canons. In [the Russian Islam], the text (*predanie*) is more important than [ethno-national] tradition. Therefore, the Russian Islam is closer to the truth, if one can say so".[67]

The author of the following quote distinguishes herself from the members of her new religious community. She does this not only by stressing her ethnicity – "a Russian girl" – but also by implicitly suggesting that ethnic Muslims often do not practise their faith ("non-observant") and are less knowledgeable about Islam; these Muslims, in her opinion, do not know their own religion, and hence cannot understand why a Russian would convert:

> "Everyone was curious: I was a Russian girl, not married – why would she have this religion [Islam], if all her life she considered herself a Christian. Even Muslims ask these questions (most often [those who are] non-observant, who do not understand the meaning of religion)".[68]

In general, Russian Muslims claim to have a "noble" access to Islam, as opposed to that of "cultural" Muslims; the latter are presented as if they just happened to be born to a Muslim family and have never reflected on their religious identity or put any effort into studying Islam properly. Consequently, converts reproduce and further enroot racist prejudices directed against ethnic Muslims and immigrants.[69]

In the conversion narratives, this racialization of Islam is often implicit. It resonates with ideas propagated by some prominent Russian Muslim activists, such as Vadim Kharun Sidorov, who argues, for instance, that the communities of European converts to Islam are "the most valuable resource" of not only Europe, but also the Islamic world. In his opinion, these "organic communities" of Spanish, German, Ukrainian and Russian Muslims continue and advance the "true" and "genuinely" European values and cultures; at the same time, they are also the hope for reformation of the Islamic world, which would bring Muslims back to the Islam of the Prophet

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[66] CN #29.
[67] CN #33.
[68] CN #19.
[69] Similar arguments are also to be found in conversion narratives of German Muslims, see Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim*, pp. 37, 68.

Muhammad.[70] Sidorov defines Russian Muslims as the "Kulturträger" (transmitters of cultural ideas) of Western Islam in Eurasia; seen from a cultural perspective, he places Russia in the same Western European civilization to which converts from England, Germany and Sweden also belong. This Western Islam is portrayed by Sidorov as the true religion of the "white", "Normannic" (*normannskii*) people, blending elements of religious and racial exclusivism.[71]

Some converts took their decision to become Muslim after encountering prominent ethnic Russian Muslims such as Sidorov:

> "Of course, I first met with Russian nationalists who converted to Islam. With Kharun Sidorov, the founder of the NORM, and Salman Sever [Maksim Baidak, b. 1986, since 2013 on the federal wanted list]. I do not know what he did in life, but I have never met a greater intellectual. These people impressed me with their intellect. I thought they would call [to carry out terrorist attacks by] explosions. But they only convinced me that my [way of living at that time] leads to a dead end".[72]

In the scholarly literature, the mode of conversion when an individual is motivated to embrace religion by a personal attachment is defined as "affectional".[73] Among the analysed conversion narratives, it is the second most frequent mode of conversion, which also contributes to the image of the *russkii* Islam being the religion of the enlightened (*prosveshchennyi*): some converts report that they embraced Islam after being impressed by the intellect of Russian Muslims such as Kharun Sidorov or Salman Sever.

4.4.3 Third strategy: redefining "Russianness" beyond traditional religious labels

In their conversion narratives, Russian converts first de-ethnicize and intellectualize Islam, making it go beyond the identities of ethnic and migrant Muslims. Yet separating Islam from the cultures of born Muslims does not mean emptying out the cultural content;[74] what Russian Muslims do instead is re-inscribe the religion with new, Russian cultural content. The "noble" and rational Islam that they construct is then

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[70] V. Sidorov, "Islam, Evropa, Ukraina", *LiveJournal*, 10 December 2014 <http://www.harunsidorov.info/2014/12/blog-post_10.html> (Accessed on 23 December 2017).

[71] V. Sidorov, "Normannskii polius v islamskoi Evrazii", *White Muslim's Tribune*, 12 November 2012 <http://whitemuslims.blogspot.nl/2012/11/normal-0-false-false-false-en-us-x-none_12.html> (Accessed on 23 December 2017).

[72] CN #9.

[73] See Lofland and Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs"; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.

[74] See also the discussion on "deculturation" and "deterritorialization" of religion in Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*.

nationalized by the converts as the *russkii* Islam. This kind of Islam does not contradict the Russian values or a convert's self-identification as an ethnic Russian. Ironically, this makes Russian Muslims perhaps the first Muslims to feel comfortable and confident in their assertion of their Russianness.

In their narratives, converts argue that by practising Islam, Russians do not abandon their ethnic group, but quite the opposite: the new religion helps them to rediscover connections to ancestors and return to long-forgotten roots:

> "Some believe that conversion to Islam, for example, by Russians is a betrayal, but it is not a betrayal at all, it is a return to the bosom of the true faith of our most ancient ancestors, this is a return to the path of ancient prophets such as Adam, Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus)".[75]

Some cultural artefacts are then transplanted into the new Islamic context: these are elements that the converts usually see as "genuinely" Russian – for instance, parts of ethnic dress, such as the Pavlovo Posad shawl or *sarafan*:

> "I want my wife to wear a Pavlovo Posad shawl, make a *ḥijāb* out of it. We must preserve our Russian traditions – take *sarafan*s [a traditional long dress], for example. I became a Russophile lately, also because all our traditions correspond to the norms of Islam".[76]

Nevertheless, self-identification as Russian today becomes complicated when detached from the Orthodox Christian religious identity. The public involvement of the ROC has visibly increased since Patriarch Kirill took office, and the Church feels eligible to define what it means to be Russian. According to the recent ROC statement, "a Russian is a person who considers [himself or herself] Russian; [one who] does not have other ethnic preferences; who speaks and thinks in Russian; recognizes Orthodox Christianity as the basis of national spiritual culture; feels solidarity with the fate of the Russian people".[77] Therefore, conversion to Islam also becomes a politically loaded act: converts thereby challenge the very notion of what it means to be Russian and, willingly or unwillingly, dispute the Church and state discourses on nationalism and ethnic identity.

In conversion narratives, the major argument against the statement "to be Russian means to be a Christian" is that Christianity has never been the religion of Russians; or that it already ceased to be so in the Soviet Union:

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[75] CN #18.

[76] CN # 32.

[77] See the document adopted by the Eighteenth World Russian People's Council "Deklaratsiia russkoi identichnosti", which was published on the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate on 11 November 2014. Available online <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/508347.html> (Accessed on 9 May 2018).

> "If people say that Islam is the religion of Tatars and Arabs, it can be equally argued that Christianity is the religion of Jews and Greeks, while for Russians then the original religion is Russian paganism".[78]

> "If someone believes that a Russian person who accepts Islam betrays Christianity, this is absurd, because Christianity was massively and almost unanimously betrayed as far back as in 1917. Then, in 1991, ungodly communism was betrayed; people also refused this [communist] idea and set out on a free voyage, [which took place] in a spiritual vacuum. For the most part, people are still ideologically neutral, with a significant inclination towards atheism, more than towards Christianity. So, for many people there is nothing to betray".[79]

For some converts this is also a way to defend themselves against public critique. By disconnecting Christianity from Russianness, they respond to accusations of betrayal of the Russian ethnic group, the nation or the state – the reproaches with which they are confronted as soon as the act of conversion becomes a matter of public debate.

4.5 Conclusion

The implicit claim in the discourse of the converts is that being a Russian Muslim means embodying the very best qualities of both Russian and Islamic cultures. But to be able to openly show their mixed identity, they have to create a legitimate space that is free of negative prejudices about Islam and Muslims, which are so prominent in Russia's mainstream society today. This can be achieved through keeping a distance from existing Muslim communities – Russia's indigenous Muslims as well as immigrants from the Muslim republics of Central Asia. Converts draw a demarcation line between what they see as Russian versus non-Russian values and culture, and contrast the rationality of the *russkii* Islam against the "backwardness" of other kinds of Islam practised by ethnic minorities. The *russkii* Islam thus becomes the religion of a free, independent, rational individual, who feels that she or he is a part of Russian culture, not least through the knowledge of the literary language and familiarity with major philosophical ideas developed throughout the history of Russian intellectual thought.

Language, in particular, becomes an identity marker and helps to distinguish a "native" Russian from a non-Russian: an ability to speak the "pure" and correct language is seen as an exclusive feature of the dominant group and is associated with a higher social status.

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[78] CN #22.

[79] CN #18.

Paradoxically, a significant share of converts come from marginalized parts of the political spectrum, mostly from its far-right fringe. On a bigger scale, Muslim converts often "share [their] hostility toward Christianity with the neo-pagans, who are – culturally and politically – the most radical wing of the Russian nationalist movement".[80] For a few Russian Muslims, conversion to Islam becomes a political statement, their way to manifest a nationalist political identity. By choosing an alternative religion – Islam, but also paganism or non-Orthodox Christian denominations – Russian nationalists distinguish themselves from a broad array of "national patriots" for whom the traditional orientation toward Orthodoxy is beyond doubt and who tend to be extremely loyal to the authorities.[81] In their identity-engineering, Russian Muslims racialize the practices of other Muslims and fall into Islamophobic tropes that are pervasive in the Russian nationalist discourse, which raises the issue of Muslim Islamophobia.[82]

The *russkii* Islam suggested by the converts is obviously extremely exclusive, and in the mainstream discourse on the definition of Russia's Islam it remains marginal. In the following chapter, I will discuss a particular case of a convert, a Russian Muslim who envisioned projects of a new Russian(-speaking) *umma* that had the potential to fit into the mainstream discourse on religion.

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[80] Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 154.

[81] See the discussion in Mitrofanova, "Russian Ethnic Nationalism and Religion Today", p. 107.

[82] For cases of similar practices among European converts to Islam, see the discussion in Mandel et al., "Islamophobia, Religious Conversion, and Belonging in Europe".

Chapter 5

Viacheslav Ali Polosin: Envisioning a Russian(-speaking) *Umma*

This chapter examines how not only institutions and communities, but also individual religious entrepreneurs contribute to the politicization of Islamic Russian. Viacheslav Ali Polosin (b. 1956), a former Orthodox priest who converted to Islam and rose to power as a mediator between Islamic elites and the state, instrumentalizes the Russian language to develop an Islam that is both suitable for "the mentality of a Russian" (where 'Russian' is broadly defined) and beneficial for the political goals of the state. His interpretation of Islam at various points combined elements of both previously analysed discourses – of "traditional" Muslim elites (Chapter 3) and of communities of Russian converts to Islam (Chapter 4). Against the background of an increasingly nationalist state agenda, this peculiar blend allowed Polosin to move away from the political margins, where he found himself in the early 2000s, and become an influential functionary in the state apparatus.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the third type of authority – individual religious entrepreneurs – makes use of the Russian language for Islamic discourse. I will discuss the changes in rhetoric of the ex-Orthodox priest and politician, Viacheslav Polosin (see Figure 3).[1]

Polosin converted to Islam at the end of the 1990s and rose to prominence as a vocal critic of the institutionalized Orthodox Christianity and of the Church-state rapprochement. In 2000-2006, Polosin envisioned Russian Islam as a new state ideology that could be the way to introduce liberal values into the political system and to create a monotheism-based moral framework for the country's entire population, including ethnic Russians. Polosin's programme of "The Direct Path", designed together with another convert to Islam, Valeriia Iman Porokhova, aimed to guide Russians toward the "genuine" monotheism, which, according to him, was embodied not in Orthodox Christianity, but in Islam. Similar to the rhetoric of other Russian Muslims, Polosin argued for a new, modernized and intellectual version of Islam. Although the former priest permitted selective elements of Russia's ethnic forms of Islam, he suggested transforming them to incorporate the norms and values of developed European societies.

To acquaint ethnic Russians with a Muslim way of life, Polosin focused on translation of Islam, so that it would appeal to the "Russian mentality": in the first years following his conversion, Polosin advocated making the Qurʾān and Islamic teaching not only accessible, but also attractive to native speakers of Russian. He also advocated the production of new literary translations of the Qurʾān that would be "immune" against Christian criticism. By presenting himself as a new type of Islamic scholar – more assertive and knowledgeable compared with the "turbaned" Islamic elites, and daring to engage in theological disputes – Polosin aimed to fill the niche of Islamic authority in Russia, to become a leader who is able to reach out to various groups within Russia's diverse and increasingly Russian-speaking Muslim community.

What is puzzling about Polosin's personality is that within the decade from 2000 to 2010, he changed from being an outspoken opponent of the political regime to being a staunch supporter

of the country's political course under President Putin. By 2010 he had abandoned his connections with other Russian converts to Islam, whom the mainstream

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[1] The photo source: Alif-TV, <alif.tv/ali-polosin-ot-pravoslaviya-k-pravoveriyu-serdtse-so-shramom/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

discourse portrayed as too "radical" and "non-conformist" to fit into Russian society. Instead, Polosin became involved in various Kremlin-supported projects to administer Russia's Muslim communities. I will study Polosin's career and the evolution of his political views in connection with the state's support of ethnonationalism, which has been gaining prominence since the end of President Putin's second term in 2008. The Kremlin has limited the freedom of religious expression and stated its need to have an interpretation of Islam that fits into its political course. Polosin, an ethnic Russian with experience in Russia's governmental structures as well as within Islamic official institutions, became the right candidate to offer and promote a new interpretation of Russia's Islam.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, I briefly introduce major landmarks from Polosin's biography; then the next three sections represent the stages in the evolution of Polosin's views on Islam and its place in Russian society.

Figure 3. Viacheslav Ali Polosin

5.2 Biography and conversion

In post-Soviet Russian history, Viacheslav Polosin became the first Orthodox Christian priest to openly convert to Islam. In his book *Why I became a Muslim. The direct path to God* (2003),[2] Polosin presents his life in the light of conversion: typically for the genre of conversion narrative, the author describes and reinterprets events from his

[2] Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*. Here I give references to an electronic version of the book, available at <https://azan.kz/kutub/view/pochemu-ya-stal-musulmaninom-181> (Accessed on 2 June 2018).

biography that made him decide to embrace Islam in such a way that it sounds legitimate and convincing for the reader.

Polosin, born in Moscow in 1956, describes his childhood as “non-religious”, but also as a time free of “atheist nonsense”. Whilst his family members were “unbelievers”, Polosin remembers himself having had a strong faith in God since childhood. With the goal “to learn the truth about God”, he entered Moscow State University and graduated in sociology in 1978.[3] His secular education did not provide Polosin with the answers he longed for, and he attempted to enrol in Moscow Theological Seminary (*Moskovskaia dukhovnaia seminariia*). Yet the Soviet authorities blocked his way, according to Polosin, because he was not allowed even to work as a guard, let alone to study at the Seminary. In his conversion narrative, Polosin presents himself as a firm believer whose faith is a source of tenacity and courage: he emphasizes the fact that he did not change his mind about studying at the Seminary even when the authorities threatened to evict him from his apartment. Eventually Polosin was accepted; his graduation from the Seminary in 1983 was followed by his ordination as a priest. In his book, Polosin justifies this initial affiliation with Christianity as a desperate measure: back then the Orthodox Church was the only alternative to communism that was available to him, and priesthood symbolized “a spiritual and intellectual struggle against materialism”.[4] He was not allowed to serve in Moscow, but instead was sent to Central Asia. Polosin presents this as God’s challenge: the difficulties that he had to face during this “exile” were soon rewarded, for it was in Central Asia that he got to know Islam.[5]

A gradual relaxation of state policies toward religion in the late Soviet Union, marked by the popular celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in 1988, allowed Polosin to return to Russia. He was appointed priest to Obninsk, a town 100 km southwest of Moscow. The new political climate also gave Polosin an opportunity to enter politics. In his own words, it was “by chance” that in 1990 he was elected as a People’s deputy in Kaluga, another small city near Moscow; in the same year, Boris Yeltsin, “who liked to do unexpected moves”, appointed him Chair of the Committee of the Supreme Council (*Komitet Verkhovnogo Soveta*) of the Russian SFSR on Religion; in this office, Polosin participated in drafting the 1990 Law on Freedom of Worship.[6] In other sources, Polosin confesses that, in fact, it was he who

[3] Ibid., p. 7.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 8.
[6] Ibid.; see also Svet Istiny, “Biografiia Ali Polosina,” *Svet Istiny* 34:2 (2010), 5.

initiated the very creation of this office, which was supposed to "solve religious questions"; Yeltsin supported Polosin simply because the latter "had education in philosophy, was a priest, and religion came into vogue at that time".[7] In April 1990, Polosin launched the RCDM, together with liberal priest Gleb Iakunin, religious philosopher Viktor Aksiuchits (b. 1949) and religious activist Gleb Anishchenko (b. 1952).[8] However, the party suffered from internal struggles caused by conservative and liberal pulls; moreover, during the August Coup in 1991 it stood in opposition to Polosin's patron Yeltsin, which could be the reason why the priest left the RCDM. Polosin explained his withdrawal from the Movement and disinterest in further attempts to foster Christian Democracy in Russia by the lack of "humanistic (*gumanitarnyi*) traditions" in the ROC of the immediate post-Soviet period. In Polosin's opinion, the ROC turned its back on Western democracy and instead of following the path of Catholicism, which "was reformed and suited for the new time", returned to the less progressive Byzantine model.[9]

After obtaining his degree of candidate of sciences (*kandidat nauk*, equivalent to PhD) in 1993, followed by a doctoral degree in philosophy in 1999, Polosin worked as an adviser to the Duma Committee for Public Associations and Religious Organizations (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi Dumy po delam obshchestvennykh ob"edinenii i religioznykh organizatsii*). The increasing workload in secular institutions made Polosin leave church service; in 1991-1999, until his conversion, he remained an off-duty priest of the Moscow Patriarchate.[10]

Following the rules of the conversion narrative genre, Polosin reports on indicators that pointed toward the "right" religion long before the actual conversion: for instance, he remembers an episode from his period in Central Asia, when an elderly Tajik, allegedly a "secret Sheikh", saw Polosin's "Muslim eyes". This Tajik prophesied that in the future the priest would become a Muslim; in Polosin's words, instead of being confused by this sudden revelation he made it "sink into [his] soul".[11]

In the absence of "good (*gramotnyi*) literature about Islam in Russian", Polosin turned to lectures, books and the TV show "Nyne" of the Islamic philosopher Geidar

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[7] V.A. Polosin, "Zamysly i ikh realizatsiia", *NG Religii*, 12 April 2000 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2000-04-12/4_realisation.html> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).
[8] A. Verkhovsky et al., "Khristianskie demokraty", in *Religioznyi faktor v politike i v ideologii natsional'nykh dvizhenii v Rossii i Kazakhstane*, ed. A. Verkhovskii et al. (Panorama, 1998).
[9] Polosin, "Zamysly i ikh realizatsiia".
[10] Svet Istiny, "Biografiia Ali Polosina".
[11] Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*, p. 8.

Dzhemal' to learn about Islamic teaching.[12] He was also strongly influenced by Sufi Sheikh Said Chirkeiskii, whom he first met in Moscow in the late 1990s. After this encounter Polosin travelled to Dagestan in 1999 in order to be initiated into Chirkeiskii's Naqshbandiyya-Shādhiliyya Sufi order and to become his *murīd*.[13]

Around 1998-1999[14] Polosin converted to Islam and embraced the Muslim name Ali. Before the term gained negative connotations, Polosin claimed to be an adherent of Salafism; in his interpretation, this religious movement was "an orthodox Sufism that reproduces the Islamic way of life in its pristine purity".[15] To counter rumours that he converted to Islam because the ROC gave him no chances of promotion, Polosin claimed in his interviews that he became Muslim in order to bring his "social status in accordance with [his religious] convictions"; he emphasized that he did not leave the Church because of conflicts with its leadership.[16]

After his conversion, Polosin soon joined Muslim political networks that came into existence in the late 1990s. First, the former priest affiliated himself with the all-Russian public movement "Refakh" (Prosperity), established in November 1998. He became the associate chairman and editor of Refakh's main media outlet – the "Muslim Newspaper" (*Musul'manskaia gazeta*). When in 2001 "Refakh" transformed into the political party "Eurasia", led by another ethnic Russian convert to Islam, Abdul-Vakhed Niiazov (Vadim Medvedev, b. 1969), Polosin left the organization.[17]

Polosin also established connections with the umbrella organizations under Mufti Gainutdin's leadership – the DUM RF and SMR (see Chapter 3). As of 2017, on paper Polosin is still an advisor to Gainutdin and co-chair of several centres within the SMR that focus on research and culture. De facto, his involvement in these structures today is barely visible. In addition, Polosin heads the Union of Muslim Journalists (*Soiuz*

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[12] V.A. Polosin, "Uspokoites', ia nashel svoe mesto, i ves'ma schastliv svoim vyborom", *Portal-Credo*, 26 June 2003 <https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=authority&id=122> (Accessed on 25 April 2017); Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*.

[13] Info-Islam, "Studenty Instituta teologii i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii vstretilis' s Ali Viacheslavom Polosinym", *Info-Islam*, 19 April 2011 <http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/novosti/rossiya/studenty_instituta_teologii_i_mezhdunarodnykh_otnoshenij_vstretilis_s_ali_vjacheslavom_polosinym/1-1-0-7928> (Accessed on 20 February 2017).

[14] Various sources give contradictory information on the exact year of Polosin's conversion to Islam.

[15] Polosin, "Uspokoites'".

[16] N. Babasian, "Reshaite sami", *Russkii Zhurnal*, 2 July 1999 <http://old.russ.ru/ist_sovr/99-07-07/babas.htm> (Accessed on 8 May 2018); A. Iasin, "Protoirei Viacheslav Polosin prinial islam", *Why Islam*, 12 March 2010 <http://www.whyislam.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=524> (Accessed on 25 April 2017).

[17] T. Gudava, "Evroislam. Chast' 1", *Radio Svoboda*, 7 June 2001 <http://archive.svoboda.org/programs/rtl/2001/RTL.060701.asp> (Accessed on 29 January 2018).

musul'manskikh zhurnalistov, founded in 2003), which, in fact, has not been active for years.

5.3 Islam as a liberal state ideology (2000-2006)

Polosin enjoyed the relative freedom of the media in the early 2000s and promoted himself as an Islamic scholar. He was a frequent guest on the TV programme "1000 and one day, Islamic encyclopaedia"; this program, shown on the state channel "Russia" from 1999 until 2003, was the first major media outlet to talk about Islam with barely any censorship.[18] In 2002, Polosin was invited to the "Gordon" talk show, where he disputed with biologist and priest Alexander Borisov (b. 1939) on the definition of paganism in Islam and Christianity.[19]

Polosin is a prolific writer: his books *The direct path to God* (2000), *Why I became a Muslim* (2003) and *The Gospel through the eyes of a Muslim* (2006) comprise articles and essays written in 1998-2006 on Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Russia.[20] Two other books, *Myth. Religion. State* (1999) and *Overcoming paganism. Introduction to the philosophy of monotheism* (2001),[21] Polosin envisioned as educational literature on Islam for Russia's secular universities and a broad audience of readers.[22] Another work, *Islam is not like that! But like what? 40 answers to the critics of Islam* (2008)[23] was written together with Azerbaijani scholar Aidyn Ali-Zade (b. 1963), seen back then as a representative of a small "liberal" scene within Russia's Islam.[24] Designed in a Q&A format, the book follows Polosin's agenda of Islamic apologetics, with the help of the Islamic theologian Ali-Zade, who covers topics directly related to the Qurʾānic texts and interpretations, and the contradictions that one may encounter there. Polosin's share of the book is

[18] M.A. Safarov, "Polosin Ali Viacheslav Sergeevich", in *Islam v Moskve: Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'*, ed. D.Z. Khairetdinov (Moscow: Medina, 2008). Available online at <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/encyclopedia/?3076> (Accessed on 2 June 2018).

[19] A. Gordon, "Preodolenie iazychestva". Broadcast, distributed by *NTV*, 2002 (Accessed on 17 February 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFYPz-c4wAo>)

[20] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*; Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*; V.A. Polosin, *Evangelie glazami musul'manina. Dva vzgliada na odnu istoriiu* (Moscow: Umma, 2006).

[21] V.A. Polosin, *Mif. Religiia. Gosudarstvo: Issledovanie politicheskoi mifologii* (Moscow: Ladomir, 1999); V.A. Polosin, *Preodolenie iazychestva: Vvedenie v filosofiiu monoteizma* (Moscow: Ladomir, 2001).

[22] T. Gudava, "Evroislam. Chast' 4", *Radio Svoboda*, 17 July 2001 <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24201975.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[23] A.A. Ali-Zade and V.A. Polosin, *Islam ne takoi! A kakoi? 40 otvetov kritikam Korana i Sunny* (Moscow: Ansar, 2008).

[24] V. Emel'ianov, "'Liberal'nyi' islam v seti", *Portal-Credo*, n.d. <https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=netnav&id=81> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

primarily found in the section on comparative religious studies: for instance, he compares perceptions of Heaven in the Qurʾān and the Bible, and the concept of clergy in Islam and Christianity.

In 2000, together with Valeriia Iman Porokhova, Polosin launched "Priamoi put'" (The Direct Path), an organization created with the goal of uniting ethnic Russian converts to Islam. The ideology of this organization was based on Polosin's book *The Manifesto of New Russia: The Third Path is Direct!* (2001).[25] The book addressed not only Russia's Muslims, but to a great extent also ethnic Russians; Polosin constructed Islam as a religion that could play a central role in bringing democratic transformations into Russian society, which many in the turbulent 1990s and early 2000s hoped for.

In his early publications, Polosin denounced the dominant role of the ROC in Russia. He did not consider Orthodox Christianity among Russia's "genuinely" traditional religions, instead arguing that historically only Islam (in the Volga-Ural region and the Caucasus) and Tengrism (in Siberia) proliferated and were accepted by local peoples *voluntarily*; whereas Orthodox Christianity or, as Polosin defines it, the "Eastern-Roman (Byzantine) model of Christianity" was introduced "with fire and sword". Being inherently alien to Russian culture, the new religion had to be "forcefully inculcated", which, in Polosin's opinion, crushed the local, true "ancient monotheism" that was naturally developing in Kievan Rus'.[26]

When elements of Russian paganism were mixed with Byzantine and Judeo-Christian traditions, the new religion prevented the creation of a strong, independent Russian man, a national hero, whom Polosin would like to see as a Russian Odysseus; instead, the imported Christianity has been nurturing "a humble wimp" (*smirennyi khliupik*) with a guilt complex, who does not have an active social position and just keeps "turning another cheek".[27] Polosin regarded Islam as a special path for Russia to enter a new covenant (*zavet*) with God; because, in his opinion, it is the only monotheistic religion that obtained its revelation directly from God through the Prophet. Polosin's use of the word *zavet* resembles the lexical practices of Mufti Gainutdin; the latter, as I argued in Section 3.3, used the same word as a synonym of the word 'Qurʾān'.

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[25] V.A. Polosin, *Manifest Novoi Rossii: tretii put' — priamoi!* (Moscow: Ladomir, 2001). Originally published in Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, pp. 47-68. This chapter gives references to an electronic version of the book *Priamoi put' k Bogu*, available at https://namaz.today/books/pryamoj-put-k-bogu-ali-vyacheslav-polosin (Accessed on 2 June 2018).
[26] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 64.
[27] Ibid., p. 41.

If Russia adopts Islam, it can return to the true monotheism that was developing before the baptism of Kievan Rus' in the tenth century. Moreover, in contrast to Orthodox Christianity, Islam also promotes "social activity and volitional (*volevoi*) transformation of the world".[28] Here Polosin brings up a popular argument among ethnic Russians who feel sympathy toward Islam; namely, that Muslims maintain a healthier and more disciplined lifestyle in comparison with Christians. In the words of Polosin, "the utopia of absolute freedom" imposed by Western liberalism resulted in the "godlessness, drug and alcohol addictions, decadence, physical and spiritual decomposition (*rastlenie*)" of Russians; and Polosin saw Islam as "a spiritual alternative" to it.[29]

Polosin believed that at the political level, Orthodox Christianity divides the Russian population into "us", the bondmen (*kholopy*) and slaves, versus "them" – Russia's "god-bearing" elites.[30] The Church has replaced the Almighty Creator by an image of Jesus Christ, "the King of the Jews";[31] since then, Russia's state ideology boils down to "a blind obedience" to Jesus and his worldly vicar – the Russian Tsar.[32] Such an ideology has been and still is exceptionally lucrative for the country's elites, argued Polosin back in 2000. In alliance with the clergy, the state usurps the political freedom of people. Backed by the Church, its authority becomes "immune to prosecution (*nepodsudnyi*)".[33] The Byzantine political model, according to Polosin, imposes submissiveness toward the political elites,[34] whereas Islam promotes "natural and healthy patriotism": every Muslim is ready to bravely die in defence of "himself, relatives and the Motherland", and thereby become a *shahīd*, Polosin believed.[35]

5.3.1 Russian as the language of Muslim mission

In the absence of strong Islamic authority in Russia, Polosin attempted to represent a new type of religious scholars – *ʿulamāʾ*, who could mediate between modern context and Islamic doctrine. The traditional Soviet-style Islamic administrations were not ready to engage with the rapidly changing religious

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[28] Ibid., p. 33.
[29] Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*, p. 53.
[30] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 44.
[31] Here Polosin refers to the NT, e.g. John 19:3, which reads: "They came up to him [Jesus], saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands".
[32] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 42.
[33] Ibid., p. 31.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Polosin, *Pochemu ia stal musul'maninom*, p. 44.

communities, as members of the latter became more reflexive about their religious identity and expected more from religious affiliation than merely a sense of belonging. At the same time, a number of foreign charities brought substantial financial resources into the country and supported the quick multiplication of Islamic foundations, schools, and places of worship, which operated independently from Russia's official religious establishments. Moreover, the authority of traditional institutions was also challenged by the advent of satellite media and the Internet, which contributed to the rapid proliferation of new platforms presenting Islam and Islamic doctrine in accessible, vernacular terms. Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, who observed similar tendencies across the Muslim World, already spoke in 2003 of a "re-intellectualization of the Islamic discourse"; accessibility and growing inclusiveness of the Islamic discourse, the scholars argue, question the authority of traditional *ʿulamāʾ*, who were previously credited as the only source that could interpret the doctrine.[36] What we see in Russia, however, is not so much a shift of power from the traditional to the newly-emerging leaders, but rather an attempt to fill the void left by Soviet policies on religion: the restrictions on Islamic education and the persecution of Muslim intellectuals resulted in a sheer lack of well-educated Islamic theologians when the USSR came to an end.

Polosin repeatedly stressed the paramount importance of Islamic religious education, which he aimed to promote by vernacularizing Islam. Without directly challenging the sacred status of Arabic, Polosin emphasized the need to also make Islam comprehensible in local languages and, first of all, in Russian. According to Polosin, this would help to lay foundations for a mass readership of the sacred texts, since every believer would be able to read the Qurʾān and interpret it in an autonomous way. For these purposes, he argued, we need "a good Russian translation of the Holy Qurʾān", which "would make Islam absolutely accessible to the Russian population", and take away any possible "repulsion or alienation".[37] Polosin believed that since "most people have no theological education and are not interested in the nuances of the text", they will not go to the original sources, but take "what is on the surface", i.e. the translation.[38]

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[36] D.F. Eickelman and J.W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: the Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 12.
[37] A. Shchipkov, "From Orthodox Priest to Muslim (via State Duma)", *Keston News Service*, 29 June 1999 <http://www.keston.org.uk/kns/1999/3-FROMOR.html> (Accessed on 29 January 2018).
[38] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 16.

Polosin found such a translation in the work of Valeriia Porokhova;[39] for him, Porokhova succeeded in translating the Qurʾān into a "genuinely Russian text that transmits the meaning of the Revelation [Qurʾān]"; a translation that "is not only understandable, but is also poetically beautiful, [and] easy to remember".[40] Russia's scholars, however, criticized Porokhova's translation for corrupting the Qurʾānic message;[41] some regarded it as "full of Christian eschatological concepts" and exemplary for how Islam is understood "by a recently converted woman from the end of the 20th century".[42] Almost a decade later, Polosin acknowledged that Porokhova's work was "not a translation in a strict sense", but rather "a poetic call to Islam".[43]

At the same time, Polosin harshly opposed the other existing Qurʾān translations for not being sufficiently Russian. One of these is Ignatii Krachkovskii's (1883-1951) translation, which is widely seen as an imperfect, but reliable rendering of the Qurʾān;[44] for Polosin, it is "a word-for-word literal translation" that "does not transmit the meaning, but only the words".[45] In Polosin's opinion, Krachkovskii was not at all suited to do this kind of work, because the scholar was "maybe a Jew, but most probably an atheist". Krachkovskii's translation, according to Polosin, is not only difficult to understand, but also fails to transmit the literary greatness of the Holy Scripture, especially to newly converted Muslims who are not yet entirely familiar with it. This

[39] V.I. Porokhova, *Koran. Perevod smyslov i kommentarii* (Moscow: Ripol Klassik, 2007). For a discussion of the existing Russian Qurʾān translations made in Tsarist Russia, see I.A. Gavrilov and A.G. Shevchenko, "Koran v Rossii: perevody i perevodchiki," *Vestnik Instituta sotsiologii* 2:5 (2012), 81-96; P.V. Gusterin, "Russkoiazychnaia koranistika dosovetskogo perioda," *Voprosy istorii* 5 (2015), 160-66; in the twentieth century: A.A. Dolinina, "Russkie perevody Korana v XX veke: kratkaia kharakteristika," *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo universiteta (Ser. Gumanitarnye nauki)* 155:3-2 (2013), 7-17; and in the post-Soviet period: R. Bekkin, "Nezamechennyi chitatelem. Retsenziia na perevod Korana B. Ia. Shidfar," *Uchenye zapiski Kazanskogo universiteta (Ser. Gumanitarnye nauki)* 155:3-2 (2013), 231-37; M. Iakubovich, "Russkie perevody smyslov Korana v iazykovom prostranstve gosudarstv SNG", *Islam v SNG*, 4 March 2013 <http://islamsng.com/rus/pastfuture/6402> (Accessed on 11 August 2017).

[40] Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 16.

[41] E.A. Rezvan, *Koran i ego mir* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 2001), pp. 449-50; F.A. Dorofeev, *Koran: istoriia formirovaniia i problemy perevodov* (Nizhnii Novgorod: Izdatel'stvo NNGU, 2008), p. 27.

[42] E. Stupina and R. Bekkin, "Rabota vo imia islama ili rabota protiv islama?", *NG Religii*, 18 December 1999 <http://www.ng.ru/printing/1999-12-18/24_7_3.html> (Accessed on 12 August 2017). Polosin, being aware of these accusations, defended Porokhova and referred to the official document issued by Al-Azhar Academy in Cairo (Egypt) that approved the translation; see Polosin, *Priamoi Put' k Bogu*, p. 16.

[43] V.A. Polosin, "Kak peredat' Koran na drugom iazyke", *Islam.Ru*, 6 August 2011 <http://islam.ru/content/veroeshenie/43396> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[44] Krachkovskii's translation was compiled, edited and published posthumously as I.I. Krachkovskii, *Koran* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1963).

[45] V.A. Polosin, "Metodicheskie zamechaniia k perevodu Korana", *Minaret 4 (14)*, 2007 <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/14/polosin.htm > (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

"raw [and] obscure text" would be "of interest only for professionals in Arabic studies", Polosin believed.[46] He also rejected another well-known Qurʾān translation by the Azerbaijani scholar of religion, El'mir Kuliev (b. 1975).[47] Kuliev's work, according to Polosin, is "incomprehensible for a Russian-speaking reader" and "horrible to the ear", because Kuliev – "an adherent of the literalist method" – did not adapt the Arabic text to the Russian context.[48] For Polosin, a formal or literal translation, which pays more attention to wording than to sense, is problematic because it fails to produce the same effects as the source text, and often leads to misunderstandings.[49]

In Polosin's view, a Russian translation of the Qurʾān should not only please a native speaker's eyes and ears; its content must also accord with the Russian system of values and allow no room for misinterpretation by the enemies of Islam. For instance, one of the epithets that the Qurʾān gives to Allāh is "mocking" and "the greatest Schemer" (Q 2:14-15 and Q 3:54); taken out of context, these titles have negative connotations and Christian missionaries often contrast them with images of the all-loving and all-forgiving Christian God. For Polosin, the blame for such misrepresentations lies with Qurʾān translators. In his article "How to transmit the Qurʾān in another language", Polosin compares lexical choices in verses Q 2:14 and Q 3:54 across the three most frequently cited Russian translations (by Kuliev, Krachkovskii and Porokhova) and discusses the "safest" options. Table 1 juxtaposes these translation variants and compares them with two variants of the Qurʾān in English, by Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem and Abdullah Yusuf Ali.[50] I chose the latter because Polosin regarded the work of this British-Indian scholar as a "correct" translation of the Qurʾān – even if, taken out of context, it cannot be used to support claims against Islam.[51] This Deobandi translation, accompanied by the author's

[46] V.A. Polosin, "Otvet A. Kuraevu. Bibliia, Koran i Beslan...", *Islam.Ru*, 24 September 2004 <https://after-kuraev.livejournal.com/101098.html> (Accessed on 29 January 2018).

[47] Kuliev, *Koran. Perevod smyslov i kommentarii*.

[48] Polosin, "Metodicheskie zamechaniia k perevodu Korana".

[49] In this regard, Polosin's argumentation is close to that of Al-Tarawneh on English translations of the Qurʾān, who argues that the translator's role is to ensure that the Qurʾānic concepts are understood in the target language as they are in the source language. See A. Al-Tarawneh, "Re-examining Islamic Evaluative Concepts in English Translations of the Quran: Friendship, Justice and Retaliation", in *Translating Values: Evaluative Concepts in Translation*, ed. P. Blumczynski and J. Gillespie (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 101-22.

[50] Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*; A.Y. Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation & Commentary* (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1983).

[51] Polosin, "Kak peredat' Koran na drugom iazyke"; also V.A. Polosin, "Iavliaiutsia li 'khitrost'' i 'izdevatel'stvo' atributami Allakha?," *Medina al'-Islam* 56:15-21 February 2008, 5.

commentaries and a detailed index, has been popular among apologists of Islam; in particular, it served as a reference book for South African Muslim missionary Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005).[52] Polosin's support of Abdullah Y. Ali's work may also explain why this translation was adopted as a basis for the Qurʾān in Russian, published by DUM RF in 2015 (see discussion in Section 3.3.1).[53]

On the question of the "cunning" nature of Allāh, Polosin examines the translation of verse Q 2:15. He cites Krachkovskii, who translates *āya* as "Allāh will mock (*poizdevaetsia*) them", which, according to Polosin, is an "extremely poor (*neudachnyi*)" variant; it means that God may assault someone directly. The translation suggested by Krachkovskii resembles the text by Abdel Haleem in English ("mocking them").

	Abdel Haleem	Ali	Krachkovskii	Porokhova
2:15	God is **mocking them** […]	Allāh will **throw back their mockery on them** […]	Allāh **will mock them** (*poizdevaietsia*) […]	But Allāh **will turn their jeering** (*nasmeshki*) **against them**
	Abdel Haleem	Ali	Krachkovskii	Kuliev
8:30	They schemed and so did God: He is **the best of schemers**	They plot and plan, and Allāh too plans; but **the best of planners** is Allāh.	And they contrive, but Allāh also contrives; Allāh is **the Best of contrivers** (*luchshii iz ukhitriaiushchikhsiia*).	And they schemed, but Allāh also schemed; Allāh is **the best of schemers** (*nailuchshii iz khitretsov*)

Table 1. Translation variants of Q 2:15 and Q 8:30 in Russian and English

Polosin gives Porokhova's variant – "will turn their jeering against them (*obratit protiv*)" – as the correct translation. In his opinion, Allāh does not feel the desire to mock, but merely "mirrors" unbelievers' behaviour. A similar approach is found in Ali's English translation, which reads "Allāh will throw back their mockery on them" (see Table 1).

Another argument frequently used by critics of Islam is that, according the Qurʾān, Allāh secretly makes plans that may be harmful for believers (Q 8:30). Commenting on the respective verse, Polosin argues that the word *khitrets* ('schemer') in itself does not have negative connotations, but may acquire them within a certain context. He notes that even Jesus, in some Christian texts in Church Slavonic, is called

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[52] A. Deedat, *Christ in Islam* (New Delhi: Islamic Da'wah Centre, 1991); *What the Bible Says about Muhammed* (Los Gatos: Smashwords Edition, 2012); *Muhammed: The Natural Successor to Christ* (Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1992).

[53] DUM RF, *Sviashchennyi Koran. S kommentariiami Abdully Iusufa Ali*.

vsekhitrets, i.e. ‘the deviser of all’.[54] However, Polosin denounces Kuliev’s variant – “the best of schemers”– as “a very grave mistake”. Krachkovskii’s variant – “the best of contrivers” – he considers “doubtful in terms of style”, but an accurate translation from a theological perspective.[55] The Russian verb *ukhitrit’sia* has mainly positive connotations, as it means ‘to manage’, ‘to be lucky to accomplish something’, although it is cognate with the words *vsekhitrets* and *khitrost’* (‘cunning’). Similar variations are also found in the analysed English translations. Although the word ‘schemer’, which Abdel Haleem uses, may not immediately invoke negative connotations, Ali preferred to use the word ‘planner’ as a “safer” translation variant.

By selecting and opting for what he saw as “optimal” translation variants, Polosin aimed to minimize “foreignness” of Islam in the eyes of an ordinary Russian citizen and to make it “bullet-proof” against Christian critics. This also links to Polosin’s advocacy of the use of Russian for the Islamic mission, *daʿwā.*

For Polosin, *daʿwā* was not the same as proselytism, which he defined as “luring a believer away from one religion to another”, often in a forced way; rather, he saw it as an “invitation” to Islam. The former priest did not use either the Arabic word *daʿwā* or its common Russian translation *islamskii prizyv* ‘call to Islam’. Instead, he proposes the word *priglashenie* ‘invitation’; the latter, in his opinion, does not “sound bellicose” and has no “element of coercion”.[56] Polosin repeatedly appeared in public disputes with Orthodox missionaries, such as Daniil Sysoev (Chapter 6), where he claimed to represent Russia’s entire Muslim community. He also adopted new media technologies with the aim of delivering *daʿwā* activities effectively. Prior to Polosin’s media appearances, there were already numerous grassroots initiatives on Russian-language Islamic forums and web platforms, which shared video sermons of foreign Muslim missionaries with subtitles or voice-overs in Russian. Although Polosin used the experience of foreign charismatic religious figures, such as Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005) and Hamza Yusuf (b. 1960), in his argumentation and persuasion strategies, he attempted to apply their methods within the social context of post-Soviet Russia. For instance, he dedicated one of his books to Deedat,[57] but at the same time argued that

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[54] See, for instance, Sunday Ochtoechos, Tone 7, Ode 9. Available at <http://st-sergius.org/services/services-2.html> (Accessed on 6 February 2018).
[55] Polosin, “Kak peredat’ Koran na drugom iazyke”.
[56] V.A. Polosin, “Kakim dolzhno byt’ priglashenie v islam?”. Video, distributed by *Al’-Vasatyia*, 2013 (Accessed on 18 July 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2QcOyK4eAw>), 0:30-1:02.
[57] See Polosin, *Priamoi Put’ k Bogu*.

Deedat's strategy of "trampling" the Christian opponents would bring more harm than good to any theological dispute in Russia.[58]

Polosin's books and videos caused much public discontent. Patriarch-to-be Kirill (Gundiaev), who at that time headed the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, called Polosin's publications "a blasphemous anti-Christian attack"; and the Council of Orthodox Citizens (*Soiuz pravoslavnykh grazhdan*) accused the former priest of promoting a "fiery *jihād*". [59] This, coupled with Polosin's participation in disputes against Sysoev, increased the confrontation between the ROC and Gainutdin's umbrella organizations, with which Polosin was directly associated. After 2003 Polosin gradually softened his critique of the ROC and Orthodox Christianity.

In many respects, Polosin's efforts to "russify" Islam in the early 2000s resemble the "Russian Islam" project of Sergei Gradirovskii, who was an advisor to Volga Federal District chief Sergei Kirienko (b. 1962).[60] Both Polosin and Gradirovskii attempted to frame the renaissance of Islam in Russia as a specifically Russian-speaking phenomenon. Back in 2002, Gradirovskii's project stated that the use of the Russian language by Muslims is not just a pragmatic response to communication challenges, but the development of an entirely new "community of identity", "the Russian-speaking *umma*".[61] In fact, Gradirovskii aimed to foster the development of "an Islam of Russian culture" (*russkokul'turnyi islam*).[62] Both Gradirovskii's and Polosin's interpretation of Russia's Islam assume an accelerated modernization of the Muslim community, where the authority of small mosque communities with *imām*s preaching in national languages will be replaced by a unified Russian-language discourse on the "correct" forms of Islamic practice. Ultimately, Gradirovskii's project caused a heated debate among Russian Muslims, especially in Tatarstan, who saw it as an attempt to russify ethnic minorities and to create an official "Russian Islam" that does not protect the interests of

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[58] V.A. Polosin, "Kak musul'mane otnosiatsia k Akhmadu Didatu i ego lektsiiam?", *Forum Slovo*, 28 August 2009 <http://forum-slovo.ru/index.php?topic=6835.5;wap2> (Accessed on 29 January 2018).

[59] Sova, "Ali Polosin i Ravil' Gainutdin obviniaiut RPTS v prozelitizme", *Sova-Tsentr*, 5 March 2003 <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/interfaith/christian-islam/2003/03/d150/> (Accessed on 25 April 2017).

[60] As of 2017, Kirienko holds office as the deputy head of the Kremlin administration; Gradirovskii's most recent affiliation is membership of the Expert Council under the Russian government. See, e.g., E. Rykovtseva, "Pod diktovku Kremlia", *Radio Svoboda*, 21 February 2017 <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28323367.html> (Accessed on 12 June 2018).

[61] Graney, "'Russian Islam' and the Politics of Religious Multiculturalism in Russia", pp. 104-05.

[62] Kemper, "Islamic Theology or Religious Political Technology?".

ethnic Muslims living in the country.[63] As for Polosin's projects, they likewise did not succeed among ethnic Muslims but only among Russian converts, and even then for only a short period of time. In 2006 Polosin's "Priamoi put'" merged with NORM, the National Organization of Russian Muslims (see Chapter 4); this was possible, argues Polosin, because the NORM leadership adhered to a "more Orthodox" form of Islam, which coincided with the ideological orientation of "Priamoi put'".[64] After the conflict with the NORM leadership and emigration of prominent Russian Muslims from Russia to Europe,[65] Polosin dismantled his organization.[66]

5.4 The path of moderation (2007-2015)

In 2006 Polosin travelled to Kuwait to establish contacts with the newly opened al-Wasatiyyah Centre, which to this day functions as a government think tank that aims to vindicate the rhetoric of Islam as the religion of the middle ground (*al-wasaṭiyya*). This ideology has been elaborated by the influential Egyptian Islamic theologian, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), and is promoted in the spheres of Islamic education, social norms and culture.[67] Polosin facilitated the opening of the Russian branch of the Centre in Moscow in 2010, which he headed a year later.[68]

Polosin openly states that it was Russia's official Islamic leadership and presidential administration that initiated this rapprochement with Kuwait.[69] The *al-wasaṭiyya* ideology endorsed by a respectful Egyptian theology was envisioned to become a "peaceful" alternative for Russia's Muslims who took an interest in foreign Islamic movements. At the same time, Polosin tried to downplay the political agenda of his travel to Kuwait and argued that negotiations with the al-Wasatiyyah Centre and

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[63] Graney, "'Russian Islam' and the Politics of Religious Multiculturalism in Russia", pp. 104-05.

[64] A. Sharipov, "Ali Polosin: Bolotnaia ne put' k blazhenstvu musul'man", *Islam News*, 4 April 2014 <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-145283.html> (Accessed on 20 February 2017).

[65] On Polosin's conflict with Kharun Sidorov, see R. Silant'ev, *Noveishaia istoriia Islama v Rossii* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2007), pp. 346-48.

[66] Sharipov, "Ali Polosin".

[67] On the principles of *al-waṣatiyya*, see, e.g., M.H. Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[68] Info-Islam, "Ali Viacheslav Polosin vozglavil rossiiskii Tsentr Al'-Vasatyiia", *Info-Islam*, 30 June 2011 <http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/novosti/rossiya/ali_vjacheslav_polosin_vozglavil_rossijskij_centr_al_-vasatyjja_umerennost_v_islame/1-1-0-8485 > (Accessed on 9 February 2018).

[69] S. Mamii, "Ali-Viacheslav Polosin: 'Tselenapravlennoi raboty po bogoslovskomu razoblacheniiu radikalizma ne bylo'", *Caucasus Times*, 8 July 2012 <http://caucasustimes.com/ru/ali-vjacheslav-polosin-celenapravlen/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

opening of a branch in Moscow happened with the blessing of Polosin's spiritual mentor – Sheikh Said Chirkeiskii.[70]

The project was supported in Russia by influential political functionaries,[71] as well as by secular academic expertise: Leonid Siukiiainen, Professor of Islamic Law at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, argued that *Sharīʿa* principles understood in accordance with the *al-wasaṭiyya* ideology are not only compatible with Russia's modern socio-political system but even beneficial to it.[72] In 2007 Siukiiainen stated that Russia's Islamic elites demonstrated their inability to offer an official and "convincing" position regarding social and political problems of Russia's Muslim community; instead, they hold on to "traditional" Islam, but its ideological potential is rather limited. It is therefore the task of the state, he continues, to take matters into its own hands and elaborate a meaningful policy on administering Islam in Russia. The experience of some Muslim countries, such as Kuwait, which developed the concept of *al-wasaṭiyya,* could be an example to follow.[73]

Al-wasaṭiyya – translated into Russian as *umerennost'* 'moderation' – was to become a remedy to cure Muslims "who fall into extremes", to bring them back to "*Sharīʿa* and the Qurʾānic understanding of the golden mean".[74] In fact, the project of implementing *al-wasaṭiyya* in Russia was intended to facilitate state control over Muslim communities and to address security threats associated with radical Islam. The state envisioned transplantation of *al-wasaṭiyya* ideology to Russia, and official Islamic elites

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[70] V.A. Polosin, "Komu v Rossii meshaet umerennyi Islam", *Islam News*, 18 December 2017 <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-komu-v-rossii-meshaet-umerennyj-islam/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[71] Consider, for instance, statements by Aleksei Grishin (b. 1963) – back then an influential politician in the presidential administration and a self-proclaimed expert on Islam; he actively promoted *al-wasaṭiyya,* arguing that this ideology is "wholly consistent with the ideas of the traditional Islam for Russia", for it is "alien to extremes and radicalism". See Islam News, "Grishin: 'Nel'zia dopustit' diskreditatsii al'-vasatyii'", *Islam News*, 25 May 2011 <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-A.Grishin-Nelzja-dopustit-diskreditacii-al-vasatyji> (Accessed on 30 November 2017).

[72] L. Siukiiainen, "Umerennost' kak strategiia sovremennogo islama", *NG Religii*, 1 March 2006 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2006-03-01/4_umerennost.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018). On Siukiiainen's understanding of *al-wasaṭiyya,* see also S.E. Merati, "Islamic Views of Peace and Conflict among Russia's Muslims", in *Islamic Peace Ethics: Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. H. Shadi (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 163-80.

[73] L. Siukiiainen, "Musul'manskaia pravovaia kul'tura, dukhovnyi potentsial i natsional'naia bezopasnost' Rossii," *Vestnik Evrazii* 3:37 (2007), 22-40.

[74] V.A. Polosin, "Umerennost' – ne znachit passivnost'", *Golos Islama*, 28 September 2012 <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=11744> (Accessed on 25 April 2017). *Al-wasaṭiyya* ideas have also been used as a political instrument in Central Asia; for instance, the DUM RF cooperated with Uzbek Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf (1952-2015) and translated his books on *al-wasaṭiyya* into Russian (edited by Polosin). See, e.g., M.M.S. Yusuf, *Vasatyia – put' zhizni* (Moscow: Khilal, 2010).

were supposed to "interact with reputable scientists of the Islamic world"; with their help, a theological school specific for Russia's Islam could be created.[75] Polosin acknowledged that Russia's DUMs have no political influence over Russia's *umma*: Islamic "administrators" (*administratory*) – heads of various Muslim organizations (DUMs) and centres – do not have any political weight; while "real" Islamic scholars, whom believers would follow, are almost absent in Russia.[76]

In 2012-2015, through the Foundation for the Support of Islamic Culture, Science and Education (*Fond podderzhki islamskoi kul'tury, nauki i obrazovaniia*),[77] of which Polosin has been a board member since 2007, Russia's Islamic leaders cooperated closely with the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS). The IUMS is a Qatar-based theological organization, also founded by al-Qaradawi. In a short period of time, most of the key figures of Russia's official Islam, including the DUM RF leader Ravil' Gainutdin, became members. Polosin explained that such a large delegation from Russia was necessary in order to enable Russia's participation in the discussion of theological documents that are important for the Islamic world, and to make sure that the position of Russia's Muslims is also taken into account.[78]

At the peak of the cooperation between Russia's Islamic elites and the IUMS, several big international conferences with the participation of prominent theologians from the Muslim world took place in Moscow, Dagestan and other regions in Russia with large Muslim populations. To chair these conferences, the Kremlin succeeded in persuading Ali al-Qaradaghi (b. 1949), the Secretary General of IUMS.[79] The cooperation resulted in a series of documents, including the Moscow Theological Declaration (2012), the *fatwā* on Dagestan (2012), the Makhachkala and Nalchik Declarations (2014), as well as "The Social Doctrine of Russia's Muslims" (2015).[80]

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[75] Polosin, "Komu v Rossii meshaet umerennyi Islam".
[76] Mamii, "Ali-Viacheslav Polosin".
[77] The Foundation was, in fact, established as a state-controlled organization to accumulate and redistribute funds transferred to Russian Muslims from Islamic states within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.
[78] Polosin, "Komu v Rossii meshaet umerennyi Islam".
[79] M. Vatchagaev, "Qatari Sheikh Becomes Tool for Kremlin in Struggle Against North Caucasus Militants", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13 November 2014 <https://jamestown.org/program/qatari-sheikh-becomes-tool-for-kremlin-in-struggle-against-north-caucasus-militants-2/> (Accessed on 29 January 2018).
[80] "Moskovskaia Bogoslovskaia Deklaratsiia", 25-26 May 2012; available at www.islamnews.ru/uploads/library/1366634369/library-k6gZiywDGW.pdf; "Fetva o primenimosti termina dar as-sil'm va l'-islam ("territoriia mira i Islama") k Dagestanu i podobnym emu oblastiam", 17 November 2012; available at https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/216435/; "Itogovaia deklaratsiia Mezhdunarodnoi bogoslovskoi konferentsii "Rossiiskie musul'mane: prava i obiazannosti"", 6 March 2014; available at www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/241091/; "Itogovaia deklaratsiia Mezhdunarodnoi mezhkonfessional'noi nauchnoi

Polosin not only headed the organization committees for these conferences but is also believed to have contributed to drafting these documents, which were envisioned as cornerstones for creating a corpus of Islamic legal documents in the Russian language, justifying compatibility of the Russian secular legislation with the principles of Muslim law.

5.4.1 The doctrines of Russia's Islam

The purpose of the numerous declarations was to answer the cornerstone issue in the life of Muslims in the Russian Federation, namely: how Muslims who live in a Russian secular state, and consider themselves its loyal citizens, should follow the norms prescribed by Islam. The Moscow Declaration aimed to give theologically "correct" interpretations of the controversial concepts of '*jihād*' and 'caliphate', and of certain *Sharīʿa* norms, in order to "deprive the [Islamic] extremists of their ideological basis"; the latter, argues Polosin, often use these terms taken from the Qurʾān and Sunna to justify radical actions.[81] The conference organizers presented the Moscow Declaration as a valuable document not only for Russia, but for the entire Islamic World, on a par with the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990).[82]

The conferences in Makhachkala in 2012 and 2014 declared Dagestan to be *dār al-Islām*, the "territory of Islam," thereby forbidding *jihād* in the region as contravening Islamic norms. Later the Stavropol region was also included in the "territory of Islam". These region-specific declarations were made to support the local Muslim spiritual leaders in these "problematic" regions. The organizers hoped that the authority of Sheikh Ali al-Qaradaghi and *fatwā*s issued under his leadership would be suitable means to control the part of the Muslim community that did not recognize the authority of the local official Muslim clergy.[83]

In 2015, the DUM RF issued the major document "The Social Doctrine of Russia's Muslims". The document was a follow-up to the previous "Basic Provisions of the

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konferentsii: "Traditsionnye religii: prizyv k umerennosti i k dobrososedstvu"", 30 October 2014; available at http://islamfund.ru/news-view-2467.html; "Sotsial'naia doktrina rossiiskikh musul'man", 14 June 2015; available at http://islam-today.ru/socialnaa-doktrina-rossijskih-musulman/. All resources accessed on 20 February 2018.

[81] Polosin, "Komu v Rossii meshaet umerennyi Islam".

[82] M. Rasulov, "Dzhikhad, khalifat i takfir. Kak v Rossii vybivali pochvu iz-pod nog radikalov", *Islam News*, 6 June 2017 <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-dzhihad-halifat-i-takfir-kak-v-rossii-v/> (Accessed on 20 February 2018).

[83] A. Malashenko, *Russia and the Arab Spring* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2013), pp. 17-18; Vatchagaev, "Qatari Sheikh Becomes Tool for Kremlin in Struggle Against North Caucasus Militants".

Social Program of Russia's Muslims" (*Osnovnye polozhenia sotsial'noi programmy rossiiskikh musul'man*) from 2001. Polosin drafted both documents, which aimed at "the inclusion of Islam as a social institution into the life of Russian society on a partnership basis".[84] Whereas the 2001 document primarily addressed questions related to Muslim life within a new, post-Soviet political system, the 2015 doctrine followed the provisions of Putin's "Ufa Theses" (see Chapter 3) and instructed Muslims on "socialization" within Russian mainstream society.

These documents, according to Polosin, also clarify the attitude of Russia's Muslims toward the Russian state and society; they are to show that "we [Russia's Muslims] harbour no evil plans to create another ISIS" in Russia. Moreover, the documents explain Islamic theology in "a social language that can be understood by secular people".[85]

Like similar Church documents, the Islamic doctrines were not so much about theological questions or teachings of individual thinkers; rather, they offered a codified and institutionalized position of the religious elites. It was also mandatory for the leading Muftis, and for *imām*s and teachers of Islamic educational institutions, to sign most of the documents. A refusal to sign could be interpreted as disagreement with the statements, which at best signalled unpatriotic views but could also be interpreted as support for "non-traditional" forms of Islam – an accusation that in present-day Russia leads to severe consequences.[86] For the Russian state, these documents were to be regarded as an authoritative expert opinion on Islamic issues.

Polosin clearly demonstrated a drastic change of his political views – while he presented himself in his early publications as an outspoken critic of the Church-state rapprochement, by 2015 he declared his support of the regime. He condemned the

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[84] R.R. Abbiasov, "Evoliutsiia programmnykh dokumentov rossiiskikh musul'man: ot sotsial'noi programmy k sotsial'noi doktrine," *Islam v sovremennom mire* 12:2 (2016), 127-34. Here p. 128. The "Social Doctrine" remained largely unnoticed by Muslims: as of 2014, a survey showed that about 85% of Muslims were not aware of its existence, see ibid., p. 129.

[85] V.A. Polosin, "Tainyi sheikh skazal mne: 'U tebia musul'manskie glaza, ty stanesh' musul'maninom'", *Business-Online*, 12 September 2016 <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/322390> (Accessed on 25 April 2017). Compare with Gainutdin's linguistic strategies described in Chapter 3 and Agadjanian's comment on the language of Patriarch Kirill: "Kirill sets forth a mission of 'translation' – in terms which strikingly remind one of the 'translation proviso' that Habermas developed upon the Rawlsian theory of public reason […]. His discussion of 'the eternal truth of the gospels' – a 'comprehensive doctrine' in Rawlsian parlance – should be expressed 'in intelligible terms' which would give 'a clear response to the challenges of our time'". See Agadjanian, "Tradition, Morality and Community", p. 40.

[86] Golos Islama, "Polosin: nepodpisanie nashei doktriny - 'signal'", *Golos Islama*, 8 September 2015 <https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=27702> (Accessed on 20 February 2018).

participation of Muslims in the Bolotnaia protests of 2011-2013, when a group of ethnic Russian converts to Islam joined the mass demonstrations criticizing the state for restricting the rights and freedoms of Russia's Muslims.[87] Polosin justified the Kremlin's policies as the only effective way to protect Russia against security threats and to rescue the country from an imminent collapse. Therefore, Polosin argues, those in opposition to President Putin are, in fact, Russia's enemies who aspire to make Russia "Europe and America's resource colony" (*syr'evoi pridatok*). Polosin uses a popular discourse trope on "the global war against Russia", in which demonstrations on Bolotnaia Square in Moscow are interpreted as an attempt by the West to undermine the country's power and integrity. For Polosin, "no matter what kind of *niiat* [intention] they have", Muslims who join demonstrations immediately become participants in this war, but on the enemy's side.[88]

5.5 Defining the "right" Muslims (2016-present)

The project of cooperation with Yusuf al-Qaradawi and the IUMS became a burden after affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood won elections in Egypt and Tunisia, and the Syrian crisis broke out in 2011. In 2012 al-Qaradawi, who is currently based in Qatar and is *de facto* the spiritual guide for the Muslim Brotherhood, denounced Russia as "enemy no.1" of the global Muslim community because of President Putin's support for the Syrian regime. In 2017 Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain launched an unprecedented campaign to isolate Qatar – al-Qaradawi's base – diplomatically and economically because of the country's links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Russia, which has economic relations with all of these countries, was again put into a difficult position. Even by the time of Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015, Polosin and Russia's Islamic leaders associated with the IUMS were having to downplay their connections with the organization.

In this period, the former priest also distanced himself from the Moscow-based DUM RF, siding instead with Gainutdin's competitor, the DUM of Chechnya, under the control of Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of the republic. In 2016, the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, hosted a conference that received the explicit support of the Russian president and was co-organized by the Abu Dhabi-based Tabah Foundation. The latter is believed

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[87] D. Kalder, "Russian Court Bans Qur'an Translation", *The Guardian*, 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/oct/08/russian-court-bans-quran-translation> (Accessed on 20 February 2017).

[88] Sharipov, "Ali Polosin".

to have come into existence to counter al-Qaradawi's IUMS.[89] The Grozny conference adopted a *fatwā* that was meant to consolidate Russia's Islam by excluding extremists; instead, it resulted in a deeper rift in Russia's Islamic leadership. The *fatwā* gives a definition of the *ahl al-sunna wal-jamāʿa,* 'people of Tradition and Consensus'; according to the document, "the sole true adherents of traditional Islam are those who abide by *kalām* scholastic theology, belong to one of the four legal schools, and follow the path of moral self-perfection espoused by the great teachers, primarily the Sufi sheikhs".[90] The Salafī strain of Sunni Islam was interpreted as a "dangerous and erroneous contemporary sect", along with the extremist group Islamic State, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Ḥabashīs.[91] Not only al-Qaradawi's IUMS criticized the conference as "a shameful attempt to sow dissent within the Muslim community";[92] Kadyrov's connections with Saudi Arabia, where Salafism is a dominant stream, were also at stake and the Chechen president had to personally meet with leaders in the Arab world to offer his explanations.[93]

Russia's largest Islamic organizations, the TsDUM and DUM RF denounced the Grozny *fatwā* and refused to sign it. The critics argued that the document did not take a step toward reconciliation of the Islamic administrations within Russia's *umma*, which the conference organizers thought it would, but, to the contrary, increased the existing polarization between the DUM RF and Ramzan Kadyrov's DUM in Chechnya.[94] For Polosin, the Grozny conference marked the break with the Moscow DUM – the former priest publicly defended the propositions of the *fatwā* against the criticism expressed by Gainutdin and his allies, thereby taking the Chechen side in the conflict.[95]

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[89] J. Dorsey, "Fighting for the Soul of Islam: A Battle of the Paymasters", *Huffington Post*, 29 September 2016 <www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/fighting-for-the-soul-of_b_12259312.html> (Accessed on 20 February 2018).

[90] L. Fuller, "Analysis: Grozny Fatwa on 'True Believers' Triggers Major Controversy", *Radio Liberty*, 14 September 2016 <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-grozny-fatwa-controversy/27987472.html> (Accessed on 20 February 2018).

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] L. Merenkova, "Kadyrovskaia fetva: istoriia ne zakonchena", *Kavkaz Realii*, 6 December 2016 <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/chelobitnaya-kadyrova-istoriya-ne-okonchena/28157353.html> (Accessed on 12 June 2018).

[94] D. Akhmetova, "Smuta iz-za odnoi fetvy", *NG Religii*, 7 December 2016 <www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2016-12-07/7_411_fetva.html> (Accessed on 20 February 2018).

[95] R. Silant'ev, "Groznyi obvinil Gainutdina v potakanii vakhkhabitam", *NG-religii*, 5 October 2016 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2016-10-05/1_grozniy.html> (Accessed on 8 May 2018); A. Abuarkub, "Strasti po fetve: otvet Ali Polosina Mukaddasu Bibarsovu", *Islam News*, 14 September 2016 <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-ali-polosin-groznenskaya-fetva-prizvana-zashhitit-musulman/> (Accessed on 8 May 2018).

5.6 Conclusion

Throughout the two decades since his conversion in the late 1990s, Polosin has demonstrated flexibility in adapting to the changing political climate. He has established and maintained ties with official Islamic institutions at the federal level as well as grassroots organizations, which often pursued opposite agendas (e.g., Gainutdin's DUM RF and NORM; DUM RF and DUM of Chechnya).

In the first decade after his conversion, Polosin advocated and, through his publications, contributed to the vernacularization of Islamic discourse in order to make it more understandable to those who have the "Russian mentality". His early projects of the Russian(-speaking) *umma* resonate with the one advocated by Gradirovskii (2002), while both of them predicted an inevitable growth in the political clout of Russia's Muslim population and suggested ways of integrating Russian-speaking Muslims into mainstream society. At this stage, Polosin tried to bring Islam and Russianness closer together, using strategies that were discussed in Chapter 3 with the example of Mufti Gainutdin. Polosin also attempted to "de-foreignize" Islam with the help of linguistic tools – by making this religion accessible and acceptable to ethnic Russians through "correct" translations of the Qurʾān and enrooting Islam in Russian history and culture. At this point, however, Polosin's ideological standpoints were also close to the position of the NORM leadership: his early interpretation of Russian Islam aimed to advance the role of ethnic Russians whose emancipation and development, the former priest believed, could be achieved through conversion to Islam.

During President Putin's second, and especially third term, Polosin's ideas moved from the ideological margins closer to the centre of mainstream discourse and he attracted the attention of the political elites. He now had to downplay his critical stance against the Church and the political regime; in exchange, he gained resources and authority to work within structures that monitor and govern Russia's Islamic community and its leaders. He turned into the *éminence grise* behind the Kremlin's efforts to support the authority of local spiritual directorates. Polosin's interpretation of Russian Islam in this period focused primarily on the compatibility of Islamic law and way of living with Russia's secular legislation. By hosting conferences with internationally recognized religious leaders, Polosin contributed to the creation of a series of documents that were supposed to provide Russia's Muslims with theological guidelines that did not contradict Russia's "traditional" values.

During this period, Polosin pushes for more far-reaching "churchification" of Islam (see Chapter 3), by insisting on the institutionalization of Muslim organizations as "corporations under public law".[96] He coordinates projects that urge Muslim leaders

[96] Vinding, "Churchification of Islam in Europe", p. 61.

to fit Islam into structural standards that build on the existing church and state relations in Russia. The ideology of *al-wasaṭiyya*, although imported from abroad, in fact provides the framework into which Muslims are expected to fit in order to be recognized and integrated according to the Russian paradigm of administering religions. However, as Niels V. Vinding rightly argues concerning the example of European Muslim communities, "it seems [that] the standards Muslims are expected to meet are impossible and the possibility of institutional recognition no more than a bar that keeps moving up".[97] In fact, one could question whether, in the current political context in Russia, one could still be both a "good" Muslim and a "good" Russian: because only those Muslim organizations that are willing to transform themselves and conform to Christian standards, which is something practically non-Islamic, can be regarded as "traditional" – that is, "good" – Muslims; whereas being a truly "Russian Muslim", as the analysis in the previous chapter has shown, entails racialization of religion and advocacy of ethnic nationalism. Moreover, attempts to institutionalize Islam and fit it into the model of the ROC only have the effect of furthering disunity in the Muslim community.

Efforts to create and define Islam that is *russkii*, in the broad meaning of the word, also cause much concern in the ROC's conservative camp, which contested the very possibility of a Muslim being *russkii*. Some argued that no religion other than Orthodoxy can be Russian, and the attempts to create a *russkii* Islam were merely provocations by "liberal" Muslim movements that pursued political goals.[98] Such arguments also resonated with the leaders of ethnic Muslim communities, who perceived the projects of Polosin and Gradirovskii as top-down initiatives by the Russian state to russify ethnic minorities.[99]

The very fact that religion is exclusive when associated with a particular ethnic identity became an issue that some Orthodox missionaries operating on the fringe of the ROC tried to address. The following chapter will present a case study of the priest Daniil Sysoev, who openly opposed (ethno)nationalist use of Orthodox Christianity and argued that it becomes an obstacle for the development of genuine religiosity and prevents non-Russians from discovering the word of God.

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[97] Ibid. For a representative case of *verkirchlichung* (churchification) of Islam in Germany, see G. Jonker, "Muslim Emancipation? Germany's Struggle over Religious Pluralism", in *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union*, ed. W.A.R. Shadid and S. van Koningsveld (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2002).

[98] M. Rebrova, "Russkii Islam", *Naslednik*, 2016 <www.naslednick.ru/archive/rubric/rubric_7527.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[99] M. Laruelle, "How Islam Will Change Russia", *The Jamestown Foundation*, 13 September 2016 <https://jamestown.org/program/marlene-laruelle-how-islam-will-change-russia/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

Part II

The Tatar Language of Christianity

Chapter 6

Daniil Sysoev: Mission and Martyrdom

Part II of this thesis examines the process of how the Tatar language is being transformed to accommodate the religious needs not only of Muslims but also of Christians, and looks at the main powers behind this transformation. The first case study[1] in this part zooms in on the linguistic and discursive strategies of another religious entrepreneur, Orthodox Christian priest Daniil Sysoev, who in the early 2000s embodied the new type of Orthodox mission, more assertive and proselytism-oriented. Sysoev operated at the margins of the ROC and aimed to reintroduce the practices of Orthodox Christian brotherhoods working in the nineteenth-century Volga-Ural region; Sysoev and his followers actively engaged in missionary activities among Tatars and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, placing great emphasis on the translation of religious literature into vernaculars. Sysoev, I argue, was a harbinger of future transformations within the Church, when an intrusive Orthodox Christian activism developed from being a marginal practice into a mainstream practice.

[1] An earlier version of this chapter was published as G. Sibgatullina, "Daniil Sysoev: Mission and Martyrdom," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017), 163-82. https://doi.org/10.1080/0959-6410.2017.1287484.

6.1 Introduction

Like the previous case study on Polosin, this case study focuses on a religious entrepreneur and his rhetorical and linguistic practices, which influenced the mainstream discourse on religion. In this chapter, I will discuss the life and works of a charismatic and sharp-tongued preacher, Daniil Sysoev (1974-2009) (Figure 4),[1] who was exceptionally productive as a writer, lecturer and blogger. He was instrumental in the conversion of a number of people to Orthodox Christianity, and today some of his serious followers, such as Dmitrii Tsorionov, represent the ROC's ultra-conservative wing. Yet Sysoev's hard-line approach also made him some serious enemies, and in 2009 he was gunned down by unknown assailants. Sysoev's ambiguous personality and his provocative contribution to Muslim-Christian relations in post-Soviet Russia continues to feed disputes in both academic circles and religious communities: was he a radical Orthodox zealot or a true devotee who died as a martyr? Did he transform the Church tradition from a narrow ethnic subculture into a broader home accessible not only for *russkie*, but also for Muslim-born Tatars, migrants from Central Asia and even foreigners? Or, on the contrary, was he the *enfant terrible* of the ROC,[2] who undermined its carefully constructed image as a tolerant big brother in relation to Russia's other "traditional" religions?

Like Polosin, Sysoev started at the margins of the religious community. In Patriarch Aleksii's time, he advocated that the Church should take a more assertive approach to mission. He criticized the ROC for what he believed was its inappropriately mild stance in interreligious relations; he actively translated literature into the languages of ethnic minorities and confronted non-believers and adherents of other faiths in personal and public debates. In hindsight, Sysoev appears to have been a trailblazer for a change in the ROC's strategy. However, this view obscures the fact that Sysoev's criticism of the ROC was much more fundamental and more comprehensive than just a different position on mission strategy, as this chapter will demonstrate.

The ROC's new policy seems to indicate a return to the Orthodox Christian mission of the Tsarist era, when mission focused primarily on "Russification", that is, on the assimilation of the *inorodtsy* – the old umbrella term for non-Christian peoples of the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus – and on preventing apostasy among social groups that had been baptized over the centuries, such as the Kräshen Tatars.

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[1] The photo source: *PravMir.ru*, <www.pravmir.ru/10-besed-svyashhennika-daniila-sysoeva-video/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[2] Curanović, *The Religious Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 129.

Today, the Missionary Department of the ROC targets Muslim immigrants from Central Asia, using Orthodox Christian teaching to motivate them to integrate into Russian society.

Figure 4. Daniil Sysoev (1974–2009)

Section 6.2 sketches Sysoev's image in the eyes of posterity, as shaped by the memoirs of his family members, friends and followers. They portray him as a faithful Orthodox Christian who died at the hands of an unbeliever. This hagiographical trend contrasts with information acquired through interviews with two academics who knew him. Section 6.3 discusses Sysoev's ideology of "uranopolitism", and its relation to the official patriotic discourse of the ROC and the state. Sysoev's evangelism among Muslims is analysed in Section 6.4 6.4 Evangelism among Muslimswhich argues that he adopted many of the strategies employed by missionaries of the Kazan Theological Seminary in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for work among Russia's Muslims, in particular the use of Muslims' vernacular languages in church rites and sermons, and the engagement of Muslim opponents in theological disputes.[3] As Sysoev appears to have pioneered a new form of Church-society interaction, the last section of

[3] Geraci, *Window on the East*; P.W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); M.W. Johnson, *Imperial Commission for Orthodox Mission: Nikolai Il'minskii's Work among the Tatars of Kazan, 1862-1891* (PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005); D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Know Thine Enemy: The Travails of the Kazan School of Russian Missionary Orientology", in *Religion and Identity in Russia and the Soviet Union: a Festschrift for Paul Bushkovitch*, ed. N. Chrissidis et al. (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2011), 145-64; among others.

the chapter situates him in the context of the increasing Church-state rapprochement under Patriarch Kirill.

6.2 The making of a saint

Born in Moscow in 1974, Daniil Sysoev descended from a family with strong religious convictions. His maternal great-grandfather had reportedly been a Tatar *imām* who traced his genealogy back to the Prophet Muhammad.[4] Sysoev's parents accepted baptism in 1977, in the period of "deep stagnation (*zastoi*), when everyone seemed to have forgotten about the Church".[5] His father, Aleksei Sysoev, eventually became a priest, and is still serving in the St Peter and St Paul Church in a southern district of Moscow, where in 1990 he established the Radonezh-Iasenovo Orthodox classical gymnasium.[6]

According to family members, even as a child Daniil Sysoev was fascinated by religious rites: "Instead of children's games he had liturgies and sermons; he used to stand in the middle of the room preaching to hanging towels".[7] In 1991, he enrolled at the Moscow Theological Seminary (*Moskovskaia dukhovnaia seminariia*). His classmates remember that he was regarded as a fast learner (*samouchka*), but also as a parvenu (*vyskochka*) and even a dogmatist (*nachetchik*): a hot-head who refused to accept the authority of teachers and clerics.[8]

Sysoev began his first missionary activities as early as 1993. With the Bible in hand, he preached on the streets, and started to have disputes with missionaries of what he called "false doctrines" or "sects", from Jehovah's Witnesses to Protestants to Satan worshippers.[9]

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[4] I. Sysoeva and T. Kuropatov, "Matushka Iuliia Sysoeva: Ob ottse Daniile, schast'e, chudesakh i muchenichestve", *Pravmir.ru*, 17 December 2009 <http://www.pravmir.ru/matushka-yuliya-sysoeva-ob-otce-daniile-schaste-chudesax-i-muchenichestve/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[5] A. Sysoeva, "Vospominaniia o detstve Daniila", in *Obrativshii mnogikh k pravde...*, ed. T. Podosinkina (Moscow: Prikhod khrama proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi "Tri Sestry", 2012), 5-24. Here p. 7.

[6] Interview with Boris Knorre, associate professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics. Conducted in Moscow, 20 October 2014.

[7] E. Suprycheva, "Mat' ubitogo sviashchennika Daniila Sysoeva: 'On gotovil menia ksvoiei smerti!'", *Blagovest-info*, 24 November 2009 <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=7&id=31046> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[8] A. Lymarev, "Zhizn' za Khrista", in *Obrativshii mnogikh k pravde...*, ed. T.Podosinkina (Moscow: Prikhod khrama proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi, "Tri Sestry", 2012), 25–47. Here p. 31.

[9] O. Vladimirtsev, "Nekotorye aspekty missii sredi inovertsev na primere o. Daniila Sysoeva", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 2011 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2011/11/19/nekotorye_aspekty_missii_sredi_inovercev_na_primere_o_daniila_sysoeva> (Accessed on 21 November 2017).

After graduating in 1995, Sysoev was ordained as a deacon, and started conducting Bible-based conversations with people who had fallen under the influence of these "sects". These meetings took place in an official institutional setting – the Krutitsy Patriarchal Metochion (*Krutitskoe Patriarshee podvor'e*). Sysoev later analysed the experience gained during these conversations for his candidate degree thesis (titled "Anthropology and Analysis of the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Watchtower Society"), which he defended in 2000 at the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy (*Moskovskaia dukhovnaia akademiia*).[10] A year later he started to work as a priest.

His fellow students report that already as a seminarian, Sysoev longed for martyrdom. He used to say: "It is good to become a martyr or to retire in a monastery at the end of your life, so that you complete your life as one of the great hermits (*podvizhniki*)".[11] Sysoev explained his attraction to martyrdom in his online book *Instruction for Immortals, or What to Do if You Die*: "The death of a martyr washes away (*smyvaet*) all sins, except heresy and schism. All other sins – like lechery, murder, adultery – [can] be forgiven".[12] By a strange coincidence, Sysoev was acquainted with a priest who did become a martyr: in 1988, when he took part in restoration works at the Optina Monastery, he met hieromonk Vasilii (Rosliakov), one of three monks who would be murdered in 1993, for reasons that are unclear.[13]

On the night of 19 November 2009, Daniil Sysoev was himself shot dead after leading a service in St Thomas's Church, a temporary wooden chapel that Sysoev had constructed in Moscow.[14] The investigative agencies saw a religious motive behind the murder, as Sysoev had repeatedly received death threats. Several weeks prior to his assassination, Sysoev stated in his LiveJournal blog:

> I have some news again. You'll laugh, but today Muslims again promised to kill me. This time on the phone. I am really tired of this. It is already the fourteenth time. [Such death threats] used to bother me, but I get used to that. Islam cannot hurt those who enjoy God's help. But I ask you all to pray for me.[15]

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[10] D. Sysoev, "You Wish to See Many Miracles–You Should Become a Missionary or a Martyr", *Orthodoxy and the World*, 25 November 2009 <http://www.pravmir.com/article_793.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[11] Lymarev, "Zhizn' za Khrista", p. 45.

[12] D. Sysoev, *Instruktsiia dlia bessmertnikh ili chto delat', esli Vy vse-taki umerli* (Moscow: Blagovest, 2009), p. 14.

[13] Although Rosliakov and the other two monks have never been officially canonized, they are known as the 'Optina martyrs' (*Optinskie mucheniki*).

[14] Rosbalt, "Otvetstvennost' za ubiistvo Daniila Sysoeva vziali islamisty", *Rosbalt*, 26 December 2009 <http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2009/12/26/700646.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[15] D. Sysoev, "Dobrye musul'mane", *LiveJournal*, 9 October 2009 <https://pr-daniil.livejournal.com/56-054.html> (Accessed on 2 June 2018). In his LiveJournal entry, Sysoev changed the Russian expression

The Russian media were initially very vague about the possible perpetrators, stating that they could come from among "radical Islamists or some sectarians, for example, pagans".[16] But on 25 December 2009, radical Islamists associated with the Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz) claimed responsibility for the "liquidation of Allāh's enemy Sysoev": "One of our brothers – a person who himself has never been to the Caucasus – made an oath of allegiance to Abu Usman [Dokku Umarov, the self-proclaimed leader of the Emirate], and expressed his desire to execute the damned Sysoev". Anyone "who dares to open his mouth to defame Islam and Muslims will share Sysoev's fate".[17] Several months later, law enforcement officers in Makhachkala (Dagestan) killed a citizen of Kirgizstan, Beksultan Karibekov, when he resisted arrest. There were allegations that Karibekov had killed the priest in Moscow and was in contact with the well-known militant Islamist Said Buriatskii,[18] but the investigative agencies later denied this.[19] Some commentators even argued that Sysoev was assassinated because of a personal conflict with "representatives of construction business", over the land where he had built his church.

The case of Sysoev's death is still not closed, and neither is the debate about whether he should be regarded as a modern martyr. While his followers call for Sysoev's official canonization as a saint, the relevant Synodical Commission (*Sinodal'naia komissiia po kanonizatsii sviatykh*) prevaricates: the secretary of the Commission has argued that, due to the unclear circumstances of Sysoev's murder, it cannot be determined with certainty whether he deliberately chose to die, which is a prerequisite for canonization.[20] Many churchmen and believers nevertheless revere him as a martyr, simply for the way he lived, and for the fact that he died a violent death. After all, the Russian word for 'martyr' (*muchenik*) is related to *muchenie* ('torment') and *muka* ('torture'), highlighting the "physical" aspect of martyrdom, regardless of the victim's intention. And even Patriarch Kirill, in his letter of condolence, called Sysoev

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Bog ne vydast, svin'ia ne s''est (lit. 'if God is merciful no swine will devour me'), replacing the word 'swine' with 'Islam'.

[16] NewsRU, "Moskovskogo sviashchennika Daniila Sysoeva zastrelili po religioznym motivam, priznaiet SKP", *NewsRu*, 20 November 2009 <http://www.newsru.com/religy/20nov2009/sysoyev.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[17] Hunafa, "Likvidatsiia vraga Allakha Sysoeva", *Hunafa*, 25 December 2009 <http://hunafa.com/cgi-sys/suspendedpage.cgi?p=2522> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[18] Garaev, "Jihad as Passionarity".

[19] Interfax, "Ubiitsa ottsa Daniila Sysoeva mog vkhodit' v bandu Saida Buriatskogo", *Interfax*, 16 March 2010 <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/main.asp?id=131347&p=20> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[20] M. Maksimov, "Ubity, no ne proslavleny", *Neskuchnyi sad*, 8 February 2011 <http://www.religare.ru/2_83-226.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

"a martyr for sharing the Evangelical message (*muchenik za delo Evangel'skogo Blagovestiia*)",[21] which implies that the canonization of Sysoev may just be a matter of time.[22]

6.3 *Uranopolitism* versus patriotism

In his approach to religious mission, Sysoev clearly departed from the official ROC line. In 1995, the Church published its "Conception for the Revival of ROC Missionary Activity" (*Kontseptsiia vozrozhdeniia missionerskoi deiatel'nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*), and established a special Synodical Missionary Department (*Sinodal'nyi Missionerskii Otdel*), but programmatic documents on ROC missionary work remained very moderate in their tone and goals: a 2007 document, entitled "The Conception of Missionary Work of the Russian Orthodox Church" (*Kontseptiia missionerskoi deiatel'nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*), urged Orthodox Christians to conduct "a mission of dialogue" and "of reconciliation", based on "missionary friendliness, openness, social responsiveness", and without getting involved "in extremist activities".[23] The ROC was obviously anxious to avoid conflicts with the other major religions in Russia and emphasized its respect for the rules of the secular state.

The assertive style of Sysoev's missionary activities clearly placed him beyond the scope of these regulations. Sysoev disagreed with the "defensive" mode of the ROC in interfaith relations and rejected the established consensus that discouraged active evangelism as a means to spread the word of God.[24] For Sysoev, a good attack was the best defence.

Sysoev's criticism of the ROC is embodied in his concept of *uranopolitism*, with which he questioned the increasingly patriotic discourse of the ROC in Putin's Russia. According to Sysoev,[25] Christians are "just wanderers and aliens" in this world, because

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[21] Patriarch Kirill, "Patriarshee soboleznovanie v sviazi s gibel'iu sviashchennika Daniila Sysoeva", *The official website of the Moscow Patriarchate* 2009 <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/940065.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[22] K. Sakharov, "Kanonizatsiia sviashennika Daniila Sysoeva–delo vremeni", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 26 November 2014 <http://ruskline.ru/special_opinion/2014/11/kanonizaciya_svyawennika_daniila_sysoeva_de-lo_vremeni/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[23] Kontseptsiia, "Kontseptsiia missionerskoi deiatel'nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi", *The official website of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 27 March 2007 <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/220922.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[24] D. Sysoev, "Pokhvala prozelitizmu", *Missionerskii tsentr*, n.d. <http://mail.mission-shop.com/index.php/ru/publicatsii/583-2009-12-30-00-52-53.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[25] D. Sysoev, "Uranopolitizm i patriotism", *Uranopolitizm*, 2009 <https://uranopolitism.wordpress.com/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

their real citizenship will only come in Heaven. *Uranopolitism* (from Greek *ouranos* 'sky; heaven', and *polis* 'city') implies the supremacy of divine laws over terrestrial/secular legislation. Sysoev believed that the main and only kinship among people is "not blood or country of origin, but kinship in Christ". [26]

In denying any correlation between religion and ethnicity/nationality, Sysoev challenged one of the very fundamentals of Russian (*russkii*) identity: since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Orthodoxy has been promoted as an important component of Russianness (see also the discussion in Section 2.3.1 of this thesis).[27] Sysoev challenged this conception by arguing that nations only result from the arrogance of "those who built the Tower [of Babel]"; a person who over-emphasizes his or her ethnic background and connection with a given country "builds the same Tower, namely the Terrestrial Kingdom". [28]

By insisting that the Orthodox Church must be open to all nationalities, Sysoev asserted that a firm believer must not be a patriot: one cannot be devoted to both the terrestrial motherland and God, for this would mean "serving two masters".[29] Such an idea could have many implications. If patriotism is not a religious virtue, Orthodox Christians should not condemn persons accused of having betrayed their native land. Sysoev elaborated on this with the examples of the White Army General Anton Denikin (1872–1947) and the Soviet defector to the Nazis, General Andrei Vlasov (1901–1946), both regarded in modern Russian historiography as traitors. According to Sysoev, the Bible does not include "high treason in its list of sins": even a person who has committed war crimes can be acquitted by God's mercy, and can enter Heaven, if he or she repents.[30]

While the official Church sees patriotism as an obligation for a believer,[31] Sysoev argued that these are false convictions that provoke God's anger. When in the summer

[26] Ibid.

[27] Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*; Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia*.

[28] D. Sysoev, "Otvet Dmitriu Anatol'evichu (no ne Medvedevu)", *LiveJournal*, 18 October 2009 <http://pr-daniil.livejournal.com/47465.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[29] Sysoev, "Uranopolitizm i patriotism".

[30] D. Sysoev, "2 Mirovaia voina i chestnost'", *LiveJournal*, 10 September 2009 <http://pr-daniil.livejournal.com/48610.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016); D. Sysoev, "Uranopoliticheskie kriterii otsenki istorii", *LiveJournal*, 7 September 2009 <http://pr-daniil.livejournal.com/47465.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[31] See, e.g., O. Steniaev, "Khristianstvo i patriotism", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 14 June 2007 <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/94102.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

of 2009 bad maintenance led to a serious accident at the hydro-power station in Khakassia, Sysoev posted in his LiveJournal:

> "Just as on 11 September 2001 God's anger struck at America's arrogance, in August 2009 God also started to punish Orthodox people for their arrogance, which in the contemporary mendacious language is called patriotism and nationalism".[32]

Sysoev's publications on *uranopolitism* provoked criticism from various ROC officials and clergy, and also from Andrei Kuraev, a Church intellectual operating on the liberal fringe of the ROC spectrum.[33] Equally upset were representatives of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church ("Old Believers"),[34] the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (*Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' Zagranitsei*)[35] and lay people.[36]

Although the ROC never obstructed Sysoev's missionary activities, it did not support him either. In 2003, in order to create his own platform independent of the ROC, Sysoev launched a project to establish the "Community of the Church in honour of Prophet Daniel". The goal was to build a stone church complex in southern Moscow, with space to accommodate 2,000 persons. The complex was intended to host a missionary school, to organize Bible lectures and lessons on Orthodox Christianity for migrant workers, and to offer psychological support for new converts. This church became Sysoev's life's project, as he hoped to establish his own "Opus Dei"[37] – a highly controversial institution based on the idea that an ordinary life is a path to sanctity.[38] Successful fundraising allowed Sysoev to start the project by constructing a temporary centre for his flock, in the form of a wooden church dedicated to St Thomas, where he

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[32] D. Sysoev, "A Sud to nad pravoslavnymi narodami uzhe nachalsia!", *LiveJournal*, 24 August 2009 <http://pr-daniil.livejournal.com/45307.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[33] A. Kuraev, "O Daniile Sysoeve". Video, distributed by *Protiv Eresi*, n.d. (Accessed on 7 February 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEl2GLFaM6k>); A. Kuraev, "Diakon Andrei Kuraev o napadkakh ottsa Daniila Sysoeva na Osipova A.I.", 2013 <https://www.you-tube.com/watch?v=ghMNkLYZsC8> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[34] V. Novozhilov and P. Shakhmatov, "Protoierei Valentin Novozhilov i Pavel Shakhmatov vs o. Daniil Sysoev", *Sovremennoe drevlepravoslavie*, 12 October 2007 <https://staroobrad.ru/modules.php?na-me=News2&file=print&sid=220> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[35] M. Nazarov, "Otvet ottsu Daniilu Sysoevu na ego stat'iu 'Zarubezhnaia tserkov': raskolili eres'?", *Izdatel'stvo"Russkaia Ideia"*, 26 December 2006 <http://www.rusidea.org/?a=12034> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[36] E.g., A. Malinina, "Kto na samom dele vedet sebia ne po-liudski", *Inform-religia*, 22 January <http://www.inform-relig.ru/290110/analitika/220110_sysoev.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[37] Skype interview with Aleksandr Egorov, associate professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics. Conducted in Leiden, 27 September 2014.

[38] R. Hutchinson, *Their Kingdom Come: Inside the Secret World of Opus Dei* (London: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999).

regularly held public prayers for the conversion of "the stray Muslims and other heretics".[39]

6.4 Evangelism among Muslims

When in the early 2000s Sysoev made *uranopolitism* a central element of his discourse, he also shifted missionary activities: instead of targeting Christian evangelical denominations, Sysoev now turned to individual Muslims whom he found to be less attached to their Islamic faith. He also became involved in the Kräshen Tatars, the communities of baptized Tatars who had accepted Orthodox Christianity, either under coercion or voluntarily, in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, and who found themselves in a vulnerable position between Orthodox Russians and Muslim Tatars (see Chapter 7).

According to Aleksandr Egorov (who attended Sysoev's classes when the latter was still teaching at his father's Orthodox gymnasium "Iasenevo"), Sysoev had already considered missionary work among Muslims in the mid-1990s, when he had reflected on the phenomenon of Kräshens and opportunities to conduct mission among Muslim Tatars.[40] By 2003, he had established contact with Christian Tatar activists in Moscow and organized a community of baptized representatives of Turkic nations from the post-Soviet area.

In "Contemporary Trends in Islam: An Orthodox Christian Evaluation", Sysoev provides a rather simplified categorization of Islamic trends and communities. He distinguished five trends in Islam: 1) "everyday (*obikhodnyi*) Islam of Turkic peoples"; 2) "traditional Islam of peoples from the Caucasus"; 3) "Russian (*russkii*) Islam", 4) "Wahhabism", and finally 5) Shi'ism. His article was designed as a practical guide for other Orthodox Christian missionaries in Russia, outlining the specifics of the various groups.

Turkic people, Sysoev argued, profess a "soft Islam": they adjust a given religion to their local traditions and give priority to the earthly (secular) legislation, not to divine (*Sharīʿa*) law. According to him, this group is not easy to engage in any theological dispute, because adherents of "soft Islam" believe that "all religions are one way to the same summit", and they therefore avoid confrontation. Sysoev also reflected on Tatar Jadīdism (Muslim modernism) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

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[39] B. Knorre, "Tragediia odnogo missionera, non-konformista i gumanista kak indikator rasstanovki radikalistskikh sil v Rossii", in *Religia i rossiiskoe mnogoobrazie*, ed. S. Filatov (Moscow: Letnii Sad, 2011), 424-42.

[40] Skype interview with Aleksandr Egorov, associate professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics. Conducted in Leiden, 27 September 2014.

which in his opinion grew out of Turkic "everyday Islam". He compared Jadīdism to the Renovationist movement within the Orthodox Church and saw both as a negative deviation from the fundamentals of the respective confessions. Moreover, Sysoev saw a strong link between Turkic Islam and the nationalism that he abhorred: the Turkic peoples of the former USSR are driven by the idea that "being a Tatar or Uzbek means to be a Muslim", which, Sysoev argued, leads to the growing Islamization of Turkic nations. On the whole, however, Sysoev considered Tatars an easy target for missionary work, claiming that in comparison with their co-religionists from the Caucasus, Muslims of the Volga-Ural region showed less fervour for Islam.[41]

Islam in the Caucasus was, in Sysoev's view, characterized by a stricter observation of *Sharīʿa* laws, but also coupled with *ʿādāt* regulations. These were interpreted by Sysoev as "the customary law that is essentially pagan". This explains, Sysoev continued, why the peoples of the Caucasus persist in indulging in blood feuds and other practices that contradict *Sharīʿa*. In a similar vein, he explained Sufi influences, especially the cult of saints and pilgrimages to holy places in the Caucasus. For Sysoev, such pagan elements in Islam proved that Islam is inferior to Christianity. Shiism seems to receive slightly less criticism from him, arguably because it has a cult of martyrs. However, while a Christian martyr is "a witness to Christ's victory over death", a martyr in Islam was for him "simply somebody who suffered for Allāh and wants to be rewarded for this".[42]

But Sysoev was most concerned by the growing number of ethnic Russians who were converting to Islam (see Chapter 4). He argued that this phenomenon had its roots in the wars in Afghanistan (1979–1989) and Chechnya (1994–1996/1999–2009). Today "representatives of the Chechen diaspora and Arab preachers" in Russia "seduce Christians into the Muslim community (*musul'manstvo*)".[43] Many *russkie* Muslims follow the "Wahhabism" variant of Islam, which Sysoev saw as "legalism" pure and simple; "Wahhabism" he described as an ideology for establishing a Terrestrial Kingdom that has nothing to do with the path toward salvation.

Sysoev concluded that, if cleverly approached, Islam's variety of forms and its lack of a unifying authority were bound to facilitate Orthodox Christian mission. And indeed, Orthodox missionaries still employ Sysoev's classification. Although they stress

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[41] D. Sysoev, "Sovremennyie techeniia islama – pravoslavnaia otsenka", 2006 <fondiv.ru/articles/1/57/> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

their disagreement with the strategy of "excessive polemics", they agree that Orthodox missionaries should not be too "soft" when engaging with Muslims.[44]

Christian activists often compare Sysoev to the missionaries from the Kazan Theological Seminary of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[45] and he might indeed have taken his inspiration from his Tsarist-era predecessors. Although he never mentioned any direct connections with the Kazan Seminary, in his own mission Sysoev used similar strategies and identified similar target groups to those singled out by the Kazan missionaries in the Volga-Urals.

The first of these strategies is to employ native languages for missionary purposes. This feature was introduced by the well-known missionary Orientalist Nikolai Il'minskii (1822-1891). Il'minskii also advocated using priests from the local population to teach basic Orthodox tenets to the local population. He developed a special Cyrillic alphabet and a new Tatar grammar for the community of the baptized (Kräshen) Tatars (see also Section 7.2). The Kräshen language that Il'minskii designed was also understandable to Muslim Tatars but was relatively free of Arabic and Persian loanwords with Islamic semantics (see also Section 8.3 of this thesis).[46]

The second feature of Sysoev's missionary work – active disputation with Islamic authorities – was first advocated by the priest and scholar Efimii Malov (1835-1918), who confronted Russia's Muslims by organizing sophisticated anti-Islamic polemics.[47] Native-language teaching and theological disputes were meant to spread Christianity and to prevent apostasy within the baptized communities of the Volga-Ural region.

Sysoev, too, put a strong emphasis on missionary work among Tatars: "myself being half Russian and half Tatar, it would be a sin not to preach among Tatars", as he

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[44] See A. Troshin, "Pravoslavnaia khristianskaia missiia v islamskoi srede v Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost'", *The official website of the Mission department of the Moscow Patriarchate*, 2016 <http://infomissia.ru/2016/09/24/pravoslavnaya-xristianskaya-missiya-v-islamskoj-srede-v-rossii-istoriya-i-sovremennost/> (Accessed on 6 February 2017).

[45] Vladimirtsev, "Nekotorye aspekty missii sredi inovertsev na primere o. Daniila Sysoeva"; V. Ordynskii, "Kazan' reabilitiruet imia velikogo prosvetitelia", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 7 June 2012 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2012/06/07/kazan_reabilitiruet_imya_velikogo_prosvetitelya/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016); Troshin, "Pravoslavnaia khristianskaia missiia". On Orthodox Christian mission among Muslims in the Volga-Ural region, see also Section 7.2 of this thesis.

[46] Geraci, *Window on the East*, p. 39; A. Kefeli, "The Tale of Joseph and Zulaykha on the Volga Frontier: The Struggle for Gender, Religious, and National Identity in Imperial and Postrevolutionary Russia," *Slavic Review Slavic Review* 70:2 (2011), 373. Here pp. 397-98.

[47] D. Mardanova, *Polemika mezhdu musul'manami i khristianami v Povolzh'e v poslednei treti XIX veka* (MA thesis, European University at St Petersburg, 2016); also Geraci, *Window on the East*, pp. 90-97.

used to say.[48] He was proud of his Tatar stock and believed that "half-bloods" (*polukrovki*) were notable for their vital energy.[49] His aversion to nationalisms thus had much to do with his own mixed background, and under the umbrella of his uranopolitism he intended to show that representatives of any ethnic group can become firm Orthodox Christians.

Accompanied by his disciples, Sysoev regularly visited the Tatar cultural centre in Moscow, which, because of its "religious neutrality", was seen as a good platform for a "dialogue" with Muslims.[50] Once he even preached on Sabantui, the traditional summer festival of Bashkirs and Tatars, which was regarded as a provocation by the Muslims who attended it.[51] In 2007, Sysoev headed a mission to Kräshen villages of Tatarstan; two years later he went on a mission to the town of Zainsk.[52]

But Sysoev was also interested in labour migrants from Central Asia, who in the late 1990s and 2000s came in huge numbers to Moscow and its suburbs; this led to the well-known rise of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant xenophobia in Russian society. Sysoev must have believed that the difference in religious norms was at the core of the conflict: in 2007, he planned to conduct lessons about religious morality among workers, which he hoped would be facilitated by their employers. These lessons would have the purpose of "convincing migrants that Russia is not a territory of war"; otherwise, according Sysoev, "Islam allows a Muslim to do practically anything".[53] However, he did not find the necessary financial support to teach such lessons. In 2008, Sysoev organized a missionary trip to the Republic of Kirgizia, where he managed to baptize several local citizens.[54]

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[48] Interfax, "Sviashchennik Daniil Sysoev zaiavliaet, chto v ego adres postupaiut ugrozy fizicheskoi raspravy", *Interfax-religia*, 19 February 2008 <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=22955> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[49] Neizvestnyi, *Neizvestnyi Daniil. Vospominania o sviashennike Daniile Sysoeve* (Moscow: Blagotvoritel'nyi fond "Missionerskii tsentr imeni iereia Daniila Sysoeva", 2012).

[50] L. Lapshina, "Pravoslavnye tatary proveli konferentsiiu v Moskve", *Blagovest-Info*, 11 January 2006 <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=4&id=3768> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[51] Neizvestnyi, *Neizvestnyi Daniil. Vospominania o sviashennike Daniile Sysoeve*.

[52] Vladimirtsev, "Nekotorye aspekty missii sredi inovertsev na primere o. Daniila Sysoeva".

[53] E. Suprycheva, "Batiushku ubili za propovedi sredi musul'man?", *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 20 November 2009 <https://www.kp.ru/daily/24397/574542/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[54] E. Stepanova, "Pamiati ottsa Daniila Sysoeva", *Pravmir.ru*, 20 November 2009 <http://www.pravmir.ru/po-sledam-apostola-fomy-missionery-v-kirgizii/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

There are no verified records about actual numbers, but some sources affirm that "during his life he [Sysoev] baptized about eighty Muslims".[55] In fact, these converts from Islam became Sysoev's most devoted followers: in his community, they found the support and understanding after their conversion that they lacked from their friends and family. They reported that many ordinary Orthodox parishes rejected new converts, on the grounds that they had betrayed their national (Turkic-Tatar) tradition.[56]

Sysoev believed that he could draw on the experience of the Kazan Seminary to create what he considered "a united Orthodox Christian mission for the Turkic-Ugric space". He envisaged this mission as a platform for an even more ambitious enterprise: to establish a "Unit of Christians in the Caucasus"[57] to "solve spiritual problems" of the region.

6.4.1 Mission in Islamic vernaculars

In his work with Tatars and other Turkic-speakers, Sysoev emphasized the need to address them in their native language. His publishing house produced prayer books in three languages: Kräshen Tatar, Tatar and Kyrgyz, which correspond to the major ethnic groups Sysoev was trying to reach.[58] These books contain "essential Christian prayers, psalms" and other ritual texts translated from Russian in its Church Slavonic variant.

Sysoev himself made an effort to learn Kräshen, a historical variant of the Tatar language spoken in Kräshen communities in the Volga area; these communities will be discussed in the next chapter. From 2003, when he organized a community of Orthodox Christian Tatars in Moscow, he led weekly collective prayers in both Kräshen and Russian. It should be noted that in contemporary Kräshen parishes in the Volga-Ural region, the Kräshen language relates to Tatar in the same way as Russian Church Slavonic relates to contemporary standard Russian: the former is reserved exclusively for liturgical purposes, whereas the latter is used as a language of (religious) communication (including conversations and writings about religious matters).

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[55] Iu. Maksimov, "Siiat' kak zvezda", in *Obrativshii mnogikh k pravde...*, ed. T. Podosinkina (Moscow: Prikhod khrama proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi, "Tri Sestry", 2012). Here p. 111.

[56] V. Emel'ianov, "Reportazh: Napravlennost' pravoslavnoi missii–islam", *Portal-Credo*, 5 January 2009 <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=39419> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[57] Lapshina, "Pravoslavnye tatary proveli konferentsiiu v Moskve".

[58] Molitvoslov, *Pravoslavnyi molitvoslov na kriashenskom iazyke* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khrama Proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi, 2007); Molitvoslov, *Pravoslavnyi molitvoslov na tatarskom iazyke* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khrama Proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi, 2007); Molitvoslov, *Pravoslavnyi molitvoslov na kyrgyzskom iazyke* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khrama Proroka Daniila na Kantemirovskoi, 2008).

Sysoev's sermons were given Patriarch Aleksii's blessing, and this made him the first priest in Moscow to hold a special service in the Kräshen language.[59]

Members of Sysoev's community in Moscow wished to distinguish themselves from Muslim Tatars and preferred to be identified not as "Orthodox Christian/baptized Tatars" but as "Kräshens". By adopting this ethnonym, they established continuity with the centuries-long history and the rich cultural heritage of the Kräshen communities in the Volga-Ural region. The Kräshen spiritual mission in Tatarstan, however, refused to cooperate with Sysoev's group of "new Kräshens", and also criticized Sysoev's Kräshen translations, which they regarded as inappropriate (see discussion in Section 7.4).[60]

Perhaps in response to the opposition he met in Tatarstan, Sysoev gradually shifted from Kräshen to modern standard Tatar as the liturgical language in his community – that is, back to a language that has a significant Islamic lexicon. This shift was deemed necessary because the Tatar converts in his Moscow congregation complained that Kräshen was incomprehensible to them.[61] By adopting literary Tatar for translating Orthodox Christian sermons and prayers, Sysoev thus departed from the translation strategies of Il'minskii, who sought to purify the Kräshen language from Islamic lexical items; terms of Arabic and Persian origin were replaced by Russian alternatives.

The way that Sysoev and his collaborators employed terms of Arabic/Islamic origin can be demonstrated by the first sentence from the Creed, which starts with "I believe in God, the Father Almighty". In Tatar it begins as "I bring my faith to […]", where the translators use the Arabic term *īmān* (which stands for 'faith' in Islam): ***Iman*** *kiterämen ber* ***Alla*** *Ataga*… (I bring my faith to the only God Father…).[62]

The word 'blessing' in the Holy Cross prayer in Tatar is rendered by *bäräkät* (Arabic *baraka*). In Tatar, this term carries associations with Islamic theology, and marks a kind of continuity of spiritual presence and power (and in addition to 'divine blessing' in an Islamic understanding, *bäräkät* also signifies 'prosperity'): *Äy* ***xoday***, *xalkïngï sakla häm yortïnga* ***bäräkät*** *bir* (Oh Lord, save your people and give blessing to your house).[63]

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[59] Maksimov, "Siiat' kak zvezda".

[60] From the author's interview with priest Dmitrii Sizov, the leader of the Kräshen spiritual mission at the archdiocese of Tatarstan. The interview was conducted on 18 July 2016 in Kriash Sreda, Tatarstan.

[61] Interviews with members of the Orthodox Tatar community in Moscow. Conducted at St Thomas's Church in Moscow, 23–24 October 2014.

[62] Molitvoslov, *Pravoslavnyi molitvoslov na tatarskom iazyke*, p. 7.

[63] Ibid., p. 17.

The translators also adopted the vocabulary used by Muslim Tatars to refer to the Supreme Being: in the first example above this is *Alla* (Arabic *Allāh*, 'God'; the Russian variant used by the ROC is *Bog*), and in the second it is *xoday* (Persian *khodā*, 'Lord'; Russian: *Gospod'*) (see also Section 8.3.1).

A similar approach can be found in the prayer book in Kyrgyz: e.g., the word 'psalm' is translated as *namaz-ïr* (lit. 'a *namaz*-song'),[64] which refers to the semantic field of *namāz* (of Persian origin, denoting an obligatory prayer in Islam). To take another example, the bowing element in Christian rituals (for example, after reading certain Christian prayers) is explained in Kyrgyz as *sezde qïluu* – lit. 'to perform *sajda*'.[65] The word *sajda* usually means an act of prostration in the direction of the Kaʿba, which is done by Muslims during their daily prayers (see also Section 8.3.2).

Remarkably, the Kyrgyz prayer book keeps the Russified variants of personal names, e.g., *Iisus Khristos* (Jesus Christ), whereas the translation in Tatar presents its Islamic variant *Gaisä Mäsikh* (Arabic *ʿĪsā Masīḥ*, 'Jesus the Messiah').

The above-mentioned words of Arabic and Persian origin may have a weaker connotation with Islam in languages used for more than one religion (e.g., in Arabic, which is also the language of Oriental Christians), but Tatar and Kyrgyz remain predominantly associated with Islam. And it should be noted that some Christian evangelical missions that entered the former Soviet Union space in the late 1980s also used Muslim terminology in Christian texts. In general, this vernacularization of Christian texts is believed to facilitate their acceptance in Muslim communities.[66]

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Sysoev and his followers made extensive use of Tatar, Kyrgyz and Tajik translations of Christian texts that had been produced by evangelical missions, such as the NT in Kyrgyz published by the Gideons International, an Uzbek version of the Gospel of Luke published by an organization called "Light of Hope", and the NT in Tatar published by Jehovah's Witnesses (see Section 8.2.2).[67] These and other books used for missionary work among Muslim peoples were shown to me during my interviews with members of the Orthodox Christian Tatar community in Moscow in 2014.

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[64] Molitvoslov, *Pravoslavnyi molitvoslov na kyrgyzskom iazyke*, p. 10.
[65] Ibid., p. 7.
[66] D.L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 32-34.
[67] Gideons International, *Injil/ Zabur* (Nashville, TN: The Gideons International, 2005), containing translations by the Institute of Bible Translation in Stockholm; Umid Nuri, *Mukaddas Khushkhabar [Uzbek translation of the Gospel of Luke]* (Umid Nuri, Al' Salam, 2006); NWT, *Injil. Yanga dönya tärjemäse* (Selters: Wachtturm-Gesellschaft, 2013).

Although Sysoev started his missionary activities by addressing non-Orthodox Christian denominations, he repeatedly suggested copying their strategies.[68] He thus relied on the experience of his adversaries. In fact, neither he himself nor members of his community had sufficient training in any of the Islamic vernaculars to produce high-quality translations: the two little prayer books in Tatar and Kyrgyz that Sysoev's team compiled for Orthodox Christians have clear orthographic and stylistic shortcomings. And today, Sysoev's followers prefer to use books published by the Moscow branch of the Institute of Bible Translation for evangelism among Muslims.[69]

6.4.2 Disputes with Muslim authorities

The second approach that Sysoev seems to have adopted from the Kazan Seminary was the readiness and eagerness to engage Muslims in public theological debates.

On 20 December 2005, the editors of the website *Islam.ru* organized a debate between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the conference hall of the prestigious Hotel Rossiya in Moscow.[70] Orthodox Christianity was represented by Daniil Sysoev as the main speaker, Andrei Redkozubov (at that time a student at St Tikhon's Orthodox University of Humanities) and the Orthodox theologian Aleksandr Lul'ka. Their opponents were headed by Ali Viacheslav Polosin (see Chapter 5). Polosin was supported by Askar Sabdin (a theologian who directs the information analysis centre "Ansar") and Iskander Iafisi (a Russian Muslim who participates in NORM, the National Organization of Russian Muslims). The topic of the discussion was "the Qurʾān and the Bible". Those present at the event reported that the audience was unevenly balanced: there were more Muslims in the hall, mostly young men, while Christianity was mainly represented by elderly women. In the eyes of the public, neither side won a convincing victory.[71]

A second round of the debate was organized on 3 February 2006 and dealt with the image of God in Christianity and Islam. This time Sysoev was backed up by Georgii

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[68] See, for example, Sysoev, "Pokhvala prozelitizmu".

[69] See the official website of the Mission Centre named after Daniil Sysoev at <http://mission-center.com/gastrobaiters> (Accessed on 7 February 2017).

[70] Radonezh, "Sostoialsia pervyi v Rossii publichnyi disput musul'man i pravoslavnykh", *Radonezh*, 21 December 2005 <http://radonezh.ru/news/sostoyalsya-pervy-v-rossii-publichny-disput-musulman-i-pravoslavnykh-17196.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[71] See RusIvan, "Teologicheskoe: po sledam sostoiavshikhsia religioznykh debatov pravoslavnykh imusul'man", *LiveJournal*, 17 December 2005 <http://lj.rossia.org/users/pyc_ivan/163821.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016); Vudit, "Sysoev vs. Polosin", *LiveJournal*, 17 December 2005 <http://lj.rossia.org/users/vudit/71650.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

(Iurii) Maksimov (editor of the "Orthodoxy and Islam" website, and lecturer at the Moscow Theological Seminary) and ROC archpriest Oleg Steniaev. On the Muslim side, the main figure was still Polosin, but Iafisi was replaced by Polosin's collaborator Aidyn Ali-Zade, a senior researcher of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan.

Both debates were covered by the national mass media, and various communities responded to the event. The religious-patriotic Union of Orthodox Citizens (*Soiuz pravoslavnykh grazhdan*) argued that such discussions threatened the country's stability. Speakers of this organization also challenged the legitimacy of the debaters. In their view, the participants had no right to speak on behalf of Orthodox Christianity, or of the Muslim tradition: rather, they were from "purely marginal circles who are interested in conflict".[72] This view was shared by the Union of Muslim Journalists of the SMR: in their view, the debates lacked mutual respect, as each side was only concerned with detecting hostile meanings in the other's statements. The speakers did not find a common language, and therefore did not foster dialogue between the religions.[73]

A third round, expected to centre on "Muhammad and Christ", did not take place. Both sides blamed the other for the failure. Sysoev stated that he was ready to engage with the best brains in Islamic theology and suggested the popular Islamic writer Shamil Aliautdinov (*imām* of Moscow's Memorial Mosque on Poklonnaia Hill) as his most authoritative sparring partner.[74] Later he argued that further debates with Muslims were pointless as long as his opponents were not ready to question the essence of Muhammad's divine ministry (*poslannichestvo*). He did not regret the first two debates, though, because they offered "a unique chance to preach Christ to Muslims", in front of "a hostile audience".[75]

In the public debates of 2005 and 2006, Sysoev developed the anti-Islamic critique that would guide his subsequent lectures and publications on Russia's

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[72] Interfax, "Zaiavlenie Soiuza pravoslavnykh grazhdan v sviazi s obostreniem polemiki povoprosam pravoslavno-musul'manskogo dialoga", *Interfax*, 23 December 2005 <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/islam/?act=documents&div=302> (Accessed on 21 Novemebr 2016).

[73] Sova, "SPG bespokoit sostoianiie mezhreligioznogo dialoga v Rossii", *Sova-Tsentr*, 23 December 2005 <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/interfaith/christian-islam/2005/12/d6843/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[74] D. Sysoev, "Spletni o islamo-khrisitanskom dispute", *Pravoslavie i islam*, n.d. <http://www.orthodoxy-islam.com/disput1.htm> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[75] D. Sysoev, "Skaip-konferentsiia so sviashchennikom Daniilom Sysoevym", *Stavros*, 15 June 2009 <http://stavroskrest.ru/content/skajp-konferenciya-so-svyacshennikom-daniilom-sysoevym> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

Muslims. He focused on the image of Allāh in Islam, the personality of the Prophet Muhammad and the nature of the Qurʾān. He also challenged the main pillars of Islam, the concept of belief in angels and djinns, and specific points of *Sharīʿa* law.

Eventually, Sysoev rejected the idea that Muslims and Christians, as adherents of Abrahamic religions, share the same concept of God; he referred to the Council of Constantinople (1180), which laid down that the God of Christianity is not the same as Allāh.[76] For describing the Almighty in Christianity, Sysoev used terms such as *Bog* 'God', *Tvorets* 'Creator', *Gospod'* 'Lord', *Otets* 'Father', which all denote the various characteristics or actions of God; for him, God "is Love". But for the God of Islam, he uses only *Allāh* (*of Muslims*), who is "tyrannical, iniquitous, non-omniscient, artful, non-permanent" and cruel.[77] As the true (*istinnyi*) God is only found in Christianity, Muslims are called upon to "come under His shroud (*pokrov*)".[78] In his later works and speeches, Sysoev argued that Muslims themselves have little knowledge about their faith,[79] and therefore did not recognize that Allāh was simply "a parody of the true God".[80] Allāh is a creature of the mind of Muhammad, who "simply misinterpreted narrations from the Old and New Testaments".[81]

In order to prove that Muhammad's claim was not credible, Sysoev referred to the places in the Bible where criteria of false prophesy are listed, and held that "Muhammad was not just a fraud (*zhulik*), but a man who entered a *sviaz'* ('connection'), although not with God but with Satan".[82] Sysoev also rejected the assumption that Muhammad was simply suffering from epilepsy, as some Western Orientalists have suggested; in his view, there are clear indications that Muhammad was possessed by demons.[83]

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[76] D. Sysoev, *Islam. Pravoslavnyi vzgliad* (Moscow: Avtonomnaia nekommercheskaia organizatsiia "Dukhovnoe nasledie", 2011).

[77] D. Sysoev, *Brak s musul'maninom* (Moscow: Avtonomnaia nekommercheskaia organizatsiia "Dukhovnoe nasledie", 2011), p. 77. His references to the Qurʾān were based on Ignatii Krachkovskii's popular Russian Qurʾān translation, see Krachkovskii, *Koran*. For the discussion on Russian Qurʾān translations, see Section 5.3.1.

[78] Disput, "Predstavlenie o Boge v Khristianstve i Islame". Video, distributed by *Pravoslavnaia Biblioteka*, 2006 (Accessed on 7 February 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Amv6pBQSsQ>), 44:10-44:20.

[79] Sysoev, *Islam. Pravoslavnyi vzgliad*, p. 15.

[80] Sysoev, *Brak s musul'maninom*, p. 77.

[81] Sysoev, *Islam. Pravoslavnyi vzgliad*, p. 17.

[82] Film, "Fil'm-lektsia sviashchennika Daniila Sysoeva na temu: Pravoslavie i Musul'manstvo". Film, distributed by *Studia "Obitel'" Troitse Sergievoi Lavry*, 2008 (Accessed on 7 February 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUwOVOmZAsU>), 39:06–39:09.

[83] Sysoev, *Islam. Pravoslavnyi vzgliad*, p. 78.

As the Qurʾān was dictated by Satan himself, Muslims "have to fight with fire, terror and executions to maintain their delusion". In Sysoev's view, the Qurʾān not only fails to reach the highest degree of virtue (embodied in the Bible), but its "moral level is even lower than what is regarded as decency in Europe", that is, among the Westerners "who lost their piety".[84]

To stress the difference, Sysoev also uses different terms for elements and figures that are shared by Islam and Christianity. Thus, in his writings the angel Jibril (in his spelling, *Dzhabrail*), in the Arabic form, is not the same as Gabriel but opposed to him; and ʿĪsā in the Qurʾān cannot be Jesus, because, according to Sysoev, Muslims do not believe in his crucifixion. The only figure for whom Sysoev uses a common term is Satan: the Russian form *satana* (or *drevnii vrag* 'ancient enemy') occurs interchangeably with the Arabic/Qurʾānic *Iblīs*. Obviously, there is only one Satan – and it was Satan who formulated the Qurʾān, in which he himself figures.

In his debates, Sysoev was very careful with regard to Arabic-Islamic terminology. In his own statements, he did not personally bring up Arabic terms, obviously to avoid providing his opponents with ammunition. Only when a specific notion had already been introduced by the other side did Sysoev use it, but giving it his own interpretation. Thus, when his opponents started using the Arabic term *shirk* (in the sense of the sin of practising idolatry or polytheism), Sysoev used the term but defined it as "flagrant, unforgivable sin": Muslims commit *shirk* when they attribute Satan's qualities to the Creator.[85]

In his online lectures, sermons and public discussions, Sysoev referred to Islamic notions more often. Words such *āya*, *sūra*, *Sharīʿa* and Qurʾān, as well as Sunnism, Sufism and Shiism, and even *murīd* ('aspirant') and *muʾadhdhin* ('caller to prayer'), are used without translation, on the assumption that these terms are well known to both his Christian and Muslim audiences. Neither did he define such words as Wahhabi and jihād, using them as negative catch-all terms instead of providing the range of meanings that they cover.

Sometimes Sysoev used Islamic concepts only in their Russian translations, which led to obvious simplifications. For example, he claimed that according to the Qurʾān, "the World is divided into the territory of peace (*zemlia mira)* and the territory of war (*zemlia voiny*)", and that the latter falls into the "territory of *jihād*" (*zemlia*

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[84] D. Sysoev, "Mozhet li Koran pretendovat' na to, chto on – eto slovo Boga", *Missionerskii tsentr*, n.d. <http://mission-center.com/publicatsii/175-koran> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[85] Disput, "Predstavlenie o Boge v Khristianstve i Islame", 42:30-42:36.

dzhikhada) and "the territory of truce" (*zemlia peremiriia*).[86] These concepts (Sysoev did not give the Arabic terms *Dār al-salām*, *Dār al-ḥarb*, *Dār al-ʿahd* etc.) do not, of course, occur in the Qurʾān, as he claimed, but were introduced by later scholars of Islamic legal traditions, and their definitions are much more complex. Incomplete or corrupted definitions can be detected in other cases, too, for instance when Sysoev defined *ʿādāt* 'customary law' as "a traditional Turkic code" (in spite of the fact that many Muslim peoples have *ʿādāt*), and "peaceful (*mirnyi*) *jihād*" as a kind of Islamic missionary work.[87]

These patterns show that Sysoev was acquainted with the basic Arabic-Islamic terminology, and by using it he tried to persuade the audience of his own competence in Islamic theology and law. However, his expertise was limited, and he tended to give Islamic terms the meanings that he wanted them to convey. To highlight his familiarity with Islam and Muslims, he also resorted to expressions such as "I have seen/heard/read with my own eyes/ears", or "when I had another talk with a Muslim". While in public debates Sysoev consistently addressed his opponents as "Muslims", in his writings he often used labels such as *nevernyi* 'infidel', *neveruiushchii* 'unbeliever', and *inoverets* 'adherent of a different faith'. Those who came to Islam consciously, at a mature age, he called *sovrativshiesia v Islam*, 'those who have gone astray by entering Islam'. However, Sysoev deliberately refrained from using the highly pejorative notion of *Mahometans*, a term many Church authors used to indicate that Muslims follow the pseudo-prophecy of Muhammad.[88]

Clearly, Sysoev's works on Islam introduced a range of Arabic-Muslim terminology into the religious language of Orthodox Christianity.[89] He also shaped religious polemics with Muslims: Sysoev's videos and publications inspired many

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[86] Sysoev, *Islam. Pravoslavnyi vzgliad*, p. 10.
[87] Ibid., p. 12.
[88] Sysoev, *Brak s musul'maninom*, p. 180. In one chapter of this book, the term 'Mahometans' does indeed occur quite often, but the style of this chapter suggests that it was not written by Sysoev himself. This chapter differs from the rest of the book in its abundance of composite sentences, elevated style and the absence of imperatives; also, the reader is addressed in the second person plural, which is more formal than the singular form that Sysoev was accustomed to employ. Some parts of Sysoev's published works might have been authored by his companion Georgii (Iurii) Maksimov, who often wrote on similar topics. See Iu. Maksimov, *Religiia Kresta i religiia Polumesiatsa* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo podvor'ia Sviato-Troitskoi Sergievoi lavry, 2004); Iu. Maksimov, "Pochemu khristiane ne schitaiut Mukhammeda prorokom. Chast' 1", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 23 July 2007 <http://www.pravo-slavie.ru/put/070723175350.htm> (Accessed on 1 August 2017); Iu. Maksimov, "Sviashchennoie Pisanie: Koran ili Bibliia?", *Azbuka very*, n.d. <https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Georgij_Maksimov/pravoslavie-i-islam/6> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).
[89] See Bugaeva, "Pravoslavnyi sotsiolekt" and the comments in the Introduction of this thesis.

Orthodox missionaries, who now use similar strategies in their own disputes with Muslims.[90]

While Sysoev thus seems to have followed the example of the Kazan Theological Seminary, there is one aspect in which he clearly departed from their model. When engaging Muslims in controversies on the Holy Scriptures, the Kazan theologian Efim Malov did not deny the divine nature of the Qurʾān, but argued that Muslims had simply misunderstood their own Scripture; in his opinion, the Qurʾān does not contradict the teaching of Christianity.[91] Sysoev, however, rejected the authenticity of the Qurʾān and of Muhammad's teachings, and attacked Muhammad as a person without morality, thus following the medieval tradition of anti-Islamic polemics.

The mission among Muslims brought Sysoev much public attention. Especially controversial was his booklet *Marriage to a Muslim*, first published in 2007,[92] in which he addressed Christian women who married Muslim men (or were tempted to do so) and admonished them to stay true to their faith. Mufti Nafigulla Ashirov, chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Administration of the Asiatic Part of Russia and co-chairman of the Council of Russia's Muftis, accused Sysoev of extremism, and the Tatar Muslim journalist Khalida Khamidullina even filed a lawsuit against him,[93] but no litigation was conducted. The Central Muslim Spiritual Board in Ufa (in competition with the Council of Muftis, and considered to be closer to the ROC and the government at that time) preferred to ignore Sysoev's work altogether.[94] Sysoev's position did not receive any official criticism from the ROC or the state, although it was against their rhetoric of harmony between Russia's "traditional religions".

Sysoev did not soften his polemical style and did not shy away from comparing Islam to diseases. In his eyes, interfaith dialogue in Russia meant nothing less than the "capitulation" of the ROC;[95] Muslims were seducing Christians to their faith "under a mask of spiritual AIDS".[96] Patience and tolerance he regarded as manifestations of

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[90] Steniaev, "Khristianstvo i patriotism"; K. Morozov, "Dialog mezhdu pravoslavnymi i musul'manami (1-aia peredacha)". Film, distributed by *Internet channel "Telepartnerstvo"*, 2013 (Accessed on 7 February 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WA2wKFSqYs>)

[91] Mardanova, *Polemika mezhdu musul'manami i khristianami*, p. 80.

[92] Sysoev, *Brak s musul'maninom*.

[93] Islam News, "Zaiavlenie protiv iereia RPTS MP", *Islam News*, 29 January 2008 <http://www.islam-news.ru/news-9428.html> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[94] B. Knorre, "Sviashchennik Daniil Sysoev i pravoslavnaia missiia sredi rossiiskikh musul'man," *Religia i pravo* 44:1 (2008), 10-13.

[95] D. Sysoev, "O tolerantnosti". Video, distributer unknown, 2007 (Accessed on 7 February 2017 <https://vk.com/video76284242_167821607>), 0:48–0:50.

[96] Ibid., 1:13–1:24.

spiritual sickness, and as features of persons who have no aspiration to recognize the Truth.[97] The government was disregarding the "real Islam", which was, in his opinion, "an inherently aggressive religion that is loaded by the bomb of *jihād*".[98]

6.5 Conclusion

Sysoev was killed in 2009, the year when Kirill became head of the ROC. The new patriarch made the ROC more visible in public and drew it closer to the state. In contrast to his predecessor Aleksii II, Kirill supports the idea that the Church is under siege, or under attack, and he gives more freedom to initiatives from a laity that is eager to defend its religion against "an enemy from without" (*vneshnii vrag*),[99] an imagery that fully conforms to the political course of the government. When the state leadership was in need of social and electoral support (in the wake of the parliamentary elections in 2011, and the presidential elections in 2012), the ROC became a convenient mobilization force; being "a true believer" merged with "being a patriot". Kirill gave ROC activists space to present the Church as an active institution that is able to protect itself against criticism.[100]

This new course is also leading to a re-positioning of the ROC toward Daniil Sysoev's heritage. While Sysoev had little to no support from the official ROC during his lifetime, today he is seen as a trailblazer for initiatives from below. Most of Sysoev's ardent supporters and followers – often called "Sysoevians" (*Sysoevtsy*), although they reject this attribution[101] – graduated from the "School of the Orthodox Missionary" (*Shkola pravoslavnogo missionera*) that Sysoev established in 2008. These disciples continue his activities in defending and spreading Orthodox Christianity: they engage in street preaching, publish the Gospels and produce religious pamphlets in Tatar, Uzbek, Kacessezakh, Tajik and other languages.

The most visible personality in this circle is Dmitrii Tsorionov (known as Enteo, b. 1989), who has adopted Sysoev's ideas, strategies and aggressive attitude toward

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[97] Sysoev, "Skaip-konferentsiia so sviashchennikom Daniilom Sysoevym".
[98] Ibid.
[99] Knorre, "Rossiiskoe pravoslavie", p. 80.
[100] B. Knorre, "Sotsial'noie sluzheniie sovremennoi Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi kak otrazheniie povedencheskikh stereotipov tserkovnogo sotsiuma", in *Pravoslavnaia tserkov' pri novom patriarkhe*, ed. A. Malashenko and S. Filatov (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), 60-120; "Rossiiskoe pravoslavie", p. 85.
[101] Those who continue Sysoev's activities claim that the name 'Sysoevians' is a token of disrespect toward their founding father; see Sysoevtsy, "Sysoevtsev ne sushchestvuet", *Missionerskii tsentr im. Iiereya Daniila Sysoeva*, n.d. <http://mail.mission-shop.com/publicatsii/16107-nosysoev> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

non-Orthodox believers. Tsorionov has also reportedly announced his readiness (and willingness?) to die in the name of Christ.[102] Although Orthodox clergy officially condemned Tsorionov's attacks on Muslim migrants in 2013-2014 (which at times included physical assaults), he is believed to enjoy support from within the ROC.[103] Other students of Sysoev seem to have taken a less aggressive stance; and Sysoev's closest disciples, Iurii Maksimov, Oleg Steniaev and Aleksandr Lul'ka, scaled down their missionary work among Muslims after Sysoev's death.

At the same time, Sysoev's arsenal of strategies to reach out to various target audiences has inspired Orthodox believers to conduct more active missionary work: today, there are numerous branches of his followers throughout the country. Sysoev's attempt to mobilize the laity for missionary work apparently coincides with the new programme of the Church under Patriarch Kirill, and in 2010 Sysoev's "School of the Orthodox Missionary" was officially included in the structure of the Synodical Missionary Department. Aleksandr Lul'ka claims that this inclusion has embedded Sysoev's methods within the official curriculum of the Belgorod Orthodox Theological Seminary, which has a strong emphasis on missionary training.[104] This is remarkable, because Sysoev adopted Protestant mission models and effectively adapted them for Orthodox Christian evangelism, despite the enmity of the ROC toward evangelical denominations. His books nevertheless still occupy whole shelves in Orthodox bookstores and are regularly republished with the blessing of the ROC leadership, including the Patriarch himself.

Despite all this, the ROC is hesitant to give in to calls for Sysoev's canonization. To declare him a saint, or to officially acknowledge him as a model, would mean a complete change in the ROC's stance toward Russia's other major religions, and the development of a missionary vision that would resemble those of the Protestant churches. The Sysoev groups still have a monopoly on missionary "shock therapy", and its results remain highly questionable.

Sysoev regarded the dissemination of Christian religious belief to Muslims as a fundamentally linguistic act; for him, the spread of religion entailed establishing

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[102] D. Tsorionov, "Dmitrii Tsorionov (Enteo), lider obshchestvennogo dvizheniia 'Bozh'ia Volia", *Ekho Moskvy*, 28 June 2014 <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/oni/1349058-echo/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

[103] S. Solodovnik, "Rossiia: ofitsial'naia tserkov' vybiraet vlast'," *Pro et contra* 17:3-4 (2013), 6-26.

[104] K. Kirillova, "Missionerskaia shkola ottsa Daniila Sysoeva priobrela status fakul'teta Belgorodskoi dukhovnoi seminarii", *Pravmir.ru*, 14 February 2011 <http://www.pravmir.ru/missionerskaya-shkola-otca-daniila-sysoeva-priobrela-status-fakulteta-belgorodskoj-duxovnoj-seminarii/> (Accessed on 21 November 2016).

communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. He was among the first to use the Kräshen language in Church services beyond Tatarstan. Later he adopted a variant of Christian Tatar that was different from the language standardized by Orthodox Christian missionaries in imperial Russia, as Sysoev attempted to modernize it so that speakers of literary Tatar could also be addressed. His case demonstrates that the very choice of a language to be used in mission is an important factor that may have consequences for the identity construction of a religious community.[105] Sysoev's mission insisted on keeping the ethnic vernacular for preaching and liturgy, which distinguished his community from the rest of the Russian-speaking ROC flock. At the same time, the priest emphasized discontinuity in the cultural domain, as he challenged the ethnicity-religion connection among Tatars.

In the following chapter, I will discuss how Sysoev's mission in Kräshen villages in Tatarstan influenced the political discourse on recognition of this minority as a separate ethnic community; further, Chapter 7 will touch upon the development of Sysoev's community of baptized Tatars within the ROC under Patriarch Kirill.

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[105] Liddicoat, "Language Planning as an Element of Religious Practice".

Chapter 7

From Religious to Ethnic Minority: Discourses on Kräshen History, Language and Ethnicity

This chapter[1] continues the discussion of language choice and policy in religious settings and zooms in on the communities of Kräshens and baptized Tatars whom Sysoev and his followers targeted in their mission. Here I examine how conversion to another faith shapes not only religious but also ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

In the nineteenth century, the Orthodox Christian mission aimed at strengthening the faith of the Tatars who had been baptized in previous centuries, and at transforming them into subjects of the Russian Empire; in this process, perceptions of Kräshen "otherness" increased at various levels. In the Soviet Union, religious markers were downplayed and ethnic ones emphasized; accordingly, the Kräshens were discursively again subsumed under the mainly Muslim Tatar nationality. Today Kräshens find themselves pressed between the major ethnic, religious and linguistic groups that offer competing interpretations of Kräshen identity; thus, the community is becoming involved in the struggle for power and authority in the region.

[1] An earlier version of this chapter was published as G. Sibgatullina, "Found to Be on the Fault Line: Discursive Identity Construction of the Kriashens", in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Role of Religions in the Turkic Culture held on September 9–11, 2015 in Budapest*, ed. É. Csáki et al. (Budapest: Péter Pázmány Catholic University, 2016), 277-85.

7.1 Introduction

Kräshens live predominantly in the territories of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Udmurtia and the Cheliabinsk province of the Russian Federation. Their precise number remains a subject of much speculation: figures range from 34,822 people in the whole country,[1] to more than 250,000 Kräshens in Tatarstan alone.[2] Neither is there a consensus on the origins of the Kräshens, their history or the language they speak. The discussion on these ethnicity-forming factors has been at the centre of the ongoing "Kräshen question" (*Kriashenskii vopros*), which revolves around whether Kräshens should be recognized as a distinct ethnic group or should continue to be listed as a subgroup under the umbrella term "Tatars".

In this chapter I examine how, from the nineteenth century onward, the state has been managing an ethnic identity of this religious minority group, and how this identity has been re-enforced in the post-Soviet context against the background of growing ethnic nationalism and renewed religious affiliation. Here I focus on dominant tropes that construct Kräshen identity discursively; [3] that is, my emphasis is on the interpretations of Kräshen ethnicity as offered by a variety of social and political players, including the Russian state, Tatar and Kräshen national elites, and Orthodox Christian missionaries.

The status of the Kräshen language plays an important role in this discussion. In works published in the 1970s, the Kräshen language is described and characterized as a dialect of Tatar; in fact, the researchers have argued that there is not one, but a set of sub-dialects (*govory*) that constitute Kräshen. The development and standardization of the Kräshen alphabet and grammar is attributed to Orthodox Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century who worked under the leadership of Nikolai Il'minskii.[4] Today

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[1] Census, "Chislennost' i razmeshchenie", *All-Russian Population Census 2010*, 2010 <http://www.gks.ru-/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm> (Accessed on 27 March 2018).

[2] R. Suleimanov, "Kriashenskii sviashchennik: 'Stroitel'stvo nashikh tserkvei v Tatarstane koe-gde prosto sabotiruetsia'", *Eurasia Daily*, 6 April 2016 <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/20-16/04/06/kryashenskiy-svyashchennik-stroitelstvo-nashih-cerkvey-v-tatarstane-koe-gde-prosto-sabotiruetsya> (Accessed on 28 March 2018).

[3] See R. Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006).

[4] F.S. Baiazitova, *Tatarskie govory Nizhnego Prikam'ia* (Kandidat fologicheskikh nauk, Institut iazyka, literatury i istorii ANRT, 1973); Baiazitova, *Govory tatar-kriashen v sravnitel'nom osveshchenii*; Baiazitova, *Keräshennär: tel üzenchälekläre häm yola ijatï*. For specific characteristics of Kräshen in comparison with the literary Tatar language, see F.S. Nurieva, "Dialektnaia osnova knig na 'kreshcheno-tatarskom' iazyke vtoroi poloviny XIX veka," *Ural-Altaic Studies* 2:17 (2015), 67-73.

Kräshen is mostly used as a liturgical language in Orthodox Christian religious settings and as a spoken vernacular in some rural areas in Tatarstan. Although the majority of Kräshens identify Tatar as their native language (62.2%),[5] in the Kräshen nationalist discourse, Kräshen is constructed as a marker of the distinct ethnic identity that should enjoy the status of a separate language, not a dialect of Tatar.

Since the 1990s, Kräshen activists have been in conflict with Tatar elites. These clashes, I argue, did not result from the state collapse of 1991 but are deeply rooted in Russia's imperial and Soviet past; therefore, the first section of the chapter provides a historical background. I start with a brief analysis of the state-supported missionary projects; efforts to encourage religious conversion to Orthodox Christianity among Turkic peoples in the Volga-Ural region led to the construction of a Kräshen religious identity. The focus of Section 7.2 then lies on the role played by Bible translation projects in reinforcing the "otherness" of Kräshens and their separation from the majority of Muslim Tatars. Then I will touch upon the Soviet approaches toward this religious minority: while in the early years of the USSR the state encouraged the transformation of Kräshen religious identity into a secular, ethnic self-identification, this process was later aborted and Kräshens were re-configured as a sub-group of Tatar nationality.

Section 7.3 of the chapter discusses the three discourses that dominate the public debate on Kräshen history, language and ethnicity in post-Soviet Tatarstan. Here I distinguish (1) the position of Tatar national elites, who are generally reluctant to recognize Kräshens as a separate ethnic group; (2) the position of pro-Tatar Kräshen leaders, who argue that cooperation with the Tatarstani authorities is the only possible way for Kräshens to survive as an ethnic group with a distinct culture; and finally (3) the standpoint of Kräshen nationalists, who advocate the separation of Kräshens from Tatars.

Section 7.4 examines the role being played by the ROC in the evolution of the "Kräshen issue" today. As seen in the previous chapter, under Patriarch Kirill the ROC embarked on a more active missionary policy, which includes promoting grassroots projects that try to revive imperial practices of Orthodox Christian mission among Russia's Muslim ethnic communities. The Kräshens have become a target group not only for assertive proselytism activists, like Sysoev and his followers; there have also been attempts to establish a new Kräshen missionary school in Tatarstan to support

[5] Only 13% of Kräshen respondents reported that their native language is Kräshen, and 8,5% named Russian as their mother tongue. See T.A. Titova et al., "Ethno-Confessional Group of the Kryashens: Transformation of Identity and Modern Ethno-Cultural Processes," *Journal of Sustainable Development* 8:4 (2015), 260-67. Here p. 265.

Christian mission among ethnic Kräshens in the region. In parallel, the ROC also supported efforts to complete the translation of the Bible into Kräshen Tatar: throughout the 1990s-early 2000s, the newly-ordained Kräshen clergy and parishioners of restored Kräshen churches continued the translation projects that had been started by Orthodox missionaries in the nineteenth century (see also Section 8.2.3 of the next chapter).

Here I argue that in all three historical periods –Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet – the Kräshen language, religion and ethnicity have been categorized and controlled by the state in the same terms: standardization of the Kräshen language has often accompanied top-down efforts to construct ethnic and religious identity markers of the minority. At the same time, suppression of the Kräshen distinctiveness also involved downgrading the status of the Kräshen language. In late imperial Russia and in the post-Soviet period we observe that the interests of the state overlap with those of the ROC, which amplified the efforts to exercise influence over Kräshen self-identification. Under the Tsars, the Church-sponsored translation of the Bible became the catalyst for profound changes and development in the Kräshen language and culture, thereby contributing to Russia's policies on integration of *inorodtsy* (minorities).[6] Today, the ROC's goal is to gain a stronger position in Russia's Muslim-majority regions, which is also advantageous for the state, which is attempting to impose a rigid "vertical of power" to subordinate ethnic republics to the federal centre.

7.2 Constructing the Other: imperial and Soviet policies

Authorities in Tsarist Russia used religious affiliation and religious institutions as tools for governing the ethnically and religiously diverse empire. Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796), and especially Alexander I (r. 1801-1825), constructed the system of administration that subordinated "foreign faiths" to state supervision, "even as it meant endowing their hierarchies with substantial spiritual authority within their respective communities".[7]

The existing scholarship on this topic offers a detailed overview of how missionary projects in imperial Russia constituted new understandings of ethnic

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[6] For discussion on strategies of integrating minorities into the Russian empire, see, e.g., V. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 23-46.

[7] P.W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 3.

particularity among baptized peoples in the region.[8] Robert Geraci and Paul Werth argue that by the 1860s, those Tatars who were baptized prior to the eighteenth century adopted the "Kräshen" label to differentiate themselves from Muslims and pagan peoples.[9] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many Tatars had accepted Christianity only formally, and sought to re-join the Islamic community; at the same time, "a perhaps larger group, slowly abandoning the complex of Muslim and indigenous Turkic ('pagan') practices […], constructed an indigenous Orthodox Christian Identity".[10] Agnès Kefeli also argues that by viewing Kräshens only as "Christianized crypto-Muslims", we risk oversimplifying the real state of affairs. In her opinion, the community lived in a religiously hybrid milieu, where elements of Islam and Christianity were mixed within a mosaic, together with pagan practices of venerating local and ancestral spirits. Kefeli does not see the apostasies to Islam that took place among Kräshens in the nineteenth century as a mechanical "return" to Islam, but partially a result of missionary efforts by Muslim missionaries, who also aspired to "expand their community in Turkic and Finno-Ugric milieus".[11]

The large-scale "apostasy" in the second half of the nineteenth century – when at least 8,000 baptized Tatars in different districts of the Kazan province alone asked permission to return openly to the practice of Islam[12] – triggered the Church, as well as the state, to pay attention to conversion strategies. The Tsarist government not only looked for an effective way of communicating with its subjects, but also wished to create strategies of subjecting them into becoming docile citizens.[13] At that time, Nikolai Il'minskii suggested that the emphasis should not be placed on "external" baptism but rather on a Christian upbringing. The essence of what was later called the "Il'minskii system" was the religious education of children in their native languages with the help of native missionaries, priests and teachers. This method was thought to promise better results in preventing apostasy than the traditional missionary work in the Russian

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[8] E.g., Geraci, *Window on the East*; Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*; A. Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia: Conversion, Apostasy, and Literacy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); R.R. Iskhakov, *Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi v otnoshenii musul'man Srednego Povolzh'ia v XIX-nachale XX vv.* (PhD thesis, Institut Istorii im. Sh. Mardzhani ANRT, 2008).

[9] P.W. Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists: Religious Conversion and Ethnic Particularity in Russia's Eastern Provinces," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42:3 (2000), 497-523. Here p. 499.

[10] Ibid., p. 497.

[11] Kefeli, *Becoming Muslim in Imperial Russia*, pp. 3-4.

[12] P.W. Werth, *Subjects for Empire: Orthodox Mission and Imperial Governance in the Volga-Kama Region, 1825-1881* (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1996), 389.

[13] On similar practices in other European empires, see Robinson, *Translation and Empire*, p. 10.

language, which cared little for the local cultures and provoked misunderstandings and resistance.[14]

In this effort, one of the first tasks was to translate the fundamental Christian texts into what was coined as the Kräshen language, which was chosen to facilitate the Orthodox Christian education of Kräshens: "In order to serve effectually for the Christian enlightenment of the baptized Tatars", Il'minskii wrote, "translations ought to be made in a language entirely comprehensible to them – that is in a conversational language".[15] Il'minskii held that "in instances when the vocabulary of such a dialect [of baptized Tatars] was too poor, […], words would be introduced not from the literary Tatar language, but from Russian".[16] Il'minskii's goal was, as Geraci argues, to prepare the Tatar children to learn Russian and make them "less vulnerable to Muslim written propaganda".[17]

As a result, it was the missionaries who produced the first Kräshen vocabularies and grammars; they did so for practical purposes of Christian education but also to create a new group of religious leaders versed in that language. In this endeavour, the Cyrillic alphabet gradually replaced the Arabic script used by Tatars. Il'minskii's colleagues, the missionaries and Orientalists Nikolai Ostroumov and Aleksei Voskresenskii, worked on the standardization of the Kräshen language and published Tatar-Russian (1892) and Russian-Tatar (1894) dictionaries.[18] These dictionaries reflected "the Tatar speech as it is heard in the conversations of baptized Tatars predominantly of Kazan *gubernia* [a major administrative subdivision]".[19] Thereby, the missionaries documented and standardized the language of the Kräshen community at that time.

In addition to the translation of religious literature and the production of text books, the Orthodox missionaries also engaged in what scholars in postcolonial translation studies refer to as "cultural translation".[20] It involves "a process of making

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[14] On the "Il'minskii system", see I. Kreindler, *Educational Policies toward the Eastern Nationalities in Tsarist Russia: A Study of Il'minskii's System* (PhD thesis, Columbia University 1969); Johnson, *Imperial Commission for Orthodox Mission*; Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance*.

[15] Quoted in S.K. Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translation and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 135.

[16] Geraci, *Window on the East*, p. 58.

[17] Ibid.

[18] N.P. Ostroumov, *Tatarsko-russkii slovar'* (Kazan: Tipografiia Imperatorskogo Universiteta, 1892); A. Voskresenskii, *Russko-tatarskii slovar'* (Kazan: Tipografiia Literaturnogo Universiteta, 1884).

[19] Ostroumov, *Tatarsko-russkii slovar'*, p. 1.

[20] E.g., Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*; Robinson, *Translation and Empire*; Bassnett, "Postcolonialism and/as Translation".

known the unknown, of distinguishing between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' native practices […] to further the spread of God's Word and consolidate its gains".[21] In this sense, the Christian missionary enterprise and Il'minskii's educational programme contributed to the accommodation and Russification of the Kräshen community in imperial Russia. According to Charles Steinwedel, Il'minskii saw the primary reason for teaching in non-Russian as lying "not in the Russian language, but in the development of common human conceptions, moral principles and convictions, and Russian sympathies"; these sympathies "could take any linguistic form".[22] Among the most prominent users of Il'minskii's method and programme was the Brotherhood of Bishop Gurii, a group of priests, officials and educators who took upon themselves the task of spreading Christian education among non-Russians.[23] The activities of Orthodox missionaries in imperial Russia thus support the argument that colonizers often translated texts in order to later use them for "translating" the people: that is, by making religious texts of the dominant culture available in vernaculars, the religious mission contributed to the transformation and incorporation of indigenous populations within the dominant culture.[24]

In the context of nineteenth-century imperial Russia, the efforts of Orthodox missionaries contributed to the creation of a distinct religious and ethnic self-awareness among Kräshens, although Russians spoke of Tatar-speaking Christians as "baptized Tatars";[25] inhabitants of Kräshen villages, however, refused to call themselves "baptized Tatars", which they regarded as inaccurate and even offensive, and instead used the term "Kräshens" (lit. 'Christened'). As Paul Werth argues, after the October revolution of 1917,[26] "some Kräshen activists even attempted to secularize this identity in order to claim status as a full-fledged *narodnost'* and/or *natsiia* and staffed a special *Kriashensektsiia* of the Tatar Republic's communist party after 1922".[27]

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[21] Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, p. 106.

[22] C.R. Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 136.

[23] P.W. Werth, "Big Candles and 'Internal Conversion': The Mari Animist Reformation and Its Russian Appropriations", in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. R.P. Geraci and M. Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 144-72.

[24] See Robinson, *Translation and Empire*, p. 84.

[25] Geraci, *Window on the East*, p. 30.

[26] On the eve of the Russian revolution we may already observe the development of a secular poetry in Kräshen, including works of the Kräshen poet Iakov Emelianov (1848-1893).

[27] P.W. Werth, "From Resistance to Subversion: Imperial Power, Indigenous Opposition, and Their Entanglement," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1:1 (2000), 21-43. Here p. 37; also Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists".

Until the mid-1920s the Soviet authorities generally recognized the Kräshens as a separate ethnic group that deserved Soviet-style cultural autonomy. In the first all-Soviet census of 1926, the Kräshens were recorded as a *narodnost'* 'nationality'[28] encompassing 101,466 people.[29] As Werth observed, the Kräshens gradually began to transcend the predominantly confessional foundations of their identity and to transform into a secular community.[30] Yet by the end of the 1920s, the state demanded the consolidation of smaller peoples into larger ethnic units, thus ending the proliferation of entities with nationality status that had begun shortly after the revolution. In the second half of the 1920s, the project of introducing the Latin (Roman) alphabet for Soviet minority populations offered the opportunity for what was perceived as "a painless merge" of Kräshens with Tatars, as both groups were about to start using the New Tatar Alphabet (Janalif).[31] Although the Latin alphabet for Tatar and other Turkic languages of the USSR was soon replaced by a Cyrillic alphabet (1938), the latter was still different from the script introduced by Il'minskii. Throughout the Soviet Union, the Kräshens continued to be educated in the literary Tatar language and in Russian.

The official Soviet discourse on the status of the Kräshen minority was subject to frequent change, which reflected uneasy relations of the Soviet authorities with Russia's imperial past. While in 1922 a special party commission had concluded that it was the Tsarist missionary policy that "artificially" segregated Kräshens from other Tatars,[32] the Soviet Encyclopedia of 1952 recognized Il'minskii's positive contribution to the enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*) of non-Russians.[33] At the same time, Soviet authorities also actively supported the creation of national histories with a clearly definable

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[28] The concept refers to what in Western scholarship is usually defined as "ethnicity", that is, "the sense of belonging to a community of presumed descent based on the subjectively-determined saliency of such cultural markers as language, religion, and custom"; see D. Arel, "Demography and Politics in the First Post-Soviet Censuses: Mistrusted State, Contested Identities," *Population* 57:6 (2002), 801-27. Here p. 811.

[29] A. Sakurama, "Ethnicity and Imperial Memory: N.I. Il'minskii in the Identity of Contemporary Tatars and Kriashens," Paper presented at *Central Eurasian Studies Society: Fifth Regional Conference* (Kazan, Russia; 2016), 1-18. Here p. 9.

[30] Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists", p. 497.

[31] A.A. Sal'nikova and D.M. Galiullina, "Tatarskie bukvari na kirillitse: ot bukvaria N. I. Il'minskogo do sovetskikh uchebnikov kontsa 1930-1950," *Otechestvennaia i zarubezhnaia pedagogika* 13:4 (2013), 102-20. Here p. 104.

[32] Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists", p. 512.

[33] Sakurama, "Ethnicity and Imperial Memory: N.I. Il'minskii in the Identity of Contemporary Tatars and Kriashens", p. 9.

trajectory leading back to the past, no matter whether this could be proven by scholarly evidence or not.

As Werth argues, the autonomy and the national history of Tatars came at the expense of smaller groups like Kräshens, who were "deemed too insignificant to warrant the trappings of nationhood".[34] According to Kefeli, the post-war trend in Soviet historiography to ground Tatar ethnogenesis primarily in the Volga Bulghars of the tenth century, and not in the "Tatars" of the Golden Horde, also contributed to the further marginalization of the Orthodox Christian identity of the Kräshens.[35]

7.3 Kräshen ethnic identity in the post-Soviet period

In the post-Soviet period, Kräshen identity has been constructed around three ethno-differentiating factors: (1) the origin of the minority; (2) the status of their language; and (3) their religious affiliation. The way these factors are interpreted and combined gives room for a broad spectrum of ideas. One extreme is the view that the Kräshens constitute a distinct ethnic group that historically and linguistically developed in parallel with the majority of Muslim Tatars, with little to no Islamic influence on Kräshen language and traditions. On the other side of the spectrum are those who argue that the present-day Kräshens are descendants of a group of Muslim Tatars who were baptized and segregated from the latter by imperial Russification policies targeting the indigenous peoples of the Volga-Ural region. In this section I will examine two dominant discourses that represent each side of the spectrum, as well as the middle way that attempts to reconcile ideas of both extremes.

Of importance for the discussion is the first post-Soviet Russian population census of 2002, which increased the number of recognized nationalities in comparison with the last Soviet census (of 1989) from 143 to 176. The dictionary of nationalities for this census was prepared by the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences; it listed Kräshens apart from Tatars but as speakers of the Tatar language.[36] In a letter to the Russian Duma, the Institute initially advised that recognition of Kräshens as an ethnic group detached from Tatars "would not be wise",

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[34] Werth, "From 'Pagan' Muslims to 'Baptized' Communists", p. 515.

[35] A. Kefeli, "Baptized Tatars", in *The Supplement to the Modern Encyclopedia of Russian, Soviet, and Eurasian History*, ed. E.J. Lazzerini (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 2001), 199-204. Here p. 202. On the "Bulghar identity", see A.J. Frank, *Islamic Historiography and 'Bulghar' Identity among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

[36] S.V. Sokolovskii, "'Tatarskaia problema' vo vserossiiskoi perepesi naseleniia," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2002), 207-34. Here p. 226.

but by late 2001 it endorsed the separation, arguing that there was strong evidence that many people in Tatarstan wanted to be counted as Kräshens.[37] This move was justified as a "liberalization" of the population census that emphasizes the people's right of self-identification.[38] The view on the "Kräshen issue" was certainly shaped by Soviet historian and ethnographer Valerii Tishkov (b. 1941), who headed the Institute at that time. Tishkov's ideas about ethnicity, as Paul Kolstø argues, have been influenced by the Western schools of modernism and constructivism. For Tishkov, an ethnic group is not a naturally determined entity; its defining elements can be "invented", and once "an ethnic group has been established, it can lay a foundation for political demands".[39]

7.3.1 Tatar nationalist discourse

Tatar national elites explained the origin of the Kräshens as the result of Russification and assimilation policies by Tsarist authorities, when groups of Muslims and pagans who lived in the Volga-Kama region were forcefully baptized and separated from other neighbouring peoples from the sixteenth century onward.[40] Advocates of this version generally refuse to recognize the Kräshens as an independent ethnic group, seeing them as an Orthodox Christian subgroup within the Tatar nation. The language that the Kräshens speak is subsequently classified as one of the many Tatar dialects.[41]

This standpoint gained prominence in the 1980s, when ethnic mobilization among Tatars and Kräshens was still a relatively joint movement. The vanguard of the national movement was the All-Tatar Public Centre (*Vsetatarskii obshchestvennyi tsentr*, established in 1988), which promoted the ethnic and cultural consolidation of the Tatars. In the process, Islam came to be seen as one of the core factors unifying the Tatars over the huge territories where they had settled, because, as Tatar historian of Islam, Rafik Mukhametshin, explains, "Russian colonial rule strengthened the Tatar's

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[37] Arel, "Demography and Politics in the First Post-Soviet Censuses", pp. 817-18.

[38] Sokolovskii, "'Tatarskaia problema'".

[39] See P. Kolstø, "Values and State ideology in Post-Communist Russia", in *Nation-Building and Common Values in Russia*, ed. P. Kolstø and H. Blakkisrud (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Incorporated, 2005), 327-39. Here pp. 328-29.

[40] E.g., D.M. Iskhakov, "Kriasheny: istoriko-etnograficheskii ocherk," *Idel'* 7 (2002), 58-62; R.R. Iskhakov, *Missionerstvo i musul'mane Volgo-Kam'ia* (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2011); R.R. Iskhakov, "Khristianskoe prosveshchenie i religioznye dvizheniia (reislamizatsiia) kreshchenykh tatar Volgo-Kam'ia v XIX - nachale XX vv.", in *Iz istorii i kul'tury narodov srednego povolzh'ia*, ed. I.K. Zagidullin et al. (Kazan: Ikhlas, 2011), 109-30.

[41] Baiazitova, *Govory tatar-kriashen v sravnitel'nom osveshchenii*; Baiazitova, *Keräshennär: tel üzenchälekläre häm yola ijatï*.

adherence to their pre-colonial spiritual and, especially, religious traditions, which became symbols of their former independence".[42]

The standpoint of Tatar nationalists reveals what has been referred to as "nationalist/nativist assimilation of colonial myths".[43] In the interest of constructing a unified Tatar national identity that challenges the influence of the dominant Russian culture, the discourse of nationalism suppresses difference, heterogeneity and hybridity.[44] Nativism, in general, advocates a return to lost origins,[45] and in the Tatar case, this imagined pre-colonial purity was centred on religion and on getting rid of elements brought by Russians, including influences on Tatar culture and language.[46] The Russian regime and the Orthodox missionary policies were regarded as methods of suppressing the Tatar ethnos, and any resistance to these methods was depicted as contributing to the national liberation movement. In this view, Kräshens were a constant reminder of the colonial past, and it is no wonder that a few Tatar public figures insisted on the Kräshens' "immediate return" to their roots: they demanded that Kräshens embrace Islam and abandon any traditions inspired by Christianity and paganism.[47]

A specific feature of Tatarstan is that the republic's institutional structures were established during the Soviet era and remained to some degree intact in the post-Soviet period. These structures prioritize Tatar ethnicity above the interests of other non-Russian ethnic groups in the republic. As the titular minority, the Tatars enjoy more privileges in terms of cultural promotion policies and, informally, better access to education and jobs, which results in the overrepresentation of Muslim Tatars in the state structures in Tatarstan.[48] The Kräshens lack these privileges and are especially vulnerable to assimilation within either Muslim Tatar or ethnic Russian groups.

In the asymmetrical power relations between Moscow and Kazan, the Tatar national elites see Kräshens as an instrument of the federal centre to strengthen the

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[42] R. Mukhametshin, "Islamic Discourse in the Volga Urals Region", in *Radical Islam in the former Soviet Union*, ed. G. Yemelianova (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 31-61. Here p. 34.
[43] Robinson, *Translation and Empire*, p. 91.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, p. 166.
[46] Wertheim, "Language ideologies and the 'purification' of post-Soviet Tatar".
[47] E.g., F. Baltach, "Gordit'sia ili stydit'sia dolzhny kriasheny?," *Idel'* 6 (1994), 61-65; A. Akhunov, "Zvezdnyi chas kriashen: segodnia kriashenam vygodno byt' ugnetennym narodom," *Vostochnyi ekspress* 8 (2000), 8.
[48] A.C. White and I.A.-L. Saikkonen, "More Than a Name? Variation in Electoral Mobilisation of Titular and Non-Titular Ethnic Minorities in Russian National Elections," *Ethnopolitics* 16:5 (2017), 450-70. Here pp. 453-54.

Kremlin's control over the republic. When the Moscow-based Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology marked Kräshens as a separate ethnic group in the dictionary of nationalities, Tatars in Tatarstan perceived this as an attack on the sovereignty of the republic. If Kräshens are counted separately, the number of Tatars in the republic decreases, which undermines the status of Tatars as the largest ethnic group and hence as the Muslim majority in Tatarstan (where Tatars had only a slight majority of about 52 % of the population, according to the census of 2002 and also of 2010).[49] The discussion on which ethnic categories should be used in the 2002 population census was taken to the federal level and involved meetings between Russia's presidential administration and political leaders of Tatarstan, higher Orthodox clergy and Muslim authorities, State Duma deputies, scholars of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan, as well as Kräshen movement activists in Tatarstan and Udmurtia, all of which together contributed to the further politicization of the "Kräshen issue".[50] Moreover, some Russian public figures, such Egor Kholmogorov – who is known for his Russian nationalist agenda (see also Section 2.3.1) – poured even more oil on the fire; Kolmogorov defined Kräshens as a necessary counterbalance against the Tatar national elites and even claimed that "if there were no Kräshens, they should have been invented".[51]

7.3.2 Pro-Tatarstani Kräshen group

Since the First Congress of the Peoples of Tatarstan, held in 1992, Kräshens have been persistent in pressing the Tatarstani authorities to accept the following demands: 1) to establish a department of Kräshen studies within the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences; 2) to create and finance Kräshen media outlets; 3) to revive the Kräshen

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[49]Census, "Natsional'nyi sostav i vladenie iazykami, grazhdanstvo", *The official website of the All-Russian population census of 2002*, 2002 <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=17> (Accessed on 18 July 2018); Census, "Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia po sub"ektam Rossiiskoi Federatsii", *The official website of the All-Russian population census of 2010*, 2010 <http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/results2.html> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[50] On the discussion, see Sokolovskii, "'Tatarskaia problema'"; D.M. Iskhakov, "Vzgliad na vserossiiskuiu perepis' iz Tatarstana," *Ab Imperio* 4 (2002), 235-49; A. Sakurama, "Varied Perceptions of Ethnicity in Contemporary Russia: The Case of Tatarstan in the All Russian Census of 2010," *Annals of the Japanese Association for Russian and East European Studies* 40 (2011), 34-39.

[51] E. Kholmogorov, "Kriashenskii kliuch", *Spetsnaz Rossii*, 8 August 2002 <http://www.globalrus.ru/comments/66212/> (Accessed on 13 February 2018).

national theatre/musical ensemble; and 4) to return the building[52] of the Central Kräshen-Tatar school in Kazan, built in 1871.[53]

In April 2002, in the midst of the debates about the position of the Kräshens in the upcoming census, then President of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev (b. 1937), met with a selected group of Kräshen leaders who repeated these demands. If these requests were met, the Kräshen leaders promised to strive for preserving the "unity of the Tatar nation", that is, to downplay their claims to be listed separately from Tatars in the census questionnaires. As a result of this meeting, Shaimiev signed a protocol containing instructions to responsible bodies and departments in the government.[54]

Following the negotiations with Shaimiev, on 3 October 2002 – a week prior to the census – a richly illustrated newspaper "Tuganaylar" (Congeners), published by the city administration of Naberezhnye Chelny,[55] began to circulate in both the Tatar and Russian languages.[56] Later, on 25 May 2007, a new state-supported body, the Public Organization of Kräshens (*Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia kriashen*, hereafter: OOK), was created with the intention of being the only legitimate body to protect and represent interests of the Kräshens in the republic. Kräshen Ivan Egorov became chair of the OOK; as of 2018, Egorov also occupies the director's chair of the republic's major holding company "Ak Bars", and is a deputy of the State Council, the parliament of Tatarstan.

OOK's leaders recognized and respected the agreements adopted at the meeting with the President of Tatarstan in 2002; in the all-Russian population censuses of 2002 and 2010 their official standpoint was that Kräshens do indeed constitute a sub-ethnos within the Tatar nation, yet this sub-ethnos has a distinct religion (Orthodox Christianity) and customs that differ from those of Muslim Tatars. It is noteworthy that the OOK-edited newspaper *Tuganaylar* uses standard literary Tatar. Moreover, the

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[52] In 1871-1928 the building hosted pedagogical courses and served as a cultural centre for Kräshens. See L. Belousova, "Kereshen: pravo na samobytnost'", *Tatarskii Mir*, 2003 <http://www.tat-world.ru/article.shtml?article=47> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).

[53] E. Rylova, "Sindrom 'starshego brata', ili pochemu kriasheny ne khotiat nazyvat'sia tatarami", *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 21 February 2002 <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/428815.html> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).

[54] A. Fokin, "Kriasheny kak ob"ekt natsional'noi politiki", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 2 April 2014 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2014/04/02/kryasheny_kak_obekt_nacionalnoj_politiki/> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[55] In 2008 the newspaper became part of the "Tatmedia" agency for press and mass communications of the Republic of Tatarstan.

[56] At first, one of the Kräshen leaders, Liudmila Belousova, denounced the "Tuganaylar" for being "not a Kräshen newspaper, but a newspaper *for* Kräshens", a media outlet that "the colonial administrations [would] create for the colonized peoples"; see Belousova, "Kereshen: pravo na samobytnost'". In 2008 Belousova became the main editor of the newspaper.

OOK insisted on keeping the historical endonym "Kräshens", instead of using the term "baptized Tatars".

The OOK leaders defended their decision to cooperate with the Tatarstani authorities by citing the need to preserve the cultural heritage of the Kräshens: the latter's survival as an ethnic group with distinct traditions is only possible within the Tatar nation, since the Kräshens themselves lack the financial and human resources to invest in research and the preservation and transmission of their cultural heritage. If the Kräshens become a separate ethnic group, according to OOK, they are more likely to become assimilated with Russians; young Kräshens who move to urban areas are already prone to amalgamate with the dominant ethnic group because of their Russian given names and Orthodox religion.[57] Commenting on their political stand, in 2013 the OOK board openly states that:

> "It is no secret that many Kräshens are dissatisfied; [these are] mostly those who stood at the origin of the Kräshen ethno-cultural movement in the early 1990s. It is clear that some of [their] goals have not been reached in the [past] twenty years, but we should not forget that the society [in Tatarstan] has undergone changes, and [our] priorities have [also] changed. Therefore, we have to turn a blind eye to some things, and just forget about other [things], as [utopian ideas]".[58]

Tatarstan, in turn, attempted to meet other demands of the Kräshens. In 2008 the Kräshen folk ensemble "Bermianchek" ('Willow') was allowed to stage its first performances,[59] and the same year saw the establishment of the new Research Centre for History and Culture of Baptized Tatars and Nagaibaks[60] at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences in Tatarstan.[61] After much contestation about the official title of the Centre, the expression "Baptized Tatars" was replaced by "Tatar Kräshens". Since 2015 the Centre publishes a subject-specific academic journal, *The Kräshen*

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[57] D. Gorenburg, "Tatar Identity: A United, Indivisible Nation?," Paper presented at *Emerging Meso-Areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised?* (University of Hokkaido, Japan; 2004), 1-31. Here p. 15.

[58] I. Mullina, "Nezvanyi gost' khuzhe tatarina!", *Tuganailar*, 27 March 2013 <http://www.tugan-aylar.ru/tt/2014-09-25-12-53-26/item/872-nezvanyiy-gost-huzhe-tatarina.html?tmpl=component&print=1> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).

[59] The ensemble today promotes the cultural heritage of the Kräshens by performing folk songs and dances, using traditional musical instruments. See OOK RT, "Obshchestvennaia organizatsiia kriashen RT", 2018 <http://krshn.addnt.ru/about/> (Accessed on 27 March 2018).

[60] The term 'Nagaibaks' refers to descendants of the Nogais, who were converted to Christianity (around the eighteenth century) and speak a dialect of Tatar. See Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union: A Historical and Statistical Handbook*, p. 100.

[61] In the 1990s there was already a scholarly group with a similar research agenda, which was affiliated with the Institute of History, but it ceased its activity in 1998.

Historical Review (*Kriashenskoe istoricheskoe obozrenie*). The Kräshen nationalists have repeatedly criticized the Centre for promoting a pro-Tatar standpoint in academic research and an ethnic bias in appointing its staff members – ethnic Muslim Tatars are by far the majority among its affiliated members.[62]

7.3.3 Kräshen nationalists

Finally, there is the group of Kräshen nationalists, who denounce cooperation with the Tatarstani officials and promote self-identification of the Kräshens as a separate minority, independent from Muslim Tatars. This group was formed around several key figures, in particular Arkadii Fokin (b. 1938, the founder and chair of the Council of Veterans of the Kräshen movement in Kazan) and Maxim Glukhov (1937-2003, one of the leaders of the Ethnographic Society of the Kräshens), who disapproved of the works by Tatar historians and instead presented their own readings of Kräshen history.[63]

Their main argument is that the Kräshens are not just Tatars of another faith; they have a separate history, distinct language and unique customs. Fokin, following Glukhov, defends the standpoint that Kräshens professed Orthodox Christianity prior to the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by the Muscovite army in 1552. This view runs counter to commonplace historiography, and is difficult to sustain with evidence. They argue that this Christian minority had little to no relation to Muslim Tatars, and they portray Kräshens' cultural heritage and language as devoid of Islamic influence.[64]

These claims for recognition of Kräshens as an independent ethnic group have been supported by several secular and Orthodox Christian research institutes at the federal level.[65] In addition, the so-called "Islam-critical experts", who are known for

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[62] Regnum, "'Ruchnye kriasheny' planiruiut ostat'sia 'vnutri tatar', no ne nazyvat'sia kreshchenymi tatarami", *Regnum*, 8 May 2014 <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1799940.html> (Accessed on 12 June 2018); A. Fokin and N. Mamakov, "Doktorskaia dissertatsiia ili ideologicheskii zakaz?", *Russkiaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 8 June 2018 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2018/06/08/doktorskaya_dissertaci-ya_ili_ideologicheskij_zakaz/> (Accessed on 15 June 2018).

[63] See, e.g., M.S. Glukhov, *Tatarica* (Kazan: Vatan, 1997); A. Fokin, *Est' takoi narod – kriasheny: Problemy etnokonfessional'noi identifikatsii kriashen* (Kazan: Kriashenskii prikhod goroda Kazani; Sovet veteranov kriashenskogo dvizheniia goroda Kazani, 2011); A. Fokin, "Kriashenskaia dukhovnaia missiia v Tatarstane: prednaznachenie i perspektivy", *APN*, 12 February 2016 <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article34679.htm> (Accessed on 7 March 2018).

[64] Gorenburg, "Tatar Identity: A United, Indivisible Nation?", p. 14.

[65] See publications by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, e.g., Sokolovskii, "'Tatarskaia problema'"; V.A. Tishkov, "O Vserossiiskoi perepisi naseleniia 2010 goda: raz"iasneniia dlia retrogradov i natsionalistov i preduprezhdeniia dlia chinovnikov i politikov", in

their regular attacks on the Islamic establishment in Russia, have actively endorsed the discourse of the Kräshen nationalists since the early 2000s. As Kristina Kovalskaya argues, these "experts" rose to prominence in the post-Soviet period due to the increased cooperation between the ROC and the state; in Tatarstan, particularly Rais Suleimanov (b. 1984) became notorious for his publications denouncing the secular and Islamic leaders of the republic for breeding Islamic extremism.[66] For several years Suleimanov was based at the Kazan branch of the Russian Institute for Strategy Studies (*Rossiiskii institut strategicheskikh issledovanii*), which consistently claims that Tatarstani leaders rhetorically promote a balance between Russian/Orthodox and Tatar/Muslim interests but, in fact, favour Tatars and Islam on all accounts.[67] In 2011-2013, the Institute hosted a number of conferences and issued publications that promoted the Kräshen nationalists' standpoints;[68] yet in the mainstream discourse in Tatarstan, these publications remain marginal.

7.4 Alternative Christianity

7.4.1 The new Kräshen mission

The Kräshen nationalist discourse also receives moderate support from the renewed Orthodox mission among Kräshens. In 1989, a group of ethnic Kräshen priests established the first parish in late-Soviet Kazan, where they conducted services in the Kräshen language. Initially the parish was located in the Cathedral of St. Nicholas; in

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Etnologicheskii Monitoring Perepisi Naseleniia, ed. V.V. Stepanov (Moscow: IEA RAN, 2011), 15-130; also O.E. Kaz'mina, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' i novaia religioznaia situatsiia v Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 2009); V.V. Ilizarova, *Kriasheny: faktory formirovaniia etnokul'turnoi identichnosti* (PhD thesis, Moscow State University, 2013); A.V. Zhuravskii, "Sovremennoe tserkovnoe kraevedenie i ego rol' v vossozdanii tserkovno-istoricheskoi nauki," Paper presented at *IX-X Rozhdestvenskie Chteniia* (Moscow, Russia; 2001).

[66] See K. Kovalskaya, "Nationalism and Religion in the Discourse of Russia's 'Critical Experts of Islam'," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017), 146-61. To name just few works by Suleimanov: R. Suleimanov, "Vakhkhabizm v Tatarstane v postsovetskii period v svete vliianiia vneshnikh faktorov", *APN*, 26 February 2014 <http://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=31137> (Accessed on 28 March 2018); R. Suleimanov, "Musul'mane Povolzh'ia v riadakh Talibana i IGIL: masshtab problemy, mekhanizm verbovki, posledstviia", *APN*, 8 November 2015 <http://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=34174> (Accessed on 28 March 2018); Suleimanov, "Kriashenskii sviashchennik".

[67] Kovalskaya, "Nationalism and Religion in the Discourse of Russia's 'Critical Experts of Islam'", p. 149.

[68] See, e.g., A. Fokin and R. Suleimanov, *Natsional'noe samoopredelenie kriashen: istoriia i sovremennost': materialy tret'ikh publichnykh chtenii pamiati uchonogo-kriashenoveda M.S.Glukhova, posviashchennykh ego 75-letiiu (23 noiabria 2012 g.)* (Kazan: Aventa, 2013); *Nikolai Il'minskii i kriashenskoe natsional'noe dvizhenie: materialy nauchnoi konferentsii (27 dekabria 2011 g.)* (Kazan: Aventa, 2013); also the academic journal *Kriashenovedenie: nauchnyi al'manakh*, edited by Arkadii Fokin and Rais Suleimanov.

1995 it moved into the reconstructed Tikhvin Church in Staraia Tatarskaia Sloboda (the 'Old Tatar quarter') in the centre of Kazan. As of September 2017, the Tatarstan archdiocese of the ROC (*Tatarstanskaia mitropoliia*) oversees in total fifteen Kräshen parishes, in nine of which liturgical services are conducted in Kräshen, while in six the liturgy is held in Church Slavonic.[69]

Like the Kräshen nationalist camp, the Kräshen clergy who work with the community today have a positive view of the strategies of the Orthodox Christian mission practised in the imperial period. Missionary Il'minskii, who fell into oblivion during the USSR, has been promoted as the "apostle of the Kräshens", and there are voices that call for his official canonization by the ROC. The contemporary mission also draws on Il'minskii's strategies of translating Christian religious texts: in 2005 the Kazan parish together with the Russian Bible Society (RBO) completed the translation of the parts that had not been translated in the imperial period and published the first full version of the NT in Kräshen. The strategies behind these translations will be analysed in Chapter 8.

The NT in Kräshen was intended to facilitate the ongoing "in-churching" in Kräshen villages, where the situation, as the Orthodox Christian missionaries see it, is similar to the state of affairs in the nineteenth century: many Kräshens are "in danger" of apostasy to Islam and of "Tartarization". Yet the present-day Orthodox Christian mission among Kräshens is experiencing a severe lack of clergy: even decades after the relaxation of state policies on religious practice, there is still an urgent need for priests who can perform services in the Kräshen language.

In their research on ethnic and religious identities among Kräshens in Tatarstan, Tatiana Titova et al. observed that 96.6% of the interviewees identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, and half of them consider it important to conduct religious services in Kräshen. The vernacular is seen as the minority's liturgical language and should enjoy a status similar to that of Church Slavonic within the ROC.[70]

Until the mid-2010s, Orthodox missionaries who tried to revive Kräshen parishes did not receive any official support from the ROC;[71] the Church was reluctant to get involved, fearing that it would jeopardize the relationship with the political leadership in Tatarstan. The situation changed in 2013, when several Kräshen churches were set

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[69] I. Alekseev, "Dukhovno-religioznoe razvitie kriashen mezhdu II i III Forumami pravoslavnoi obshchestvennosti Respubliki Tatarstan", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 27 January 2017 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2017/12/27/duhovnoreligioznoe_razvitie_kryashen_mezhdu_ii_i_iii_forumami_pravoslavnoj_obwestvennosti_respubliki_tatarstan/> (Accessed on 21 February 2018).

[70] Titova et al., "Ethno-Confessional Group of the Kryashens", p. 264.

[71] Personal interview with D. Sizov, 18 July 2016.

on fire; the community members sent a letter to the Patriarch of the ROC asking for protection. This led to new negotiations on the rights of the minority between the federal authorities and the government of Tatarstan. The Church accused the Tatar national elites of discriminating against Christians and of sheltering radical Muslim movements in the republic, which the ROC identified as the circles behind the arson attacks. At the same time, the Tatarstan Archbishop Anastasii (Metkin, b. 1944), who had occupied the office for a quarter of a century, was implicated in a sexual abuse scandal and was forced to step down. The choice of Feofan (Ashurkov, b. 1947) as his successor in the office of Archbishop was seen by many as a strategic move: before his appointment Feofan had served as the deputy to the Patriarch in Moscow, and had risen to prominence through work in predominantly Muslim regions, such as the Caucasus, Syria and Egypt. Feofan is seen as a powerful and assertive figure, able to promote the interests of the ROC in Tatarstan.[72]

In 2016, Feofan successfully organized a long-postponed visit of Patriarch Kirill to Tatarstan. Kirill did not shy away from openly explicating the ROC interests in the region: by performing a sermon, partially in the Kräshen language, he recognized the community as part of the ROC, and thus as subject to ROC protection. The Patriarch also laid the foundation stone for a new cathedral in the centre of Kazan, which was intended to redress the imbalance and put Christianity on an equal footing with Islam in Tatarstan, after Muslims "received" an Islamic Academy in Bolghar. Equally noteworthy is that shortly before the Patriarch's visit, the Kazan Theological Seminary – the successor of the eighteenth-century institution for training Christian missionaries – re-launched its Chair of Islamic studies;[73] obviously intended as a revival of the chair of *anti*-Islamic studies that the Academy housed before 1917. The media immediately interpreted the ROC's assertive presence in the region as an attempt to restore imperial practices: the newspaper headlines described Kirill's visit as "a [second] conquest of Kazan", and a return of the "imperial spirit".[74] In the opinion of some journalists, after the arson cases the Tatarstani authorities had been forced to make these concessions in

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[72] E.g., K. Antonov, "Mitropolit Anastasii Kazan' sdal", *Kommersant*, 17 July 2015 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2769390> (Accessed on 20 June 2018).

[73] I. Vasil'ev, "V Kazanskoi seminarii dolzhna byt' sozdana sobstvennaia islamovedcheskaia shkola", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 9 August 2016 <http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2016/08/09/v_kazanskoj_seminarii_dolzhna_byt_sozdana_sobstvennaya_islamovedcheskaya_shkola/> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).

[74] V. Mal'tsev, "Novyi mitropolit prines v Kazan' 'imperskii dukh'", *NG Religii*, 5 August 2015 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2015-08-05/4_kazan.html> (Accessed on 13 February 2018); Antonov, "RPTS vziala Kazan'".

order to maintain the long-cherished image of the republic as an oasis of tolerance and peaceful Islamo-Christian coexistence.[75]

7.4.2 The community of baptized Tatars

The ROC already supported initiatives of Orthodox Christian mission among Tatars before the mid-2010s, when it eventually seized the opportunity to strengthen its presence in Tatarstan and tighten its grip over the Kräshen community there. Moreover, as seen in Chapter 6 of this thesis, in the early 2000s the missionary Daniil Sysoev established his own community of baptized Tatars in Moscow. While Orthodox Christian clergy who provide pastoral care for Kräshens in Tatarstan claim to restrict their mission to inhabitants of traditionally Kräshen villages, or Kräshen settlements within mixed villages,[76] Sysoev and his followers primarily understood mission as an effort to convert Muslims to Christianity, and therefore targeted primarily Muslim-dominated settlements: in 2007-2009, Sysoev headed a mission trip to Kräshen villages and the town of Zainsk in Tatarstan, and also to Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia.[77]

After Sysoev's assassination in 2009, his community of baptized Tatars dropped out of sight; but since the Tatarstani arson cases of 2013, two baptized Tatars, Evgenii Bukharov and his wife Dinara Bukharova from Moscow, took the lead in bringing the community back into the media spotlight. In November 2016, Dinara Bukharova sent an open letter on behalf of all Tatars of Russia to US President-elect Donald Trump in which she requested the abolition of the 1959 US law on "Captive Nations". This Cold War law classifies the nations of the Volga-Ural region as subjects under the control of a non-democratic government. Bukharova's letter states that this law "destroys our country [Russia] and the integrity of the Russian nation", and that the Tatars have never regarded themselves as a "captive" nation but rather as an important part of Russian society.[78] With this initiative, Bukharova drew criticism from both Tatar and Kräshen national elites; the former accused her of "distorting the history of Tatars" and supporting Russian assimilation policies,[79] while the latter argued that her letter

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[75] Antonov, "RPTS vziala Kazan'".
[76] Personal interview with D. Sizov, 18 July 2016.
[77] Vladimirtsev, "Nekotorye aspekty missii sredi inovertsev na primere o. Daniila Sysoeva".
[78] Regnum, "Pravoslavnye tatary prosiat Trampa otmenit' 'Zakon o poraboshchennykh natsiiakh'", *Regnum*, 17 November 2016 <https://regnum.ru/news/2206462.html> (Accessed on 28 March 2018).
[79] B. Timerova et al., "Chukıngan tatar neofitınıŋ Trampka möräjägate tatar jämägatchelegendä rizasızlık uyattı", *Azatlıq Radiosı*, 18 November 2016 <https://www.azatliq.org/a/28126521.html> (Accessed on 15 June 2018).

downplayed the Kräshen quest for recognition as an ethnic group independent from the Tatars.

The media attention increased the tensions between Sysoev's community of baptized Tatars and the Kräshens in Tatarstan. The Kräshens resented their struggle for liberation and recognition in the republic becoming associated with aggressive Orthodox Christian mission coming from Moscow: Sysoev and his followers repeatedly stated that a union of Kräshens and the newly baptized Tatars had a chance to become "the avant-garde in the Christianization of the Muslims of Russia" and, in particular, of Muslim Tatars.[80] Despite their disagreements with the Kräshens in Tatarstan, the community of baptized Tatars continues to make claims to Kräshen history, language and traditions, and regularly conducts church services in the Kräshen language. Sysoev's followers go so far as to suggest that Kräshens trace their roots back to the seventh century. In December 2017, the St. Thomas's Church that Sysoev had established in Moscow hosted a memorial service for the family of Khan Kubrat (c. 635-c. 650/665); the community of baptized Tatars even venerated Khan Kubrat as the founder of Great Bulgaria, the proto-state of Volga Tatars, and as a ruler who converted to Orthodox Christianity in the region prior to the baptism of Rus' in 998.[81]

The 2017 Christmas Readings – an annual event of the ROC that formulates the Church agenda for the coming year – for the first time included a special section on Orthodox Tatars. Sysoev's community was allocated a place in the Christmas Readings of the Patriarchate and its representatives gave reports on behalf of Kräshens and newly baptized Tatars. They argued that Christian Tatars are an inherent part of the "bi-religious" Tatar nation, adding that the Tatars are the second largest ethnic group in Russia and that the Christian part of it is a significant congregation within the ROC. They demanded the canonization of Golden Horde Khan Sartaq (d. 1256), who was supposedly killed by his uncle for professing Christianity, as well as the canonization of Nikolai Il'minskii and Daniil Sysoev.[82]

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[80] A. Priimak, "Kriashenami pozhertovali radi missionerov", *NG Religii*, 15 February 2017 <http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2017-02-15/14_415_kryashens.html> (Accessed on 9 February 2018).

[81] Pravoslavie.ru, "V khrame Apostola Fomy na Kantemirovskoi proidet moleben na tatarskom i tserkovnoslavianskom iazykakh", *Pravoslavie.ru*, 18 December 2017 <http://pravoslavie.ru/109269.html> (Accessed on 28 March 2018).

[82] The full title of the section was "Orthodox Tatars (baptized Tatars, Kräshens, Nagaibaks). History. Mission. The future of Orthodoxy among the Tatar people". See Priimak, "Kriashenami pozhertovali radi missionerov"; also Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia, "Tret'ia pravoslavnaia tatarskaia konferentsiia", *Russkaia Narodnaia Liniia*, 8 February 2018 <http://ruskline.ru/opp/2018/fevral/8/tretya_pravoslavna-ya_tatar-skaya_konferenciya_tatarskaya_sekciya_rozhdestvenskih_chtenij_v_formate_kruglogo_stola_pravosla vnye_ta/> (Accessed on 20 June 2018).

Paradoxically, the arguments of the community of baptized Tatars resonate with the position of Russia's Islamic leaders. The baptized Tatars and Islamic authorities embrace the dominant state rhetoric, according to which the coherence of Russia's multinational society is based on a shared religiosity and traditional values; both rely on the ambiguity of the definition what "Russia's nation" is, to construct Tatars as Russia's indigenous and loyal subjects. Both present post-Soviet Russia as a successor to the great states of the past: Great Bulgaria, the Golden Horde and Tsarist Russia, emphasizing that Tatars have always been supportive of the Russian rulers. Sysoev's community claims that Tatars have always been faithful to the Russian state and defended its interests, not as a "captive" nation but as a voluntary actor; hence their conversion to Christianity also came about by volition, not by coercion. DUM RF Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin and his deputy Damir Mukhetdinov (see Section 3.4.3) make similar references to distant history, arguing that Russia owes its greatness to the Golden Horde, and that Tatars often defended Russia's independence, for instance by contributing to the Russian struggle against the Polish invasion in 1611.[83] Yet they differ in their goals: for the Islamic authorities, such interpretations of Tatar history help to present Islam as Russia's truly "traditional" religion, which should entitle Muslims to all the benefits that come with this status (Chapter 3); while for Sysoev's community, the historical references serve to transform their marginal community into an essential partner of the ROC in managing Turkic communities of (new) Christian converts.

7.5 Conclusion

As the analysis of this chapter shows, religion and language are the identity markers believed by Kräshens to distinguish them from the Muslim (majority) Tatars. Orthodox mission and the translation of the Bible (which will be analysed in the next chapter) contributed to the formulation of markers of "otherness", which in the Soviet era turned into a foundation for secular ethnic identity. Yet Soviet nation-building practices also turned this Kräshen "otherness" into a "deviant" difference, in an attempt to blur the differences among ethnic groups in order to construct a homogeneous Tatar nation. The legacies of Soviet policies are still present. Throughout the 1980s-90s, the Tatar national elites campaigned to reverse the decline of the Tatar language and Tatar cultural knowledge, denouncing the centuries of Russian cultural and political domination. Because of the Tatars' status of a minority – although the largest in Russia – they perceive their culture as being dominated by the majority group; in their attempt

[83] Sibgatullina and Kemper, "The Imperial Paradox".

to counter linguistic and cultural amalgamation, Tatars seek "to distance themselves from the Russian nation while following Russian ideas on ethnic identity and ethnic categorization",[84] which involves downplaying the differences between Kräshens and Muslim Tatars.

When we look at the development of the Kräshen vernacular, a paradoxical trend is to be observed. Initially, the Orthodox Christian missionaries who developed its alphabet and described its grammar, placed an emphasis on comprehensibility of the liturgical language: it was supposed to be more understandable and "closer" to languages spoken by ordinary people, compared with the literary Tatar of that time. In the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, Kräshen was maintained primarily in religious settings, as the majority of Kräshens received their secular education in either Russian or Tatar. During these decades the emphasis in using Kräshen has been shifting from comprehensibility to sacredness: the pre-revolutionary script and archaic grammatical forms that are still used in Kräshen religious literature and rituals suggest that the language today enjoys the status of being sacral (similar to Church Slavonic); the use of Kräshen in liturgies meets the primary purpose of "enabling the linguistic performance of a religious act in a way which is reverent and mystical and a perpetuation of a sacred tradition", [85] whereas the level of comprehensibility of this language to parishioners continues to decrease.[86]

The politicization of the "Kräshen question" occurred in parallel to the public debates about ethnic Russian converts to Islam, as analysed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. The two communities mirror each other in several aspects. First of all, they are religious minorities that are having to define themselves in the use of language and in opposition to the ethnic majority. The converts promote the idea that Orthodox Christianity is not a defining feature of Russianness, and it is possible to be both Russian and Muslim; the Kräshens argue that they differ from the Muslim-majority group of Tatars by being Orthodox Christians and by speaking a language that – due to its use in Church settings – has developed into a separate vernacular and not a dialect of Tatar.

In contrast to the "new" Russian Muslims, the Kräshens' ethnic identity question traces back to the imperial past. Yet despite this difference in historical development, the two communities identify similar problems in the contemporary religion-

[84] D. Gorenburg, "Tatars as Meso-Nation", in *Emerging Meso-Areas in the Former Socialist Countries: Histories Revived or Improvised?*, ed. K. Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, University of Hokkaido, 2005), 83-89. Here p. 87.

[85] Liddicoat, "Language Planning as an Element of Religious Practice", p. 124.

[86] Titova et al., "Ethno-Confessional Group of the Kryashens", p. 265.

nationality discourse: lack of social recognition and mobility of the community members, little to no financial and political support from the authorities, discrimination by the majority group(s). The leader of NORM, Vadim Kharun Sidorov, stated that the discussion on the rights of Kräshens in Tatarstan "has a precedent significance for us, Russian Muslims, who are in many ways in a similar position". At the same time, he notes, the Kräshens have already been granted the rights that ethnic Russian converts to Islam can only wish for; the Christian minority in Tatarstan is "recognized and represented in the government bodies of the republic" and has its "ethnic-confessional" infrastructure.[87]

In both cases, we find communities being pressed "in-between" the big confessional blocks. Both Kräshens and Russian Muslims navigate the discursive constructions of religious, linguistic and ethnic identities, and define themselves through what they share with the major religious and ethnic groups, while at the same time insisting on their difference.

The following chapter will take a closer look at linguistic features of the Kräshen language by analysing the Kräshen translation of the New Testament. However, in the early 2000s several NT translations in literary Tatar also began to circulate alongside the Kräshen version, which marked the advent of new Christian churches among Tatars.

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[87] V. Sidorov, "Kriasheny i russkie musul'mane: sravnitel'noe polozhenie", *LiveJournal*, 11 December 2013 <https://v-sidorov.livejournal.com/310165.html> (Accessed on 4 March 2018).

Chapter 8

Battle of the Books: Tatar Translations of the New Testament

This final chapter investigates three recent Tatar translations of the New Testament (NT). My focus here lies on lexical choices made by the various organizations involved in the translation process in order to accommodate Christian meanings in the Tatar language. As my analysis shows, two projects that aimed to translate the NT into literary Tatar drew on existing religious vocabulary; thus, Islamic terms were employed to signify "new", Christian concepts. The third project was conducted by the Kräshen community and therefore followed the strategies of imperial Orthodox brotherhoods, which introduced Russian loanwords into the Tatar text in order to avoid Islamic connotations. As a result, the translations reveal differing approaches to mission. The versions in literary Tatar aim to contextualize Christianity in the recipient culture and construct a Christian community that continues to identify itself as Tatar. The NT in Kräshen emphasizes the "non-Tatarness" of its target community and highlights the differences between Kräshens and Muslim Tatars; at the same time, the use of Russian terms implies closeness to the ROC discourse.

8.1 Introduction

In the 1980s, various organizations and groups that have decades, if not centuries of experience in translating Holy Scriptures received access to the Soviet religious market and began active missionary work among the country's population. The ROC – threatened by this growing influence of what it perceived as "non-traditional" Christian missions – attempted to limit the influence of foreign religious associations; the general hostility of the Moscow Patriarchate toward inter-denominational cooperation only increased in the immediate post-Soviet period, and it seriously damaged the relations between the ROC and non-Orthodox Christian denominations working in Russia.[1] At the same time, the Church could not ignore the fact that many evangelical movements had more means and manpower to conduct mission; these evangelical projects included costly translations of religious literature and the Bible into vernaculars, with the result that in the struggle for winning "new" souls, these movements were about to make the ROC look bleak. The Church endorsed legal measures to restrict the proliferation of "non-traditional" religious organizations and supported a strict limitation on foreign sponsorship.[2] However, some of the Bible translation projects received the green light from the Moscow Patriarchate to continue their activities in Russia, obviously in the expectation that quality translations from abroad might also benefit the cause of the ROC, which thereby admitted that it lacked the capacity to come up with its own translation projects.

In particular, the Patriarchate gave its blessing to translation projects by foreign evangelical religious communities, which prioritize missionary work among sizable ethnic groups. Ideally, these ethnic groups should never have been associated with Christianity before. The consent of the Patriarchate was thus given on the condition that the translations would not target the ROC's own flock; and moreover, that the ROC would not prioritize mission among non-Christians in Russia. The goal that these translation projects are said to pursue is to make the Bible available to everyone, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic and religious background.[3] This does not, however, rule out that the final product of these enterprises – the entire Bible or parts of it in

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[1] Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*, p. 180.

[2] In July 2012, Russia's ruling party signed a bill that requires all NGOs receiving any sort of foreign funding to officially register as "foreign agents". Although the designation is not necessarily degrading in English and often simply understood as meaning lobbyists, the Russian term, *inostrannyi agent*, has the connotation of espionage or foreign infiltration; in Soviet times, it was the equivalent of 'spy'.

[3] Interview with Dr. Vitaly Voinov, director of the Institute for Bible Translation in Moscow. September 2015, Budapest, Hungary.

ethnic vernaculars – will also facilitate the efforts of Orthodox missionaries who aim to spread the word of God among Russia's non-Christian population.

Modern Bible translation practices across the world emphasize contextualization (sometimes referred to as "inculturation") of the Christian message. Contextualization is intended to enable the receptor community to understand the message of the Bible through their own culture and language, without excessive foreign influences. Unlike earlier practices, when missionaries uprooted local people from their indigenous cultures and transplanted them into an imported one, today the translation projects try to find a balance between correct transmission of the Christian message and respect toward the indigenous culture.[4] Thus, the religion that is promoted, for instance among Tatars, should be Tatar in form, but Christian in content. The translators' understanding of Tatar culture then involves "a selective rendering of national symbols and signs, with an obvious emphasis on the visual and oral culture through music, dance, and public displays", as Mathijs Pelkmans argued in the case of religious competition in Kyrgyzstan.[5] In addition, for many post-Soviet Tatars this approach is convenient, because it offers an easy transition from identities created in the Soviet period; both communists and evangelicals endorsed external manifestations of "national cultures", with a great emphasis on "dressing-styles, cuisine, handicraft, and folklore, while simultaneously advancing specific ideologies".[6]

This chapter examines three versions of the New Testament (NT) in Tatar that have been produced in the post-Soviet period. They are the outcome of projects by (1) the Moscow branch of the Institute for Bible Translation (*Institut Perevoda Biblii*, IBT), (2) the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, which produces the so-called New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures (NWT) used by Jehovah's Witnesses, and finally (3) the Russian Bible Society (*Rossiiskoe Bibleiskoe Obshchestvo*, RBO). The IBT and the NWT versions have translated the NT into present-day literary Tatar, and the RBO into the language that the Kräshen community (examined in the previous chapter) promotes as its language.

The aim of this chapter is to identify major strategies of accommodating Christian concepts within an Islamic vernacular such as Tatar; in particular, I examine whether translation choices are consistent in all three versions of the NT. In cases where

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[4] See, e.g., J. Maxey, "Bible Translation as Contextualization: The Role of Orality," *Missiology* 38:2 (2010), 173-83.

[5] M. Pelkmans, "'Culture' as a tool and an obstacle: missionary encounters in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13:4 (2007), 881-99. Here p. 887; also E.J. Clay, "Orthodox Missionaries and 'Orthodox Heretics' in Russia, 1886-1917", in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. R. Geraci and M. Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 38-69.

[6] Pelkmans, "'Culture' as a tool and an obstacle", p. 887.

translation choices differ, I attempt to answer the question of whether this variation is to be attributed to the denomination (that is, reflecting the particular interpretation of the NT as maintained by the given organization) or to the translation school (reflecting different approaches to translating the Bible that have nothing to do with theological issues).

Section 8.2 provides some background information on each of the three organizations involved in the translation work. Here I also briefly discuss some specificities of printed editions of the NT (book cover, page layouts and contents) that may also shed light on the translators' efforts to contextualize their work, that is, to adapt their translations to what they expect would appeal to their target communities. Section 8.3 embarks on a more detailed analysis of two major approaches to translation – dynamic and formal equivalence – and discusses the major challenges that arise when producing "Muslim-sensitive" Bible translations. In this section, I distinguish five broad categories of religious terms and analyse how these terms have been rendered in each Tatar edition of the NT. My main hypothesis is that the IBT and NWT versions in literary Tatar reuse the existing Islamic terminology to refer to Christian concepts and symbols. Thereby, the translators draw on the Tatar tradition of Qurʾān interpretation and Islamic theology for use in Christian communities (Section 8.4).

The RBO edition in Kräshen follows the pre-1917 approaches to familiarizing and enrooting Kräshens in Orthodox Christianity; these approaches place the message beyond contextualization, therefore Russian loanwords are used in place of Arab and Persian terminology, despite the risk of "foreignizing" the text through Russian loanwords.

In Section 8.5, I draw conclusions from the sociolinguistic analysis and examine the social context in which these translations circulate; in particular, I focus on the reception of the Tatar New Testaments in communities of evangelical Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazan.

8.2 Translation projects

8.2.1 The IBT project

The IBT was established in 1992 in Moscow as the Russian branch of the Swedish organization *Institutet för Bibelöversättning*.[7] Today it is an autonomous non-profit centre "for translating the Bible into the languages of non-Slavic peoples of Russia and of other

[7] The Croatian scholar and writer Borislav Arapović (b. 1935) established the organization in Stockholm in 1973 and managed it until 1993.

former Soviet republics".[8] The IBT works in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences and the ROC;[9] moreover, it has strong ties with the Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics and the United Bible Societies (UBS) – worldwide associations that coordinate efforts of translating the Bible into vernaculars.

The IBT officially started its project of translating the NT into Tatar in 1994. The team of translators has changed several times throughout the project; at various points, it included scholars from the Academy of Sciences, members of the Writers' Union of the Republic of Tatarstan and prominent Tatar journalists.[10]

The IBT presents itself as an organization that aims to make the Bible available in vernaculars; it sees the Scripture primarily as part of the world literary heritage, and only after that as a religious text. Thus, the IBT distances itself from any missionary movements but does not rule out the possibility that its publications will be used for proselytizing purposes.[11]

The hardcopy edition of the NT that the IBT published in 2001[12] has a green cover with ornamental press gilding; its pages are decorated with a florid frame, which makes the design and format of the book resemble traditional Tatar Qurʾān editions. Along with the NT books, the edition also contains a glossary and a list of earlier translations of the Bible into Tatar.[13] Every page has in its upper part the title of the respective book of the NT, a subtitle and the chapter and verse numbers; at the bottom of the page, the reader finds footnotes that are meant to facilitate the understanding of the text (see Figure 5).

The IBT version became the first Tatar edition of the NT published in the post-Soviet period, at a time when no other version was yet in circulation. The ROC officially endorsed the IBT project. As a result, the translation quickly spread among

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[8] IBT, "O nas", *The official website of the IBT*, 2017 <https://ibt.org.ru/ru/about > (Accessed on 2 August 2017).
[9] The *Institutet för Bibelöversättning* has a history of relationship with the Moscow Patriarchate, which started as long ago as 1961 through the ecumenical movement. In the 1980s, the Swedish institute raised money and published a three-volume work of critical commentary on the Bible by Aleksandr Lopukhin (1852-1904) – the so-called "Lopukhin Bible" – and in 1988 supplied 150,000 copies free of charge to the Orthodox Patriarchate. See J. Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 14-15.
[10] See A. Akhunov, "'Bozhestvennye otkroveniia' iz riukzaka", *Vostochnyi ekspress (№ 38)*, 14 December 2002 <http://jesuschrist.ru/forum/48086> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).
[11] The interview with V.Voinov.
[12] IBT, *Injil. Novyi Zavet na tatarskom iazyke*. In 2015, the IBT also completed translations of the Old Testament and Psalms; these were published together with a revised version of the NT as *Izge Yazma* (Moscow: Institut Perevoda Biblii, 2015).
[13] IBT, *Injil*, p.551.

communities of Kräshens and non-Orthodox Christian Tatars and became a groundwork for later translations.

8.2.2 The NWT project

A strong resemblance to the IBT version can be seen in the New World Translation (NWT) in Tatar, which was designed for Tatar-speaking communities of Jehovah's Witnesses. The reading of the NT in these communities is based on the English version of the NWT, first published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in 1950.[14] The NWT version in Tatar was published in Germany in 2013 under the auspices of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.[15] In addition to the traditional indication of the respective NT books, the NWT edition contains a foreword, an explanation of the features of this edition, a glossary of terms, an index, and appendices with tables and maps of ancient Palestine. There is also a list of topics "for conversation based on the Scriptures", which provides links to quotes from the NT books that can be used for missionary purposes. The book follows the international Bible layout standards: the text is divided into two columns, with footnotes at the bottom of the page. The first arrival of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tsarist Russia goes back to 1891, when Charles Taze Russell, one of the founders of the movement, visited Kishinev (today Chișinău in the Republic of Moldova) during his tour across Europe. It is reported that Russell expressed his strong disappointment in the visit, as he saw "no opening or readiness for the truth in Russia".[16] In the wake of the 1905 Revolution, when the Russian state granted toleration to religious minorities, the Jehovah's Witnesses received an official registration.[17] The onset of the First World War and the subsequent 1917 October Revolution, however, made it impossible for the Jehovah's Witnesses to establish any serious presence in the country. In the Soviet Union, they again had little success gaining a foothold: by 1946, the total number of their members officially amounted to only 4,797 people.[18]

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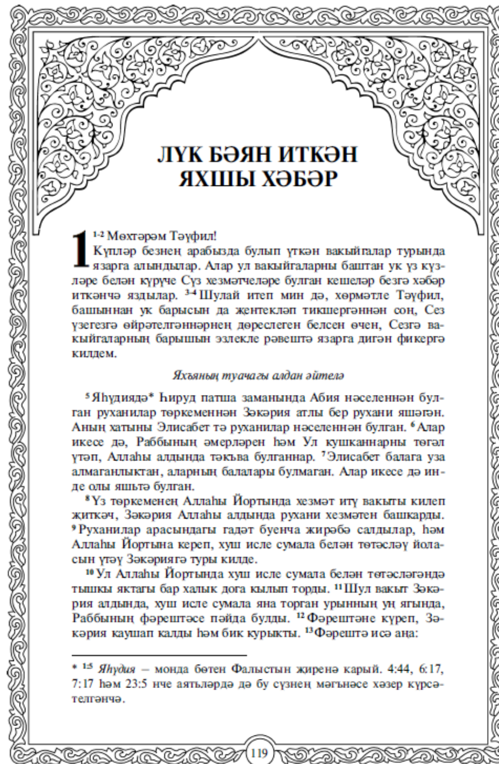
[14] JW, "The Divine Name in the Christian Greek Scriptures", *JW.org*, 2018 <www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/appendix-a/divine-name-christian-greek-scriptures/> (Accessed on 30 January 2018).
[15] NWT, *Injil. Yanga dönya tärjemäse*. In May 2018 the NWT translation was included in Russia's Federal List of Extremist Materials.
[16] Quoted in E.B. Baran, "Contested Victims: Jehovah's Witnesses and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1990 – 2004," *Religion, State and Society* 35:3 (2007), 261-78. Here p. 262.
[17] N.S. Gordienko, *Rossiiskie Svideteli Iegovy: Istoriia i Sovremennost'* (St. Petersburg: Limbus Press, 2000), pp. 223-24.
[18] Baran, "Contested Victims", p. 263; also E.B. Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach about It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

With the exception of the early 1990s, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have been limited in their right to practise religion. In recent years, a veritable public campaign has been launched against them, with a ban of five communities in 2016. By the beginning of 2017, the Russian Supreme Court placed the religious movement on the Federal Register of Banned Organizations.[19]


ЛҮК БӘЯН ИТКӘН
ЯХШЫ ХӘБӘР

1 [1-2] Мөхтәрәм Тәүфил!
Күпләр безнең арабызда булып үткән вакыйгалар турында язарга алындылар. Алар ул вакыйгаларны баштан ук үз күзләре белән күрүче Сүз хезмәтчеләре булган кешеләр безгә хәбәр иткәнчә яздылар. [3-4] Шулай итеп мин дә, хөрмәтле Тәүфил, башыннан ук барысын да җентекләп тикшергәннән соң, Сез үзегезгә өйрәтелгәннәрнең дөреслеген белсен өчен, Сезгә вакыйгаларның барышын эзлекле рәвештә язарга дигән фикергә килдем.

Яхъяның туачагы алдан әйтелә

[5] Яһүдиядә* Һируд патша заманында Абия нәселеннән булган руханилар төркеменнән Зәкәрия атлы бер рухани яшәгән. Аның хатыны Элисабет тә руханилар нәселеннән булган. [6] Алар икесе дә, Раббының әмерләрен һәм Ул кушканнарны төгәл үтәп, Аллаһы алдында тәкъва булганнар. [7] Элисабет балага уза алмаганлыктан, аларның балалары булмаган. Алар икесе дә инде олы яшьтә булган.

[8] Үз төркеменең Аллаһы Йортында хезмәт итү вакыты килеп җиткәч, Зәкәрия Аллаһы алдында рухани хезмәтен башкарды. [9] Руханилар арасындагы гадәт буенча жирәбә салдылар, һәм Аллаһы Йортына кереп, хуш исле сумала белән төтәсләү йоласын үтәү Зәкәриягә туры килде.

[10] Ул Аллаһы Йортында хуш исле сумала белән төтәсләгәндә тышкы яктагы бар халык дога кылып торды. [11] Шул вакыт Зәкәрия алдында, хуш исле сумала яна торган урынның уң ягында, Раббының фәрештәсе пәйда булды. [12] Фәрештәне күреп, Зәкәрия каушап калды һәм бик курыкты. [13] Фәрештә исә аңа:

* [1:5] *Яһүдия* – монда бөтен Фалыстын җиренә карый. 4:44, 6:17, 7:17 һәм 23:5 нче аятьләрдә дә бу сүзнең мәгънәсе хәзер күрсәтелгәнчә.

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Figure 5. Page layout of the IBT version of the NT

Against the background of this persistent social and legal pressure on the Jehovah's Witnesses, it was a challenge to get in touch with members of the translation group that worked on the Tatar NWT version of the NT. The community members who kindly agreed to give me an interview were either not aware of information about the translation process or, understandably, preferred not to share this information with me; they did not disclose names of translators who participated in the process. The scarce

[19] The Moscow Times, "Russia Calls for National Ban on Jehovah's Witnesses", *The Moscow Times*, 17 March 2017 <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russian-justice-ministry-calls-for-country-wide-ban-on-jehovahs-witnesses-57458> (Accessed on 2 August 2017).

data that were available on the Internet or that I received through interviews suggest that the NWT translation group followed similar methods in the translation process as the IBT team (see Section 8.3). Taking into account that in Tatarstan there are just a few Tatar language experts who are also knowledgeable in the Christian Holy Scriptures and who are willing to engage in translation work for Christian movements, it cannot be ruled out that some translators and/or consultants contributed to both the IBT and NWT projects.

8.2.3 The RBO translation

The third translation of the NT was accomplished under the auspices of the Russian Bible Society (RBO). The RBO is a successor of the organization with the same name, which was founded in 1813 by British evangelical organizations, back then with financial support from the emperor Alexander I. The activities of the Society were repeatedly halted by the reactionary policies of the Russian government, and after the 1917 October Revolution, it officially ceased to exist. The RBO was re-launched in 1990 through the efforts of two prominent liberal Orthodox clergymen, Alexander Men' and Sergei Averintsev (see also Section 2.3.3), with substantial funding and technical support provided by the American and the United Bible Societies.[20]

The primary goal of the RBO project was to revise and complete the translations for the community of Kräshens that Nikolai Il'minskii and his colleagues had started in the 1860s (see Chapter 7); the four Gospels and the Book of Psalms were first published in Kazan in 1891, followed by the Acts in 1907.[21] Since 1998, the re-established RBO has cooperated with the Kräshen community in Tatarstan and curated the work of the translation team. Archpriest Pavel Pavlov (b. 1957) at the Tikhvin Church in Kazan headed the team and recruited translators from parishioners and the Kräshen clergy.[22] The new Kräshen NT was finished in 2005;[23] in the Kräshen communities, it replaced the IBT translation that had been distributed there before. The Kräshen clergy refused to use the IBT NT in the literary Tatar language, arguing that the text was

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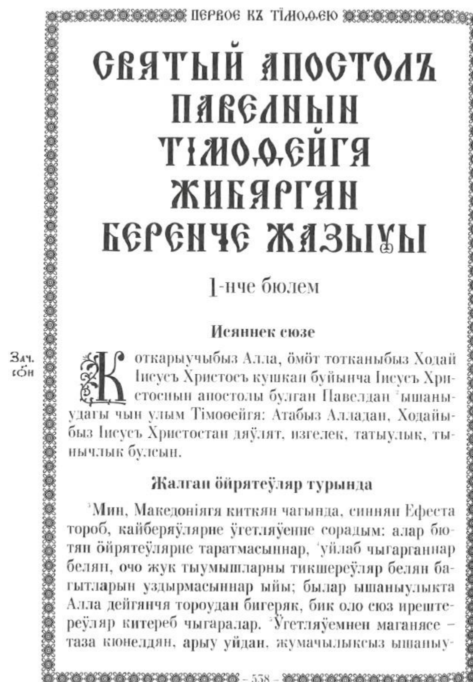
[20] A. Filippov, "Budet li sozdan 'Patriarshii perevod Biblii'?", *Expert Online*, 31 January 2014 <http://expert.ru/2014/05/18/budet-li-sozdan-patriarshij-perevod-biblii/> (Accessed on 30 January 2018); also M. Elliott and A. Deyneka, "Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union", in *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New Wars for Souls*, ed. J. Witte and M. Bordeaux (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999), 197-220. Here p. 217.

[21] RBO, "Perevod Biblii na kriashenskii iazyk", *RBO*, 2017 <http://rbo.spb.ru/perevod-biblii-na-kryashenskiy-yazyik> (Accessed on 2 August 2017).

[22] Ibid.

[23] *Zhanga Zakon". Novyi Zavet na kriashenskom iazyke* (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskoe Bibleiskoe Obshchestvo, 2005).

incomprehensible to many Kräshens; they had also argued that the IBT edition could not be used in religious rituals as it contained too many Islamic terms that corrupted the Christian message. [24]


ПЕРВОЕ КЪ ТІМОѲЕЮ

СВЯТЫЙ АПОСТОЛЪ ПАВЕЛНЫН ТІМОѲЕЙГЯ ЖИБЯРГЯН БЕРЕНЧЕ ЖАЗЫУЫ

1-нче бюлем

Зач. сӧн

Исяннек сюзе

Коткарыучыбыз Алла, ӧмӧт тотканыбыз Ходай Іисусъ Христосъ кушкан буйынча Іисусъ Христосныи апостолы булган Павелдан [2]ышаныудагы чын улым Тімоѳейгя: Атабыз Алладан, Ходайыбыз Іисусъ Христостан дяўлят, изгелек, татыулык, тынычлык булсын.

Жалган ӧйрятеўляр турында

[3]Мин, Македоніягя киткян чагында, синнян Ефеста тороб, кайберяўлярне ўгетляўенне сорадым: алар бютян ӧйрятеўлярне таратмасыннар, [4]уйлаб чыгарганнар белян, очо жук тыумышларны тикшереўляр белян багытларын уздырмасыннар ыйы; былар ышаныулыкта Алла дейгянчя тороудан бигеряк, бик оло сюз ирештереўляр китереб чыгаралар. [5]Ўгетляўемнен маганясе – таза кюнелдян, арыу уйдан, жумачылыксыз ышаныу-

– 538 –

Figure 6. Page layout of the RBO version

In this chapter, I will analyse an anniversary edition of the RBO translation published in 2012 on the 190th birthday of Nikolai Il'minskii.[25] This text preserves the pre-revolutionary Kräshen orthography. Il'minskii had developed a Kräshen alphabet based on Cyrillic, with four additional letters to represent the Tatar sound system (as opposed to six additional symbols in the Tatar Cyrillic alphabet that was later ordained by the state, in 1938, and that is still in use today). Proper names in the RBO version also follow the pre-revolutionary orthography, with 'Jesus' being spelled as *Іисусъ* (instead of the contemporary standard Russian spelling *Иисус*), 'Matthew' as *Матѳей* (instead of *Матфей*), and 'Gabriel' as *Гавріилъ* (instead of *Гавриил*). By following the old spelling (including graphemes that were abandoned by the Bolsheviks), the RBO version is distinct from the other two translation projects studied in this chapter. Other prominent

[24] Ia. Amelina, "Poka zhivy traditsii i samosoznanie, kriasheny ne ischeznut ", Interfax-Religiia, 27 August 2010 <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=286> (Accessed on 22 February 2018).
[25] RBO, "Perevod Biblii na kriashenskii iazyk".

features are the larger format (A4) of the 2012 edition, and a red hard cover with the Russian cross symbol on it; the latter element immediately signals its closeness to the Orthodox Christian tradition, not to the Qurʾān. The inner pages contain a small decorative frame; each page shows the name of the Holy Scripture (in Church Slavonic), footnotes and page numbers. In the margins, there are also pericopes written in Church Slavonic (see Figure 6).

8.3 Translation strategies

In practical terms, all three translation teams worked according to the UBS organizational framework for translation projects: each team had at least one translator (a native speaker of the target language, Tatar or Kräshen), one or more translation consultants who provided guidance on theological, stylistic and linguistic aspects of the translation, and a project coordinator. From a methodological point of view, the translations differ in their translation strategies. The NT translations in literary Tatar (of the IBT and the NWT) rely on the techniques of dynamic equivalence, whereas the RBO version draws on formal equivalence. Dynamic equivalence means that the Bible is translated thought-for-thought, rather than word-for-word; it places emphasis on embedding the text in the recipient culture. In contrast, formal equivalence aims to remain as close to the form of the original text as possible. [26]

The strategies of dynamic equivalence, used in the IBT and NWT versions, thus emphasize what I defined above as "contextualization", namely enrooting the Gospels within Tatar culture. In the past decades, several Bible translation organizations have consciously attempted to design "Muslim-friendly", "Muslim-compliant" or "Muslim-sensitive" versions of the Bible, specifically for missionary work among Muslim-majority communities.[27] One of the key and most disputed features of these versions is

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[26] See E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); E.A. Nida and C.R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969). For a detailed analysis and critique of both approaches, see A.O. Mojola and E. Wendland, "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies", in *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*, ed. T. Wilt (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2003), 1-25.

[27] For Muslims of the former Soviet space who speak Russian better than their native tongue, there is also the so-called "Central Asian" Bible in Russian (Central Asian Russian Scriptures, CARS). The version resembles the standard Russian Bible, but Christian names and terms have been replaced with Turkic or Arabic equivalents: thus, even the Russian word *Bibliia* 'Bible' is rendered using the Arabic loanword *Indzhil* (Injīl 'Gospel or New Testament'), while *Isus Khristos* is referred to as *Isa* or *Isa Masikh* (ʿĪsā Masīḥ 'Jesus the Saviour'). These innovations are supposed to reduce associations with Russianness and, as Mathijs Pelkmans argues, offer new means for Christians in predominantly Muslim regions to "speak in public about religious affairs without revealing their [Christian] religious affiliation". See Pelkmans, "'Culture' as a tool and an obstacle", p. 886.

that translations seek to avoid “problematic” terminology when it comes to explaining the relationship between God and Jesus, such as “Son of God” and “God the Father”. Such expressions are treated with caution, as they might antagonize Muslim readers who interpret them as confirming a biological kinship between the Supreme Being and His prophet; moreover, the concept of Trinity requires complex explanations, which can easily be attacked from the simple Muslim position that emphasizes monotheism. Attempts to replace or avoid such terminology have drawn harsh criticism from many Christian theologians, who argue that Muslim-sensitive Bible versions compromise the very content of the Holy Scriptures “for theological or missiological reasons or to be more compliant with Islamic teaching”.[28]

The Tatar IBT and NWT versions translate the controversial concepts verbatim, but also provide an explanation in the Glossary. For example, the NWT gives the following definition of the expression ‘Son of God’:

> “The phrase predominantly refers to Jesus Messiah. It has a figurative meaning, because God Creator does not need a woman to create living things. In regard to Jesus this phrase means that God himself created him, and Jesus has some divine features and close relations with God”.[29]

Another feature of dynamic equivalence is that to reach out to their target audiences more effectively, translators use available “indigenous” cultural symbols, lexical expressions and religious terminology and limit the presence of any elements that may appear “foreign”. Obviously, the IBT and NWT editors classified the Russian language and symbols associated with the Orthodox Church as “foreign” elements that it would be better to avoid.

The curious result of this perspective is that Arabic terminology (and the Arab-Muslim heritage associated with the Arabic language) are perceived as “own”, or at least as “familiar” to the carriers of Tatar culture to whom the text is intended to appeal; this makes Arabic-origin Tatar terminology safe to employ.[30]

In contrast to the literary Tatar versions of the NT, the RBO team follows the formal equivalence strategy, which translates the Bible word-for-word and structure-for-structure wherever possible. The RBO translation is more idiomatic and follows

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[28] R. Brown et al., “Muslim-idiom Bible Translations: Claims and Facts,” *St. Francis Magazine* 5:6 (2009), 87-105. Here p. 91.

[29] JW, “Izge Yazmalar terminnarï süzlege”, *The official website of the JWs*, 2017 <www.jw.org/tt/бас-малар/изге-язмалар/nwt/изге-язмалар-терминнары-сүзлеге/> (Accessed on 2 August 2017).

[30] Similar ideologies can also be found in online communication practices of Tatar youth, see F. Karimzad and G. Sibgatullina, “Replacing ‘Them’ with ‘Us’: Language Ideologies and Practices of ‘Purification’ on Facebook,” *International Multilingual Research Journal* 12:2 (2018), 124-39.

strategies set by Orthodox missionaries in imperial Russia, who included words from their native Russian language to avoid using Tatar religious terminology "contaminated" by Islam.

What we observe is that the influence of Islamic culture on Tatar language and culture has been immense, which has resulted in a prevalence of Islamic connotations in all domains of religious vocabulary; this obviously poses a significant challenge for translators who intend to introduce the literary heritage of another, Christian faith into Tatar. The Arabic language and Islamic terminology are intrinsically intertwined, and often an Islamic term may be the most natural equivalent of a Biblical term. Yet the translators have to make choices between using the "indigenous" religious vocabulary or purposefully avoiding it, between coining new terms and collocations or borrowing from other languages with which Tatar has been in contact and which were used in Christian contexts. These different approaches to translation have resulted in a significant variation in how religious terminology is translated in the three versions of the NT in Tatar. In the following sections I distinguish five broad categories of terms to discuss this variation.

The first category comprises common references to God, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which are key religious concepts of Christianity and therefore a natural gateway for tracing differences in the translations of the NT across denominations. The second category looks at Tatar religious terms that have been reused in the Christian text with no lexical changes; this approach we find only in the IBT and the NWT translations. The third category examines how translators find their way around Tatar religious terms that do indeed refer to Christian symbols and rituals, but often have pejorative connotations in the colloquial language. The translation of proper names constitutes the fourth group; and finally, the fifth category looks at the instances where translators have used Russian religious terms, which we find predominantly in the RBO version.

8.3.1 References to God, the Son and the Holy Spirit

As a rule, Bible translators working for a majority Muslim community use the word for the Supreme Being employed by the people of that community themselves. When translating 'God' into Tatar, one can choose between Arabic *Alla(h)*, Persian *Xoda(y)*, or Turkic *Tengri;* the latter is not found in any of the translations, probably

because of its connotation of paganism.[31] The first variant, *Alla(h)*, is used to translate the Greek word *theos* and refers to the Essential name of God;[32] therefore all three

translations employ it (see below, Table 2, Example 1.1). However, the term is generally not employed to translate the Tetragrammaton YHWH; in addition, the English Standard Version gives another term besides 'God', namely 'Lord' (Lk 1:16). The IBT translation uses the word *Rabbï* (Arabic *rabbī*, 'my lord'), whereas the NWT version, following the Jehovah's Witnesses' emphasis on using God's actual name,[33] introduces the word *Yähvä*. The RBO version employs the term *Xoday*, which is linked to the Persian word for 'Lord' *khodā* (Example 1.1).

Ex.	ESV	IBT	NWT	RBO
1.1	And he will turn many of the children of Israel to **the Lord their God** (Lk 1:16)	Ul İsrail balalarïnïng kübesen **Rabbïga**, alarnïng üz **Allahïsïna** kire kaytarïr	İsrail balalarïnïng kübesen **Yähvägä**, alarnïng üz **Allahïsïna** kire kaytarïr	İzrail' ullarïnïn kyubesen **Xoday Allalarïna** qaytarïr.
1.2.	**Lord of heaven and earth** (Mt 11:25)	kükneng häm jirneng Xujasï	kükneng häm jirneng Xujasï	kyuknen, jirnen Xodayï
1.3	**Lord**, my servant lying paralysed (Mt 8:6)	Äfände	Äfände	Xoday
1.4	If you are **the Son of God** (Mt 4:3)	Allāhï Ulï	Allāhï Ulï	Alla Ulï
1.5	I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit**. (Mk 1:8)	İzge Rukh	izge rukh	Svatïy tïn

Table 2. References to God, the Son and the Holy Spirit

Looking at Examples 1.1-1.3 below, we observe that the RBO translation does not distinguish between the name of God (Mt 11:25) and the honorific title of Jesus (Mt 8:6); for both concepts, translators have used the word *Xoday*. The IBT and NWT versions use the Persian word *Xuja*, meaning 'lord, master', to refer to God in the context of Him being the master over the earth and heaven (Example 1.2), whereas Turkic *Äfände* is used when people address Jesus before his Resurrection (Example 1.3); historically, *äfande* is a polite and neutral way of addressing a higher-standing man in Tatar, which can also be used in non-religious settings.

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31 See M. Laruelle, "Religious Revival, Nationalism and the 'Invention of Tradition': Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan," *Central Asian Survey* 26:2 (2007), 203-16.

32 K.J. Thomas, "Allah in Translations of Bible," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 523 (2001), 301-05.

33 For the discussion on translation options for YHWH, see, e.g., N. Daams, "Translating YHWH," *Journal of Translation* 1:1 (2005), 47-55.

In all three translations the term ‘Son of God’ is rendered as *Alla(hï) Ulï* (Example 1.4, *Ulï* meaning ‘son’). That is, all three translations preserved the metaphor ‘Son of God’, despite the discussion on whether in Muslim-sensitive translations the commonly used kinship terms should be avoided. ‘Holy Spirit’ is rendered into Kräshen as *Svatïy Tïn*; in this compound *svatïy* is derived from Russian *sviatoi* meaning ‘holy’; the second term, Turkic *tïn*, in present-day literary Tatar has the primary meaning of ‘air’ and ‘breath’. The other two versions translate ‘Holy Spirit’ as *Izge Rux*, where the first word is of Turkic stock and the second is derived from Arabic *rūḥ* ‘spirit’ (Example 1.5).

What these examples demonstrate is that the institutional position of each translation group influences their choice of the lexicon. The NWT version has been clearly designed in accordance with the theological and doctrinal teachings adopted in the Jehovah’s Witnesses denomination, which can be found in the translation of certain verses and specific vocabulary. In the examples shown in Table 2, the NWT resembles the IBT version, which claims to be “denomination-neutral”; the only exception is the word *Yähvägä*.

The RBO follows the translation of the Russian Synodal Bible, where in all cases Lord is translated by one word, *Gospod'*; also in addressing Jesus before his Resurrection.

8.3.2 Use of Arabic and Persian terms

This category focuses primarily on the IBT and NWT versions and zooms in on concepts from Arabic and Persian that have a firm place in Tatar Islamic literature and are transferred to the Christian context without any change. Obviously, the translators believe that these terms do not need to be eliminated, changed or “purified” of their original Islamic meanings, and that they can be directly employed for signifying Christian concepts. The Islamic context offers, on the one hand, opportunities for a NT translator, because the Qurʾān, unlike the scriptures of other world religions, includes extensive material related to the Bible, which is presumed to facilitate understanding of the Christian Scripture by Muslims.

On the other hand, the relationship between the Qurʾān and the NT is a challenge, because of the Muslim stance on the Gospels and Jesus. In Islam, the Gospels (*Injīl*) are seen as a revelation sent down by God to Jesus, confirming the Torah and other previous scriptures and anticipating the Qurʾān. This revelation, Muslims believe, was later corrupted or lost beyond recovery. The Qurʾān also mentions that the People of the Book interfered with their scriptures (e.g., Q 2:75; 2:140; 5:15; 5:41), and although Christians are not specifically named, they are implicated circumstantially as

perpetrators.[34] Jesus (ʿĪsā) is mentioned in 15 *sūras* in the Qurʾān as the envoy (*rasūl*) and one of the prophets (*nabī*) sent by God to fulfil a mission. Like all other prophets, the Qurʾān describes Jesus as an ordinary man and opposes the divinity of Jesus. The crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus are also rejected by most Muslims, although they believe in Jesus' special role, namely in the second coming of Christ at the end of time: on the day of the universal Resurrection, Jesus will be a witness against the Christians.[35]

Yet it should be kept in mind that there are several possible ways to read the Qurʾān and the Bible. This brings up the same issue that was already discussed in Chapter 3 on the translation strategies of Mufti Gainutdin; that is, translators do not elaborate on the extent to which religious concepts mentioned in the NT and the Qurʾān are similar to or different from each other. Instead, they simply draw on the target audience's knowledge about these concepts. In the case of the NT translations into Tatar, this knowledge is assumed to be sufficient to understand the Christian message, as most of the Islamic terms used in the IBT and NWT versions do not have explanatory notes.

For instance, consider the expression in 1 Cor 14:25: 'to fall on one's face [to worship God]'. The IBT and NWT versions translate it using the word *sajda* (related to Arabic *sujūd* 'prostration') (Table 3, Example 2.1; cf. Sysoev's translation strategies as discussed in Section 6.4.1). The Arabic word means 'reclining with the face on the ground in humble adoration'; in Tatar it primarily refers to Muslim worship practices in daily prayers.[36] The RBO version gives a detailed description of an act: *tyubyan jïgïlïb* 'having fallen low', *Allaga bashïrïb* 'to hit one's head [to show devotion] to God'; this extensive description makes it possible to avoid the Arabic term, but comes at a considerable price.

Another example is the verb 'to pray', which in the IBT version has been translated by the compounds *doga* [*kïlu*] and *gïybadät* [*kïlu*]. These compounds consist of the Turkic/Tatar *kïlmak* or *kïlu*, 'to do' or 'to make', plus a noun for 'prayer', which is rendered as either *doga* (Arabic *duʿā*) or *gïybadät* (Arabic *ʿibāda*). *Doga* in Tatar generally refers to a private prayer (or invocation) and is not used for one of the prescribed daily prayers in Islam; *ʿibāda* stands for any act of worship in a broader sense, and has a

[34] Thomas, "Gospel, Muslim conception of".
[35] G.C. Anawati, "ʿĪsā", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P.J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/573-3912_islam_COM_0378> (Accessed on 26 July 2018).
[36] R. Tottoli, "Bowing and Prostration", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (Washington, DC: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00060> (Accessed on 5 April 2018).

connotation of obedience (with the Arabic root *ʿ b d* also forming items, such as 'servant, slave'). An alternation between *doga* and *gïybadät* appears only in the IBT version; in the NWT translation, we encounter only the word *doga*. The Kräshen translation again gives a more "neutral" variant – Turkic *teläk* meaning 'devotion, wish' (Examples 2.2-3) – which is obviously a translation from *doga*, not *gïybadät*.

The Greek participle *eulogemenos* 'blessed' in the IBT version is translated as *möbaräk* (Arabic *mubārak*), meaning 'blessed, congratulated' (Example 2.4). The same verse, Jn 12:13, in the NWT contains the word *fatixalï*. The Arabic word *fātiḥa* in Islam is associated with the first surah of the Qurʾān, *al-Fātiḥa*, which is considered to be the most important *sūra* both liturgically (it is recited many times a day during regular prayers) and doctrinally (intention of invoking the blessing of Allāh).[37] In Tatar, *fatixa* has the meaning of 'blessing, benediction', which is probably derived from the fact that the recitation of *al-Fātiḥa* is perceived as a blessing; *-lï* in *fatixalï* is a derivational Turkic suffix, which usually implies that the object to which it is added possesses or is characterized by the semantic quality of the stem, i.e. 'a person with a blessing'. The RBO avoids using any Arabic terms, instead introducing a Turkic word *dannaulï,* meaning 'praised, praiseworthy'. The root of the word comes from the verb *dannau* – 'to glorify, make famous' – which is used primarily in secular contexts. Thus, when using Turkic terms, the RBO version introduces a shift of semantics from a secular context to that of religion.

The word *uraza* in Tatar (see Example 2.5), derived from Persian *rūza*, primarily refers to the ritual fasting: abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity during the month of *Ramaḍān.* And although the rules of the Islamic ritual fasting can be traced back to Judaism and Christianity,[38] fasting practices in all three religions are different; by opting for the word *uraza*, the translation teams do not communicate these differences.

Religious circumcision (Arabic *khitān*) is not mentioned anywhere in the Qurʾān, but Islamic theologians consider it to be a recommended practice (*sunna*). The Arabic word *sunna* entered the Tatar language in the form of *sönnät*; the expression *sönnätkä utïrtu* in Tatar means to 'put on, plant on *sunna*' and refers to religious circumcision of Muslim men. The variant *sönnätle bulu* in the translation of Rom 2:25 (Example 2.6) thus

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[37] I. Zilio-Grandi, "al-Fātiḥa", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. K. Fleet et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2016) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/573-3912_ei3_COM_27038> (Accessed on 19 June 2018).
[38] K. Wagtendonk, "Fasting", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (Washington, DC: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00062> (Accessed on 5 April 2018).

means 'to follow/to be in the custom'. In the Kräshen NT we find the variant Turkic *kiseleü* 'to be cut'.

Ex.	ESV	IBT	NWT	RBO
2.1	**falling on his face**, he will **worship God** (1 Cor 14:25)	säjdä kïlïp Allahïga tabïnïr	ul yöztübän kaplanïr häm Allahïga säjdä kïlïr	tyubyan jïgïlïb, Allaga bashïrïb
2.2.	**pray** for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44)	doga kïlïgïz	doga kïlïp yäshägez	telyak itegez
2.3.	**as he was praying**, the appearance of his face was altered (Lk 9:29)	gïybadät kïlgan vakïtta	doga kïlgan vakïtta	telyak itkyan chagïnda
2.4	**Blessed** is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel! (Jn 12:13)	möbaräk	fatixalï	dannaulï
2.5	**when you fast** (Mt 6:16)	uraza totkanda	uraza totkanda	uraza totkan chagïnda
2.6	**Circumcision** indeed is of value (Rom 2:25)	sönnätle bulu	sönnätle bulu	kiseleü
2.7	You **hypocrite**, first take the log out of your own eye (Mt 7:5)	monafik"	monafik"	kyuz aldïnda gna kïlïnïuchï
2.8	When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, **before they came together (**Mt 1:18)	nikaxlashkanchï	kavïshkanchï	kushïlmagan köyö
2.9	And when they had sung a **hymn** (Mt 26:30)	mädxiyä	mädxiyä	iman jïrlau

Table 3. Use of Arabic and Persian Islamic terms

The word 'hypocrite' (Example 2.7), which was translated as *monafik"* (Arabic *munāfiq*) in the IBT and NWT versions, refers to those who feign to be what they are not; yet the Arabic term as used in the Qurʾān carries additional meanings, namely "half-hearted believers who outwardly profess Islam while their hearts harbour doubt or even unbelief".[39] The RBO translates the word 'hypocrite' as *kyüz aldïnda gna kïlïnïuchï*, literally 'somebody who pretends before eyes'.

In Example 2.8, the IBT team translated the expression "before they [Mary and Joseph] came together" (Mt 1:18) as "before they conducted [the ceremony] of *nikax*". The Arabic *nikāḥ* is a term for a common form of Islamic marriage. This term may have been used to avoid other literary Tatar variants, such as *öylänü* or *kiyäügä chïgu* 'to marry', which are gender-specific. The other two translations use non-religious terminology, such as *kavïshkanchï* 'before (re)union' (NWT) and *kushïlmagan köyö* 'prior

[39] C.P. Adang, "Hypocrites and Hypocrisy", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00089> (Accessed on 5 April 2018).

to junction' (RBO). We could argue that when de-Islamizing or de-Ottomanizing phrases, the RBO continues Il'minskii's strategy and falls back on the vernacular of pre- or early Islamic Turkic literatures.[40]

Finally, as shown in Example 2.9, 'sung a hymn' (Mt 26:30) was translated into standard Tatar as 'sung *mädkhiyä*', the second word being derived from Arabic *madḥiyya*. The Arabic term refers to the genre of panegyric poetry in Islamic literature, which praises the Prophet Muhammad as well as saints, teachers and deceased persons of high standing.[41] The RBO gives the variant 'to sing *iman*', from Arabic *īmān* meaning 'good faith, sincerity'.

The category of terms discussed in this section posed the biggest challenge for the translators, since they continue to circulate in parallel Islamic and Christian religious domains but with different meanings in each. The translators argue that they used Arabic and Persian vocabulary consciously, because in their opinion the meanings in Islamic and Christian contexts often overlap with the meanings of terms used in the NT; in those cases where the translators realized that terms differ significantly in Islamic and Christian texts, they provided footnotes to help the reader understand the terms.[42]

8.3.3 Replacements for Christian terms

Some Christian terms that have already been circulating in Tatar carry pejorative connotations, which the translation teams obviously intended to avoid. This is the case, for instance, with the word *chukïnu* (cf. Table 4, Example 3.1). The term itself refers to either non-Islamic practices of worship or, particularly, to a Christian act of receiving baptism or crossing oneself. The etymological roots of *chukïnu* are not entirely clear but scholars generally tend to agree that the word entered Tatar via languages of peoples that once lived in the direct vicinity of the Muslim Tatars and professed paganism or Christianity.[43] In colloquial Tatar, the term has an additional negative connotation,

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[40] Paradoxically, Il'minskii's strategies were in line with secular and Muslim nationalist trends of "de-Ottomanizing" or vernacularizing the written Tatar language, which promoted simplicity (*asanlïk*) and purity (*paklïk*) of the language. As Johann Strauss argues, "language modernization for Tatars meant […] not so much the adaptation of already existing well-established literary standards […], but the emancipation from writing standards which had come from the outside". Strauss, "Language modernization", p. 566.

[41] G. Wickens et al., "Madīḥ", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P.J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2018) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/573-3912_islam_COM_0601> (Accessed on 19 June 2018).

[42] Interview with a member of the IBT translation team, who prefers to remain anonymous. 13 May 2015, Moscow, Russia.

[43] R. Äxmät'yanov, *Tatar teleneng kïskacha tarixi-etimologik süzlege* (Kazan: Tatarstan kitap näshriyäte, 2001), p. 237, 239; also A.V. Dybo, *Semanticheskaia rekonstruktsiia v altaiskoi etimologii. Somaticheskie terminy (plechevoi poias)* (Moscow: Shkola "Iazyki Russkoi kul'tury", 1996), p. 142.

namely 'to go mad', 'to lose reason' and 'to die'. The origin of these semantic fields probably goes back to the periods when Tatars were subject to forceful baptism policies of the Russian authorities. Therefore, as a replacement for the term *chukïnu*, all three NT translations introduce the word *chumdïru*, which literally means 'to dip [into water]'.

The standard term that the IBT and RBO teams use to render 'cross' is Persian *k(x)ach* (Example 3.2). Thereby, the translators avoid the problem of using the 'indigenous' Turkic word *täre*; in standard Tatar the word *täre* means 'a Christian cross or an icon', but in the spoken language it is also used as a swear word. For 'cross', the NWT uses the expression *jäfalanu baganasï* 'torture stake', which is a usual translation variant for the New World editions. The Jehovah's Witnesses argue that the original Greek term *stauros* means 'an upright stake or pole' and add that "there is no evidence that the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures used it to designate a stake with a crossbeam".[44]

Ex.	ESV	IBT	NWT	RBO
3.1	Was the **baptism** of John from heaven or from man? (Mk 11:30)	suga chumdïru	suga chumdïrïrga väkalät	chumïldïrïu
3.2	save yourself and come down from the **cross**! (Mk 15:30)	xach	jäfalanu baganasï	kach
3.3	yet if one suffers as a **Christian** (1 Pet 4:16)	masixchï	masixchï	Xristos" isemen jörtöüche

Table 4. Innovations that replace Christian terms

Even the very term 'Christian' is expressed in literary Tatar Bible translations by a less common word that is free of negative symbols, namely *masixchï,* i.e. 'a believer in or follower of *masīḥ*' 'Messiah' (Example 3.3, see also the section on proper names). The Kräshen NT coins a new compound *Xristos" isemen jörtöüche* '[someone] who carries the name of Christ'.

As observed by Kenneth J. Thomas, who wrote on the application of Arabic terminology in Biblical translations, it might be best to avoid all Arabic words in the translation of the NT, and use non-Arabic words instead; but in cases such as Tatar, "Arabic terms are the words which are commonly used for particular concepts (for example the word for extemporaneous, spontaneous prayer, *duʿā*)".[45] And therefore, according to the accepted translation principles, to express these in some other way would be cumbersome and unnatural.[46]

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[44] JW, "Izge Yazmalar terminnarï süzlege".
[45] K.J. Thomas, "The Use of Arabic Terminology in Biblical Translation," *The Bible Translator* 40:1 (1989), 101-08. Here p. 104.
[46] Ibid.

8.3.4 Translation of proper names

Proper names of Biblical characters that are also mentioned in the Qurʾān, and therefore familiar to a Muslim Tatar reader, are rendered in conformity with the Islamic tradition: for instance, the IBT and NWT translate 'Jesus Christ' as *Gäysä Mäsix* (Arabic *ʿĪsā masīḥ*), i.e., 'Jesus the Messiah' (Table 5, Example 4.1), and 'John the Baptist' is rendered as *chumdïruchï Yax"ya* 'dipping Arabic *Yaḥyā*' (Example 4.2). The RBO version uses transliterations of Russian words in pre-1917 spelling: 'Mary Magdalene', for instance, is rendered as *Maria Magdalina* (Example 4.3), and 'Jesus Christ' as *Iisus" Khristos* (Example 4.1).

Ex.	ESV	IBT	NWT	RBO
4.1	**Jesus Christ**	Gäysä Mäsix	Gäysä Mäsix	Iisus'' Xristos
4.2	**John the Baptist**	Chumdïruchï Yax"ya	Chumdïruchï Yax"ya	Chumïldïrïuchï Ioann"
4.3	**Mary Magdalene**	Magdalalï Mär'yam	Magdalalï Mär'yam	Maria Magdalina
4.4	**Babylon**	Babïl	Babïl	Vavilon
4.5	**The New Testament**	Injil	Injil	Janga Zakon"

Table 5. Translations of proper names

The IBT and NWT translation teams adjusted other proper names, including toponyms, to the sound system of the recipient language: for instance, 'Babylon' in literary Tatar is *Babïl*, whereas in Kräshen it is *Vavilon* (Example 4.4), which is also a transliteration of the Russian form.

To refer to the term 'New Testament' itself (Example 4.5), the IBT and NWT use an Arabic loanword *Injil* (Arabic *Injīl*), which refers to the Muslim idea of the Gospel.[47] The RBO uses *Janga Zakon"* 'The New Law', where the second word *Zakon"* is derived from Russian in pre-1917 spelling.

8.3.5 Use of Slavic religious terms

The final category consists of religious terms that have been derived from Russian Orthodox Christian terminology. Church Slavonic elements are visible only in the RBO version of the NT, whereas the IBT and the NWT aspired to keep the language "clean" from any Slavic borrowings. It is difficult to establish major topics in the discussion of which loanwords of Slavic origin are prevalent in the Kräshen NT. One may safely state, however, that such words are often used to denote terms that are exclusively related to Christianity, such as *svyashchenniklyar* (plural form derived from

[47] Thomas, "Gospel, Muslim conception of".

Russian *sviashchennik* ‘priest’) and *arxierey* (also from Russian ‘bishop’). The RBO also gives examples of general religious vocabulary with Russian origin (*svyatïy* ‘holy’, *prestol* ‘[God’s] throne’, *subbota* ‘Saturday’) and common non-religious concepts (*saldatlar,* plural from Russian *soldat* ‘soldiers’).

For contexts that are not specific to Christianity, the following two examples can be considered (see Table 6). In the RBO version, the word ‘temple’ as it occurs in Mt 23:16 is rendered as *chirkaü*, derived from the Russian *tserkov’* ‘church’ (Example 5.1); in contradistinction, the IBT coins a new term *Allāhï Yortï* ‘the house of Allāh’, and the NWT refers to the same concept by using the word *Gïybadätkhanä* meaning ‘Muslim or non-Muslim place of worship’. The latter term goes back to a compound used in the Persian language.

Throughout the NT text, the concept of ‘angel’ in all three translations is conveyed by Persian *färeshtä*. Yet ‘archangel’ in Kräshen is a loanword from Russian, *arkhangel”*; the IBT uses a compound *jitäkche färeshtä* ‘leading angel’, and in the NWT we read *bash färeshtä* ‘heading angel’ (Example 5.2).

It is clear that the RBO translation uses Russian and dialect vocabulary to a greater extent than the other two translations, where we find no loanwords from Church Slavonic at all. Yet it would be an overstatement to argue that the Kräshen liturgical language is free of any Islamic influence, which is a frequent argument advanced by Kräshen nationalists (see Section 7.3.3). There are actually several loanwords from both Arabic (e.g., *Allāh*, and also *tyäbyä* from *tawba* ‘repentance’ and *sauab* from *sawāb* ‘merit’) and Persian (e.g., *pyäreshtyä, uraza*), which indicate previous contacts with Islamic culture.

Ex.	ESV	IBT	NWT	RBO
5.1	‘If anyone swears by the **temple** (Mt 23:16)	Allāhï Yortï	Gïybadätkhanä	chirkyaü
5.2	with the voice of an **archangel** (1 Thes 4:16)	jitäkche färeshtä	bash färeshtä	arkhangel”

Table 6. Slavic borrowings

8.4 Non-Orthodox Tatar Christian communities

The NT editions in literary Tatar are mostly used in non-Orthodox Christian communities in Tatarstan. These communities emerged in the late 1980s-90s, when evangelical missions began their work in the republic, yet there are no statistical data on how many Tatars since then have converted to Christianity. For this research, I participated in regular meetings of two Christian groups, which were usually attended by 10-15 active members of the community. One should bear in mind that these

meetings were held in Kazan, the capital of the republic, which offers relatively more freedom for expressions of "non-traditional" faiths than rural areas of Tatarstan.

A leader of such a community is usually either a foreign missionary who has already spent several years in the republic and is able to speak both Tatar and Russian fluently; or an ethnic Tatar who has received special training, often outside of Tatarstan.[48] Where levels of religious tolerance toward "non-traditional" religions are relatively low, members of evangelical Christian communities prefer to keep their religious affiliation clandestine, being afraid of attacks from both Muslims and Orthodox Christians;[49] usually only close family members are aware of conversion cases. In the Tatar-speaking community of the Jehovah's Witnesses, however, active engagement with mission is a believer's duty, therefore after each of my meetings with them a number of members went to preach on the streets and engage in door-to-door ministry.

Non-Orthodox Christian Churches in Tatarstan attract followers by emphasizing the accessibility of God's message. Instead of the Arabic language, in which the majority of Muslim Tatars have little proficiency, these Churches offer regular readings of the Scriptures in Tatar, arguing that the divine revelation is universal and accessible equally for everybody. The very fact that the essential tenets of the Bible could transcend linguistic barriers and cross-cultural differences is used as an argument to prove that the Bible contains the "real" truth, as opposed to the Qurʾān, which, as Muslim theologians argue, must be recited only in Arabic.

In order to strengthen the contextualization of the Christian message, the missionaries often employ local Tatar symbols, genres and media, such as songs, proverbs, rituals and arts. For instance, an inherent part of each meeting is singing songs, where Christian lyrics are set to traditional Tatar music.[50] This approach helps to disconnect ideas about Christianity from Russian culture, which many Tatars perceive as a threat to ethnic self-identification. The flip side of this practice is that by displaying their Tatarness so emphatically, the communities exclude people of other ethnic backgrounds, who are therefore less attracted to the services.

[48] Community members reported that there were several Tatars who travelled to the US to follow their training.

[49] See G. Fagan and O. Sibireva, "Violence Toward 'Nontraditional' Faiths in Russia", in *Religion and Violence in Russia: Context, Manifestations, and Policy*, ed. O. Oliker (Lanham, MD: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018), 67-116.

[50] See recordings by Wycliffe Global Alliance for Tatar evangelical communities at <https://soundcloud.com/wycliffealliance/the-love-of-god> (Accessed on 19 June 2018).

At the same time, evangelical Christianity also offers free space for those who disagree with Russia's traditional institutionalized religions; in the case of Tatarstan, it challenges the monopoly of Muslim and Orthodox Christian elites, however without putting believers into direct political opposition to the state and the official confessional bureaucracies. By inviting an open discussion of the Scriptures and giving the lead to locally trained cadres, the evangelical Churches claim to be indigenous establishments with no power hierarchy. As anthropologist Oscar Salemink elegantly put it (in the context of his research on Protestants in South Asia), although each evangelical group is "a modernist movement with often well-oiled transnational support from the US, it is ultimately also a local affair".[51]

8.5 Conclusion

Studying lexical choices for translating religious terminology can tell us whether a translation is denomination-specific, and what approach translators take to contextualize or "foreignize" the Christian message in the recipient culture.

Both the IBT and NWT versions followed the strategy of dynamic equivalence, which implies a conscious contextualization of the Scriptures and their enrooting in the pre-existing culture of the assumed recipients. As a result, many Christian terms are rendered in existing Tatar religious vocabulary, even though the latter is inherently linked to Islam. Thus, the language used by Christian Tatars does not highlight differences between Christianity and Islam, but, to the contrary, plays them down. The two versions for which this strategy is dominant (IBT and NWT) greatly resemble each other in lexicon and syntactic structures, with only a few exceptions (as in the case of NWT 'Jehovah', where the other texts only use 'Lord' and 'God'). By and large, these Tatar translations of the NT have contributed to the development of literary Tatar as a religious language not only in terms of adding new loanwords or compounds but also by expanding the semantic fields of existing religious terminology.

These translations are an important basis for the establishment and proliferation of what are pejoratively called "non-traditional" Christian communities in Tatarstan. Through their emphasis on Tatar culture and language, these communities deconstruct the linkage between Islam and "Tatarness". Members of such communities maintain a strong ethnic identity but Tatar traditional symbols and customs receive new Christian understandings for them.

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[51] O. Salemink, "Is Protestant Conversion a Form of Protest? Urban and Upland Protestants in Southeast Asia", in *Christianity and the State in Asia: Complicity and Conflict*, ed. J. Bautista and F. Lim (London: Routledge, 2009), 36-58. Here p. 41.

In this comparison, the RBO version stands out at many levels. The text is written in Kräshen and follows the pre-1917 orthography, which makes it exclusive for Kräshen community members who are familiar with the language. At the lexical level, there is an abundance of dialect vocabulary and of Russian loanwords, which are used to replace Tatar religious terms that, in the opinion of the translators, have Islamic connotations. The RBO and the translation team aspired to continue the projects started by Il'minskii, without changing his approach to translation.

Close co-existence of Christians and Muslims makes language in itself an identifying factor and it serves as a distinguishing marker of each religious community. The use of Arabic and Persian religious terminology is identified as exclusively Islamic by both Christian and Muslim communities. Moreover, the use of Arabic terminology in recent translations of the NT in Tatar marks the emergence of new, non-Orthodox Christian Churches, which have arrived in Russia primarily in the post-Soviet period. They distinguish themselves from the ROC by taking a different approach to translation (dynamic versus formal equivalence); the presence of Arabic and Persian religious vocabulary in Christian religious settings makes it an identity marker for communities to distinguish in- and out-group members.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

The argument of this thesis revolved around the question of how language – in particular, its religious variant – relates to social and political identities. In this book I have tried to show how institutions, communities and individual religious entrepreneurs in Russia design, shape and promote Islamic Russian and Christian Tatar, and sanction their use for the respective religious communities. By producing texts in these types of languages, which are used in specific contexts, societal actors utilize the power of language to symbolize identities; by creating a Christian variant of Tatar or an Islamic version of Russian, they assertively challenge the conventional notion, according to which the use of Russian and Tatar is inherently restricted to the realm of Christianity and Islam, respectively.

Religious texts and the very act of translation are not politically neutral. Rather, as the chapters in this thesis have shown, societal actors employ a religious language to claim political power and to advance their position and role in Russian society. By contrasting linguistic practices in six case studies on Russia's Islam and Orthodox Christianity (including Chapter 8, which also discusses other Christian denominations), this thesis provides further insights into the question of whether the two major religions follow similar patterns of instrumentalizing linguistic elements for social and political purposes. Against the background of unequal power relations between Islam and Christianity, and in the light of their different positions vis-à-vis the state, do the two religions in Russia have similar goals when they enter the linguistic realm of the other – when Christians use a "Muslim" vernacular and when Muslims claim that Russian is also a language of Islam in Russia? And do they face the same challenges?

9.1 Convergence in the "traditionalism" box

The thesis has zoomed in on official Orthodox Christian (Chapter 2) and Islamic elites (Chapter 3), and on state-registered Bible translation organizations (Chapter 8); together (though from different sides of the religious spectrum) they all shape what I have referred to as the mainstream discourse on religion. However, most of the case studies looked at users of religious language that find themselves at the margins of their

respective religious domains. These were in-between communities of Christian Tatars (Chapter 7) and ethnic Russian Muslims (Chapter 4), and religious entrepreneurs who do not fit into the conventional power structures (Polosin and Sysoev in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively). What unites them all is that despite differences in their proximity to the state and their opportunities for outreach, all the players discussed in this thesis are being pressed into the ideological framework of "traditionalism". This framework, as discussed in Chapter 2, is introduced and backed by the Russian state. The presidential administration has successfully imposed a powerful and at the same time blurry narrative of moderate conservatism. It is explicit in its anti-Western, anti-liberal direction and in its promotion of so-called "traditional values"; this focus on "traditionalism" eliminates religious organizations and communities that cannot demonstrate a long historical presence in Russia, and that cannot claim to have made a positive contribution to Russia's development and culture in accordance with the state's current political course. Only if religions pass the test, with the state and the ROC as the major referees, will they be accepted in the traditionalism framework; from that point on, they can develop a certain ideological diversity.

We have seen that references to Russia's past are recurrent in all the case studies, as the actors strive to be seen as part of Russia's historical identity in order to gain access to power and resources. Both Muslims and Christians engage in the search for historical models and offer their new interpretations as conforming to Russia's established interests in past and present. This can include arguments that challenge Russia's established historiography, as long as this revisionism comes in the name of Russia's common good. For instance, DUM RF's leadership has challenged the point of view – prominent in Soviet historiography and repeated in contemporary Russia's history schoolbooks – that the Mongols only exerted a negative and regressive impact on Russia. DUM RF Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin and his deputy Damir Mukhetdinov assertively argue that Muscovy advanced its statehood and power *thanks to* the Tatar Golden Horde, which shielded Russia from pernicious influences coming from the medieval West; on the basis of this historical model, the Tatars of today's Russia can claim to be continuing a positive and age-old cooperation between Russians and Muslims, although now with reversed roles.

In a similar way, Sysoev's community of Christian Tatars in Moscow have also argued that as far back as the seventh century, Turks on what today is Russian soil embraced Christianity, with the conversion of Bulghar Khan Kubrat as the most prominent example. This link is not only a way to enroot Christian Tatars historically, but also to reject the argument that Orthodox Tatar communities in the Volga region

were simply the result of violent Russification policies. The further back into the past the actors go, the scanter their evidence becomes. While it was not the task of this thesis to test such claims, it is not difficult to understand that this discourse relies on almost unlimited flexibility in manipulating historical arguments and creating cultural fictions.

When they accept inclusion in the "traditionalism" framework, religious actors enter a realm of terms and concepts that are vague enough to allow political manoeuvring, on a single condition – they must still be convincing in their claim to provide support to the country's social and political stability. Even actors who nominally oppose the state, and whom one would therefore expect to resist the pressure to fit into the official framework, in the end also play by the rules, as we saw with the example of Polosin. Ethnic Russian Muslims, whose conversion to Islam suggests opposition to both the conventional ethnicity-religion pairs and the dominant role of the ROC, in fact just offer another way to "make Islam Russian", which is not so very different from the official Muftis, who operate in the traditionalism box.

It is the state that defines the rules of the game; it can expand or – as happens more often – curb the space in which religious actors are allowed to operate. The possible scope within which "traditionality" could be defined is in constant flux, and the players have to make guesses and take risks to match it. As Marlène Laruelle summarizes it:

> "[The] doctrinal products are elaborated by different groups of ideological entrepreneurs who have room to act, to determine their preferences, and to cultivate their own networks. Their fragile entrepreneurship must work in permanent negotiation and tension with competing groups and the presidential administration itself. Just as the oligarchs' empire is not secure and remains dependent on individual loyalty, the empire of these ideological entrepreneurs is also unstable and can be challenged and dismembered".[1]

This means that even large institutions of influence, such as the ROC, which has cultivated a long-term relationship with the state, remain vulnerable and prone to changes of the country's political course; and this is even more true for the smaller and fragmented Islamic organizations and communities, especially since they constantly have to clean "their Islam" from associations with radicalism and terror. Pressed into the "traditionalism" box, both Islam and Orthodox Christianity find themselves next to each other, under similar constraints and with hopes of gaining similar benefits. In this narrow space, what we observe is a convergence of these two religions.

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[1] Laruelle, "Putin's Regime and the Ideological Market: A Difficult Balancing Game".

At the nominal level, the big faith organizations are already forced to cooperate and develop an interreligious "dialogue" – however shallow and declarative-natured this dialogue in fact is – in order to sustain religious peace in the country; but more importantly, these religions are also coming closer to each other at much deeper and more fundamental levels. They are developing similar views on Russia's domestic and foreign politics, similar doctrinal lines of defence against the challenges of modernity (including a "traditionalist" definition of human rights),[2] and both of them interpret and protect societal moral norms along the same conservative lines. This is what Alfrid Bustanov and Michael Kemper referred to as the "convergence" taking place between the two major confessions, and this phenomenon affects not only the state-promoted religious institution but goes far beyond them.[3]

My thesis contributes to the study of this Russian convergence between Islam and Christianity (which, while perhaps not unique, is astounding, especially given the image of Russia as an Orthodox country) by elaborating a framework for the linguistic mechanisms that result from this process. Taken together, the text corpus of my work – sacred texts, prayers, preaching and religious doctrines, as well as life narratives of converts – mirrors these transformations precisely; religious language is fluid and flexible enough to adapt to the changing environment and function as a reliable reference point for analysing the power play between Islam and Christianity in Russia.

9.2 Language as a mirror

The case studies have shown that language – as a system of communication and a set of symbols – helps us to understand the political and ideological convergence of religious institutions and communities pressed into the "traditionalism" box.

With the naked eye, we see how Russia's Islamic elites almost unrestrictedly borrow, use and re-contextualize Orthodox religious vocabulary when they employ it for conveying Islamic messages. It is obvious that their primary audience is the Russian state, rather than the Muslim community. By using a terminology familiar to non-Muslims, Islamic actors (whether Muslim by birth like Mufti Gainutdin or Russian converts like Polosin) signal their embeddedness in the mainstream discourse, and consequently their loyalty to and support for the political regime. However, this strategy of "translating" Islam we find not only in speeches that address the country's political elites or Russia's society at large; it also appears prominently in texts that one would think are produced only for inner consumption: religious literature, prayers and

[2] Agadjanian, "Liberal Individual and Christian Culture"; Stöckl, *The Russian Orthodox Church and Human Rights*.
[3] Bustanov and Kemper, "Russia's Islam and Orthodoxy beyond the Institutions".

*khuṭba*s, Friday sermons. Thereby, these Islamic leaders draw Islam closer to Orthodox Christianity not only at the level of politics, but also at the much more profound level of symbols and notions.

A similar process is also witnessed in the Kräshen language: Tatar is brought closer to Orthodoxy, and hence also to Russian culture, through the replacement of "foreign" (Arabic/Persian) Islamic terminology by Russian loanwords. This strategy was first explicitly formulated and introduced by imperial Orthodox missionaries of the nineteenth century, but today it is maintained by the community members themselves – notwithstanding the obvious fact that the Russian loanwords are equally "alien" to the linguistic structures of the Tatar language, which of course continues to overlap with most of the Kräshen grammar and lexicon.

My study demonstrated that religious language can be a unifying but also a divisive force. Members of various religious groups want to recognize who belongs to "us" and who to "them" – this is the core of identity-building in any community, with belief and idiom as central markers. To quote from Brubaker, religion and language have always been "basic principles of vision and division of the social world", since they categorize the world by "distinct, bounded and self-reproducing communities"; and claims are made in the name of both for recognition, resources and reproduction.[4] This power to distinguish in- and out-groups is naturally amplified in a *religious variant of a language*.

9.2.1 Religious language as a marker of in-group identity

For all the case studies discussed in this book, religious language is important first and foremost as a marker of identity, making it possible to distinguish between the good "us" and the bad "them". This division is inherent to the very nature of the "traditionalism" paradigm, which imposes binary labels: "traditional" versus "foreign", "loyal" against "dangerous", "local" in contrast to "imported".

The absence of Arabic words, which are perceived as "foreign", unites the linguistic practices discussed in several case studies in this thesis. For the "turbaned" Islamic elites as well as for Russian converts, this is a way to construct themselves in opposition to the "Wahhabi", "Salafi" Islam labels, the adherents of which are believed to be more prone to pepper their Russian with Islamic terminology. In a broader sense, it is also an attempt to construct Russia's Islam in opposition to the Islam of Arabs, in particular. Russia's Islam is constructed as different, unique (*samobytnyi*), but

[4] Brubaker, "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference", p. 16.

nonetheless an equally valuable kind of Islam. Obviously it is impossible to make a complete break with the Arab world, also in the light of Russia's foreign policy, which uses Russia's Islam as an instrument for bonding, just as the ROC is part of Russia's diplomacy to Orthodox countries.[5] Respect for the Arabic language will also remain important for the Muftiates in order not to catapult themselves out of the global *umma*. The Arabic language is maintained in prayers as a "sacred" language, where it is safely detached from the "terrestrial" ethnic cultures and identities.

Similarly, the Kräshens also "purify" their language from Islamic terms. Here too the replacement of Tatar/Arabic terms by Slavic concepts is a conscious political choice; there would have been alternative scenarios, for example to continue with the existent and religious lexicon, as Orthodox Churches in the Middle East do in their Arabic texts, or to simply go back to the Greek terminology that once formed the stock on which Church Slavonic was also developed. However, turning to replacement of the familiar lexicon by new coinages and other loanwords enables the Kräshen communities to connect to the ROC; this affiliation consequently empowers Kräshen leaders in their political struggle for recognition as an ethnic group independent from Muslim Tatars. With their linguistic choices, these Kräshens consciously challenge the majority of Tatars, for whom the linguistic marker of in-group identity is constructed through a negative relation to the Russian language.

My study of New Testament translations (Chapter 8) demonstrated that the Tatars perceive one group of loanwords – Arabic and Persian – as tokens of "sameness", whereas borrowings from Russian are purged and rejected. The context – namely the very fact that this "familiar" Islamic vocabulary is used to introduce religions that fall entirely beyond the "traditionalism" paradigm – seems to be a secondary issue.

9.2.2 A marker of ethnic identity

Roger Brubaker, in his analysis of language and religion as instruments of differentiation, argues that "language conflict has lost some of its intensity and transformative potential in recent decades, as the high noon of language-based […] conflicts appears to have passed".[6]

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[5] A. Malashenko, "The Islam Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 8 August 2007 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_9133> (Accessed on 18 July 2018); R. Crews, "A Patriotic Islam? Russia's Muslims under Putin", *World Politics Review*, March 8 2016 <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/18150/a-patriotic-islam-russia-s-muslims-under-putin> (Accessed on 18 July 2018).

[6] Brubaker, "Language, Religion and the Politics of Difference", p. 13.

What we are observing in Russia, however, is different: rather than fading away, language conflict is transforming, as part of a broader field of tension between the major nationalities and the major religions. In fact, the centuries-old tension between the dominant Russian language and Russia's minority languages has substantially moved into the realm of the discourse on religion. Religion and language as markers of a distinct ethnic identity are often difficult to separate from each other; rather, there are default religion-language-ethnicity triangles: an ethnic Russian is supposed to be an Orthodox Christian speaker of Russian, whereas an ethnic Tatar is expected to be Muslim and, if not able to speak it fluently, then at least able to understand the Tatar language. In the name of social stability, the official religious establishments, and also the state, support the status quo and do not openly promote crossing these boundaries. In fact, in a time of political centralization that takes away prerogatives from Russia's "ethnic republics" (as seen in the Introduction in the case of Tatar language education in Tatarstan), the political representation of minorities makes way for religious representations, bolstering the authority of the spiritual administrations. The degree to which either Russians or Tatars actually practise their religions is irrelevant in this scenario.

In cases where the religion/ethnicity pair deviates from the conventional norms, it is the language that is emphasized and overly "ethnicized", as if to compensate for the problematic ambiguity of the unconventional religious affiliation. Chapters 4 and 7 provided examples to support this claim. Russian converts to Islam (Chapter 4) jealously guard the "purity" of Russian and claim to be its "most noble" speakers; they use the same exclusivist, anti-Muslim, anti-migration narratives that dominate the mainstream discourse and share with the state the fear of "ethnic" Islam. Perhaps it is a far stretch, but this phenomenon appears to constitute a curious case of Islamophobia among Muslims.

As shown in Chapter 7, Kräshens, who also continue to "deviate" in their language, face double marginalization. Among Tatars they are seen, in the best case, as a "special" and marginal part of their nation – but Tatar nationalists see them as betrayers of the Tatar nation and demand their "return" into the fold of Islam. And the ROC only recently acknowledged the Kräshens as part of its flock. Meanwhile, the Kräshen language has a lower symbolic status than Tatar, and continues to be listed as a dialect; against the background of the "battle" between Tatarstan and Moscow for the status of the Tatar language, the pressure on the community is only increasing.

In addition, evangelical missions use traditional "Islamic" Tatar for their translation of the New Testament, to produce religions that are Tatar in form, but Christian in content (Chapter 8).

9.2.3 A marker of national identity

As Edwin Bacon has observed, Russia is the case where nationalist leaders and elites promote religiously inflected nationalism, or what he calls "reasoned religio-nationalism".[7] This type of nationalism expounds and reinforces the relationship between religion and nation; the term "nation" here goes beyond ethnic Russian claims, to include a broad vision of a civic, multi-ethnic Russian nation. Thus, Russian religio-nationalism is an attempt to articulate and justify a connection between Russian Orthodoxy and Russian nationalism, "from an explicit nationalist and political position, rather than from a theo-political perspective".[8]

The case studies on Islamic Russian reveal that when Muslim leaders enter the "traditionalism" discourse, they have to come to terms with the inevitable link between the Russian language and Russian ethnic identity, as well as Russian nationalism. The actors try to turn this ambiguity in their favour, as we see in their use of the very terms "Russia's (*rossiiskii*) Islam" and "Russian (*russkii*) Islam". DUM RF leaders appeal to a national identity as going beyond regional ethnic identities; Mukhetdinov uses the word "*rossiiskii*" to explicitly disassociate Russian ethnic identity from Russia's civic identity. Although the word has an official flavour, it is a safe choice. In contrast, Russian converts have opted for the connotations of *russkii* linked to ethnic identity (as discussed above). Viacheslav Ali Polosin tried to manoeuvre between the two camps and reproduced the ambiguity of the term *russkii* as used in the state discourse, which "serves the authorities' line of not taking a definite stance on the national identity of Russia".[9]

However, there are also notable experiments that defy the common discourse paradigms. Resisting any attempts to link language with ethnic/national identities,

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[7] E. Bacon, "Reflexive and Reasoned Religious Nationalism: The Exploratory Case of Russia," *Politics and Religion* 11:2 (2018), 396-420. Here p. 400.

[8] Ibid., p. 403.

[9] M. Laruelle, "Misinterpreting Nationalism: Why Russkii is Not a Sign of Ethnonationalism", *Russia in Global Affairs*, 13 April 2016 <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/PONARS-Eurasia/Misinterpreting-Nationa-lism-Why-Russkii-is-Not-a-Sign-of-Ethnonationalism-18105> (Accessed on 18 July 2018). Also M. Laruelle, "Russia as an anti-liberal European civilisation", in *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*, ed. P. Kolstø and H. Blakkisrud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 275-97. Here pp. 275-76.

Sysoev's concept of uranopolitism rejects all ethnic or national connotations of Orthodoxy, and thus of religious language in general (see Chapter 6). One could argue that Sysoev was pursuing practical goals: his exceptional stance helped him to legitimize his radical Orthodox mission among Tatars and other Muslim communities, as did his claim to be proud of his own Tatar ancestors. The radicalism of the *uranopolitism* vision, coupled with his own messianic charisma and his open ambition to become a saintly martyr, might have increased the appeal of his preaching of Orthodox Christianity among the communities where he preached in Tatarstan and Central Asia. However, in his books we find evidence that he was indeed convinced of the principle that one cannot serve two kings at the same time, and that one has to choose between the terrestrial and the heavenly kingdoms; *uranopolitism* is Sysoev's argument that religious language must convey only one identity – that is, religious belonging.

9.2.4 A marker of non-religious identity

In that sense, Sysoev is rather exceptional among all of the case studies. What we see more often is that players who evoke religion tend to refer to ideas and identities associated with that religion but not to theological dogma, making faith exchangeable and, by extension, irrelevant. In the Russian-speaking realm, any terminology of Islamic origin is perceived as "foreign" and should therefore be avoided, while for Tatars using the Tatar language, this same terminology bears positive associations and perhaps even high status, and is encouraged and promoted. This is also valid beyond the discourse on faith issues. The costs of these practices – possible distortions or loss of meaning, theological clashes – seem to be of little relevance. The actors who engage in translation do not elaborate on their linguistic choices in terms of theological accuracy. In fact, there are attempts to approximate Islam and Christianity at all levels, but not yet in the field of theology. Religion is thereby *de facto* defined as culture, not as faith.[10] Language primarily symbolizes "belonging" and only after this, if at all, "believing".

9.3 Toward a painful merger

Inside the "traditionalism" box, Christianity and Islam are being forced to bring about a *sblizhenie* – a mutual movement toward each other (although on the understanding that the ROC, with its gravity, will have to move less than the "light"

[10] O. Roy, "Beyond populism: the conservative right, the courts, the churches and the concept of a Christian Europe", in *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, ed. N. Marzouki et al. (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 185-201. Here p. 193.

and vulnerable representations of Islam). Yet the process is not without inherent conflicts; in fact, the tension inherent in the paradigms of "us versus them", Christianity versus Islam, which has characterized relations between Orthodoxy and Islam over centuries, is now placed into one joint box, and the limited space within that box might increase these tensions.

First of all, language itself is becoming a battleground. The ROC has been visibly anxious about the Mufti's strategy of using Orthodox terms.[11] As a counterpoint, the Tatarstani Muftiate DUM RT resists the Russification of Islam, and makes sure that at least Friday sermons remain in Tatar.

The shared history is becoming a second field of combat. It has been easy to define and unite against the enemy from the outside: the image of a pernicious West that attacks Russia's traditional values has been used as a rhetorical tool by both Orthodox Christian and Muslim leaders; and the latter project themselves as a bulwark against radical Islam from the Middle East. But it is much more difficult to deal with enemies from *within*. How to reconcile tensions between the two major religions that trace back to the much-celebrated shared history? Who is allowed to lay claim to historical events and personalities that empowered the one, but enslaved the other? One could turn a blind eye to the "problematic" episodes in history; this is what the Tatarstani leadership does when it promotes the monastery island of Sviiazhsk as a cultural sight without giving attention to the fact that Sviiazhsk played a crucial role in Muscovy's siege of Kazan in the mid-sixteenth century, thereby bringing about the fall of the Kazan Khanate. Another way to deal with the problem is to offer alternative interpretations of history, as does the community of baptized Tatars in Moscow, which indeed denies the very fact of any assimilation or Russification of Tatars by Russians.

The need to adjust to the traditionalism paradigm is also deepening the existing cracks within religious institutions and communities. DUM RF, although close to the Kremlin, is under criticism from various Muslim and non-Muslim sides, and has difficulty reaching out to the community of Muslims. The state-registered Islamic bureaucracies are losing ground to alternative communities. State-induced attempts to consolidate a joint official "traditionalist" Islam by defining its content only drive Russia's numerous DUMs further apart, as demonstrated by the episode of the 2016 Grozny *fatwā*, which tried to limit what "traditionalist Sunnism" is supposed to be (Chapter 5). Similarly, the ROC does not have much control over its fundamentalist wing, although one could argue that it benefits from its ultra-conservative camp to

[11] Silant'ev, "Pokhititeli rozhdestva".

enforce its authority in society. Similarly, Sysoev's popularity forced the ROC to give up its reluctance toward aggressive Orthodox mission; and the cases of Polosin and less prominent converts to Islam revealed the ROC's difficulties with its "renegades" and "apostates".

When they escalate, these tensions "within" the box can produce sudden outbursts of violence. It is plausible to argue that the politicization of the Kräshen language and Kräshen identity provided the ammunition for the unprecedented series of arson attacks on Kräshen churches in Tatarstan. Similarly, the marginalization of "non-traditional" forms of Islam can be seen as having backfired when prominent religious leaders in Tatarstan were attacked, seriously injuring the Mufti Il'dus Faizov and killing his deputy, Valiulla Iakupov, in 2012. And the assassin of Sysoev was reportedly a "radical" Muslim who opposed his mission.

In order to resolve these inner conflicts, faith bureaucracies need the state. It not only protects them from potential "foreign" enemies, thereby reducing the pressure of competition that stems from religious grassroots movements; it also strengthens them against the societal forces that question the authority of religious institutions in general. The state has an interest in using tools of control to administer "traditional" religions, which means that legal prosecution or exclusion from political favour may also be applied within the box. This means that the state, although constitutionally defined as secular, serves as the protector and administrator of religions.

The six case studies of this thesis have juxtaposed changes in religious terminology with shifting discursive claims on ethnic, religious and national identities. Using the languages of religion, Christians and Muslims who participate in shaping the discourse on religion in present-day Russia have been continuously pushing, redrawing, blurring and defending the boundaries between their respective religious communities. Given this reality, the thesis calls for religious texts, written and oral, to be viewed not only as passive sources that help us to understand religion. As the study has demonstrated, religious language also has the power to ignite social changes. A careful examination of this language and the ideas, values and attitudes associated with it, is crucial for unpacking complex social interactions.

Appendices

Appendix I

The linguistic corpus: Discourse of Mufti Gainutdin

General information

Language: *Russian*
Total number of words: *91048*
Number of documents: *70* (sorted by date of speech)
All websites were last accessed on 25 June 2017.

Table 7. Linguistic corpus № 1

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
1.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii Ravilia Gainutdina vo vremia vstrechi s Ministrom inostrannykh del RF.	26.02.2006	1299	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13060/?sphrase_id=8760
2.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na soveshchanii "Etnicheskoe i religioznoe mnogoobrazie kak osnova stabil'nosti i razvitiia rossiiskogo obshchestva".	30.01.2007	1038	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13037/
3.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii "Aktual'nye problemy protivodeistviia religiozno-politicheskomu ekstremizmu".	6.06.2007	2603	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/7182/
4.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii v Malaizii.	26.01.2008	2411	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/7149/
5.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii "Islam pobedit terrorizm".	3.07.2008	1090	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13038/
6.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii "Razvitie islamskogo teologicheskogo i religioznogo obrazovaniia v Rossii i za rubezhom".	13.11.2008	1910	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13034/
7.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na zasedanii Kruglogo stola v Obshchestvennoi palate.	3.03.2009	1061	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13030/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
8.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na sovmestnom zasedanii Prezidiuma Gosudarstvennogo Soveta Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Soveta po vzaimodeistviiu s religioznymi ob"edineniiami pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii.	11.03.2009	1388	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13029/
9.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na otkrytii Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Islamskii banking: spetsifika i perspektivy".	17.03.2009	1001	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13026/
10.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na III s"ezde liderov mirovykh i traditsionnykh religii.	1.07.2009	1063	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12985/
11.	Doklad Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Rossiia i islamskii mir: partnerstvo vo imia stabil'nosti".	24.09.2009	2100	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13025/
12.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na otkrytii Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii "Islamskoe finansirovanie: perspektivy razvitiia v Rossii".	10.12.2009	819	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12998/
13.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii "Musul'manskoe dukhovenstvo i sovremennye vyzovy bezopasnosti Rossii".	14.04.2010	621	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12986/
14.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na vstreche s rukovodstvom departamentov Pravitel'stva Moskvy.	5.10.2010	832	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12979/
15.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina: Khranit' i berech' znaniia.	2.12.2010	1693	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12977/
16.	Vystuplenie na tseremonii vstupleniia R.A. Kadyrova v dolzhnost' glavy Chechenskoi Respubliki.	5.04.2011	530	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12973/
17.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na 32-m zasedanii rossiiskogo organizatsionnogo komiteta "Pobeda".	29.04.2011	1102	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12972/
18.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na VIII ezhegodnoi	15.07.2011	777	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12964/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
	nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii "Faizkhanovskie chteniia".			
19.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii "Puti sokhraneniia mezhnatsional'nogo i mezhkonfessional'nogo soglasiia"	16.07.2011	1432	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12963/
20.	Propoved' Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v Moskovskoi Sobornoi mecheti v Id-al'-Fitr (Uraza-Bairam).	30.08.2011	1119	http://muslim.ru/articles/297/13082/
21.	Propoved' Muftiia Sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina (Kurban-Bairam).	6.11.2011	1871	http://muslim.ru/articles/297/13080/
22.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na vstreche Prezidenta RF D.A. Medvedeva s rukovoditeliami musul'manskikh organizatsii Rossii.	29.11.2011	1039	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12967/
23.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na Kruglom stole "Sluzhba v organakh vnutrennikh del RF: dukhovnost', moral' i zakon".	28.03.2012	762	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12956/
24.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na IV S"ezde liderov mirovykh i traditsionnykh religii.	31.05.2012	1532	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12953/
25.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na zasedanii Soveta po vzaimodeistviiu s religioznymi ob"edineniiami pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii.	4.07.2012	575	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12950/
26.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na IV Medzhlise Soveta muftiev Rossii.	28.09.2012	3926	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/7248/
27.	Propoved' Muftiia Sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v den' prazdnovaniia Kurban-Bairam.	26.10.2012	1936	http://muslim.ru/articles/297/13091/
28.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na Zasedanii Konsul'tativnogo soveta pri predsedatele Soveta Federatsii Federal'nogo Sobraniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii po mezhnatsional'nym otnosheniiam i vzaimodeistviiu s religioznymi ob"edineniiami.	9.11.2012	1157	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/7263/
29.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na VIII Musul'manskom forume "Konsolidatsiia	27.11.2012	1509	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/291/12625/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
	musul'manskogo soobshchestva stran SNG: dostizheniia i tseli".			
30.	Dlia razvitiia tatarskoi natsii neobkhodimo edinstvo dukhovenstva i natsional'noi intelligentsii.	7.12.2012	976	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13074/
31.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na torzhestvakh, posviashchennykh 100-letiiu Sobornoi mecheti goroda Iaroslavlia.	18.02.2013	991	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12983/
32.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Bogoslovy i islamskoe probuzhdenie".	29.04.2013	873	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8229/
33.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na IV forume "Natsional'naia samobytnost' i religiia".	26.05.2013	719	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13076/
34.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na II Vserossiiskom musul'manskom soveshchanii "Musul'mane Rossii i grazhdanskoe obshchestvo".	28.05.2013	2158	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8233/
35.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na Zasedanii Konsul'tativnogo soveta pri predsedatele Soveta Federatsii Federal'nogo Sobraniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii po mezhnatsional'nym otnosheniiam i vzaimodeistviiu s religioznymi ob"edineniiami.	6.06.2013	1159	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8234/
36.	Vystuplenie Muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii "Religiia i bezopasnost'".	21.08.2013	1952	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/9659/
37.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na vstreche Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii Vladimira Putina s muftiiami dukhovnykh upravlenii musul'man.	22.10.2013	508	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/9762/
38.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na S"ezde DUMNO.	7.11.2013	1500	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/277/7771/
39.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na IX Musul'manskom forume "Sotsializatsiia ummy v strategii razvitiia grazhdanskogo obshchestva".	9.12.2013	1259	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8255/
40.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na zasedanii Soveta po	24.04.2014	1004	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/10023/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
	vzaimodeistviiu s religioznymi ob"edineniiami pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii.			
41.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na Soveshchanii musul'man Evropy na vysshem urovne "Edinstvo v razlichiiakh – sovmestnye poiski budushchego v Evrope".	14.05.2014	939	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8293/
42.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii na VI Mezhdunarodnom mirotvorcheskom forume "Islam – religiia mira i sozidaniia".	30.05.2014	730	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8311/
43.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii: "Nravstvennost' i innovatsii - put' k uspekhu".	5.06.2014	701	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/285/8813/
44.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v Sovete Federatsii.	8.10.2014	723	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/11709/
45.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na VII Musul'manskom forume "Rossiia i Islamskii mir: vektory modernizatsii na prostranstve SNG".	14.11.2014	2238	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/12961/
46.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na otkrytii VII Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-bogoslovskoi konferentsii "Rol' i znachenie islamskogo bogoslovskogo naslediia v ukreplenii dukhovnogo prostranstva Evrazii" v ramkakh X Mezhdunarodnogo musul'manskogo foruma.	11.12.2014	957	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/8361/
47.	Vystuplenie muftiia Ravilia Gainutdina na sovmestnom soveshchanii sotrudnikov apparatov DUM RF i SMR.	26.02.2015	2715	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/280/8522/
48.	Vystuplenie predsedatelia Dukhovnogo upravleniia musul'man Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na Pervom moskovskom molodezhnom forume "Most Moskva – Tatarstan".	18.04.2015	1146	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/7327/
49.	Doklad Muftiia Sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na II "Bigievskikh chteniiakh".	18.05.2015	2043	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/13248/
50.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii i Dukhovnogo upravleniia musul'man Rossiiskoi Federatsii Muftiia Sheikha Ravilia	10.06.2015	1506	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/13391/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
	Gainutdina na V S"ezde liderov mirovykh i traditsionnykh religii.			
51.	Vystuplenie predsedatelia DUM RF i SMR muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na zasedanii Gruppy strategicheskogo videniia "Rossiia – Islamskii mir".	11.06.2015	1962	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/13394/?sphrase_id=8759
52.	Propoved' predsedatelia DUM RF i SMR muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina.	17.07.2015	2164	http://muslim.ru/articles/291/13693/
53.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Dukhovnogo upravleniia musul'man Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na torzhestvennom otkrytii novogo kompleksa Moskovskoi Sobornoy mecheti.	23.09.2015	586	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/13882/
54.	Propoved' predsedatelia DUM RF i SMR muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina.	24.09.2015	1365	http://muslim.ru/articles/298/13876/
55.	Muftii Sheikh Ravil' Gainutdin: Ia prizyvaiu k edineniiu!	20.11.2015	555	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/288/14139/
56.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na XI Mezhdunarodnom musul'manskom forume "Religiia, identichnost' i integratsiia v usloviiakh tsennostnykh transformatsii".	15.12.2015	1208	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/14299/
57.	Muftii Sheikh Ravil' Gainutdin: obshchaia dlia mnozhestva narodov nashei strany gosudarstvennost' voskhodit imenno k musul'manskomu gosudarstvu.	5.05.2016	1103	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/15456/
58.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Organizatsiia palomnichestva rossiiskikh musul'man: proshloe i nastoiashchee".	2.06.2016	1396	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/269/15631/
59.	Propoved' Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii I DUM RF muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina.	5.07.2016	1259	http://muslim.ru/articles/298/15786/
60.	Vystuplenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii v gorode Urumchi.	20.07.2016	1750	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/15903/
61.	Propoved' Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii I DUM RF muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v Moskovskoi Sobornoi mecheti v Id-al'-Adkha (Kurban-Bairam).	12.09.2016	1861	http://muslim.ru/articles/298/16130/
62.	Rech' Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii I DUM RF muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na zasedanii SHURA SMR.	26.09.2016	3183	http://muslim.ru/articles/269/16178/

№	Title	Date	Words	URL
63.	Neobkhodimo vospityvat' v studentakh analiticheskie sposobnosti, bogoslovskoe, filosofskoe i gumanitarnoe myshlenie.	31.10.2016	1154	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/279/16376/
64.	Privetstvie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina X iubileinoi Assamblei Russkogo mira.	3.11.2016	591	http://muslim.ru/articles/279/16429/
65.	Obrashchenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina po sluchaiu Mavlid an-Nabii.	11.12.2016	330	http://muslim.ru/articles/291/16677/
66.	Privetstvie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina uchastnikam mezhdunarodnogo foruma v Saratove.	3.04.2017	364	http://muslim.ru/articles/287/18126/
67.	Privetstvie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina uchastnikam XIV "Faizkhanovskikh chtenii".	12.04.2017	892	http://muslim.ru/articles/279/18191/
68.	Privetstvie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v adres uchastnikov nauchnoi konferentsii "Islam i obshchestvennoe soglasie" v Minske.	24.04.2017	352	http://muslim.ru/articles/279/18257/
69.	"My zhdem rasshireniia sviazei s islamskim mirom" - Ravil' Gainutdin.	No date	621	http://www.muslim.ru/articles/296/13044/
70.	Vystuplenie Predsedatelia Soveta muftiev Rossii muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina na konferentsii vtorogo Simpoziuma musul'manskikh obshchin i men'shinstv stran Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evropy.	No date	2159	http://muslim.ru/articles/269/7103/

Appendix II

The linguistic corpus: Conversion narratives of ethnic Russian converts to Islam

General information

Language: *Russian*

Total number of words: *74757*

Number of documents: *50*, of which 27 by female and 23 by male authors (numbered as they appear in the corpus)

All websites were last accessed on 4 April 2017.

Table 8. Linguistic corpus № 2

№	Name	Title	Date	Words	URL
1.	Aisha (Larisa), female	"Ia schastliva ot togo, chto musul'manka!".	31.03.2010	782	http://www.islamdag.ru/v-islame/26425
2.	Marina Dobrodeeva, female	"Ia nikogda ne ostavliu moi Islam!".	13.03.2010	1927	http://www.whyislam.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=547
3.	Yulia, female	"Ia poverila v to, chto Koran – slovo Bozhie".	13.03.2010	722	http://www.whyislam.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=559
4.	Khadidzha (Oksana), female	"Islam interesoval menia s detstva".	13.03.2010	853	http://www.whyislam.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=562
5.	Nina, female	"Tol'ko v Islame ia poniala, kak eto khorosho – byt' zhenshchinoi".	16.06.2009	1266	http://ru.abna24.com/cultural/article/archive/2009/06/16/118880/story.html
6.	Selma, female	"Ia nikogda ne pomeniaiu svoiu veru".	31.05.2012	313	http://madrasah2.ru/mir-prinimaet-islam/novoobrashhennyie-sestryi-rasskazyivayut
7.	Maksim Sitnikov, male	"Zhizn'– eto dar Boga".	13.02.2009	1597	http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=monitor&id=13406
8.	Aleksei, male	"Ia – russkii musul'manin".	31.03.2014	1317	http://www.colta.ru/articles/society/2698
9.	Ali, male	"Ia – russkii musul'manin".	31.03.2014	1842	http://www.colta.ru/articles/society/2698
10.	Sogdiana, female	"Moia istoriia priniatiia Islama".	15.12.2012	1007	http://www.whyislam.to/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5482
11.	Dzhamilia (Olga), female	"Istoriia russkoi sestry".	02.05.2013	1543	http://minbar.kz/islam/blog/id/2115.html
12.	Abu Abdulla ar-Rusi, male	"Kak eto bylo…".	18.10.2006	5076	https://forum.ge/?f=84&showtopic=33713220&st=0

№	Name	Title	Date	Words	URL
13.	No name, male	“Istina odna”.	No date	2031	http://www.fondihlas.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7635:2013-12-12-09-00-40&catid=95:2011-05-06-06-42-52&Itemid=321
14.	Ali Russkii, male	“Istoriia priniatiia Islama”.	1.05.2004	1153	https://userdie.wordpress.com/история-принятия-ислама/
15.	Sergei Romanovich, male	“Akter Sergei Romanovich s raskazom o svoem puti v islam”.	10.11.2014	1584	https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=25340
16.	Vladislav Sokhin, male	“Moi put’ v Islam”.	No date	3231	http://www.way-to-Allāh.com/ru/journey/Vladislav_Sohin_ru.html
17.	No name, male	“Vsevyshnii pomog mne vo vsem”.	26.12.2015.	2226	http://islamdag.ru/v-islame/26567
18.	Abu Iasin, male	“Priniatie Islama – eto ne predatel’stvo, a vozvrashchenie v lono istinnoi very samykh drevnikh nashikh predkov”.	29.04.2014	4863	http://www.whyislam.to/main/vstrecha-s-abu-yasinom.htm
19.	Aisha, female	“Iz mraka nevezhestva k svetu Islama”.	15.11.2014.	4743	http://islamdag.ru/v-islame/26559
20.	Kseniia, female	“Istoriia prinatiia islama russkoi devishkoi”.	31.08.2010	703	https://islamistina.wordpress.com/category/принявшие-ислам/
21.	Eduard, male	“Kak Eduard stal Rasulom”.	07.02.2015	1119	http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=143205&lang=ru
22.	Dzhamil’ia (Natal’ia), female	“Ia priniala Islam”.	01.05.2014	1525	http://musulmanin.com/ya-prinyala-islam-istoriya-5.html
23.	Abdul’karim, male	“Istoriia islama russkogo parnia”.	21.08.2008	850	http://www.whyislam.to/oni-prinyali-islam/istorya-islama-russkogo-parnya.htm
24.	Ali, male	“Kakovo byt’ musul’maninom?”	2008	934	http://www.muslimpress.ru/intervyu/kakovo-byt-musulmaninom.htm
25.	Aleksandra, female	“Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu”.	24.02.2015	654	http://www.muslim-info.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=32&t=6&start=90
26.	Iakub, male	“Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu”.	2015	634	http://mag.afisha.ru/stories/musulmane-v-moskve/
27.	Muslima (Anna) Kobulova, female	“Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu”.	2015	621	http://mag.afisha.ru/stories/musulmane-v-moskve/
28.	Viktor, male	“Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu”.	2015	666	http://mag.afisha.ru/stories/musulmane-v-moskve/
29.	Malika (Elena), female	“Kak liudi prikhodiat k islamu”.	2015	921	http://mag.afisha.ru/stories/musulmane-v-moskve/
30.	Minazhat, female	“Neofity v khadzhe”.	19.11.2013	1417	http://islamdag.ru/v-islame/26540

№	Name	Title	Date	Words	URL
31.	Viktor (Abdulla), male	“Russkie musul’mane”.	03.06.2015	320	http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528?page=11&part=11
32.	Aleksei, male	“Russkie musul’mane”.	03.06.2015	376	http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528?page=11&part=11
33.	Klavdia, female	“Russkie musul’mane”.	03.06.2015	173	http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528?page=11&part=11
34.	Anastasiia (Aisha) Korchagina, female	“Russkie musul’mane”.	03.06.2015	290	http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528?part=7
35.	Ivan, male	“Russkie musul’mane”.	03.06.2015	262	http://www.colta.ru/articles/specials/7528?page=11&part=11
36.	El’vira, female	“Russkie zhenshchiny i islam”.	05.04.2010.	1235	http://www.vestiturkey.com/russkie-zenin-i-islam-395h.htm
37.	Oleg Kalenchuk, male	“Russkie musul’mane – Bog vmesto Rodiny”.	28.02.2011	2229	http://www.rosbalt.ru/ukraina/2011/2/28/823883.html
38.	No name, female	“Snachala islam prinial moi razum i tol’ko potom serdtse”.	18.07.2013	2805	http://islamdag.ru/v-islame/26537
39.	Mariam, female	“Ia priniala Islam”.	24.02.2014	1795	http://musulmanin.com/ya-prinyala-islam-istoriya-3.html
40.	Aleksei, male	“Ia prinial Islam”.	25.12.2013	845	http://musulmanin.com/ya-prinyal-islam-istoriya-1.html
41.	Nataliia, female	“Ia priniala Islam”.	01.12.2013	3145	http://islamtv.ru/?modul=pages&id=58
42.	Anastasiia, female	“Ia priniala Islam”.	02.04.2014	1766	http://musulmanin.com/ya-prinyala-islam-istoriya-4.html
43.	Khadidzha (Svetlana), female	“Esli by ne Islam, to davno uzhe razvelis’ by s muzhem”.	19.08.2010	507	http://islamdag.ru/v-islame/26449
44.	Islam Iablokov, male	“Moi put’ v Islam”.	No date	1596	http://www.nn.ru/community/user/experience/?do=read&thread=1489192&topic_id=31157740
45.	Aleksandra, female	“Ia priniala Islam”.	27.01.2015	906	http://musulmanin.com/ya-prinyala-islam-istoriya-6.html
46.	Nataliia, female	“Moi put’ priniatiia Islama”.	No date	2553	http://islamtv.ru/news-2260.html
47.	Ismail, male	“Moi put’ v Islam”.	30.06.2010	1822	http://www.whyislam.to/oni-prinyali-islam/moj-put-v-islam.htm
48.	Amir, male	“Kak ia prishel v islam”.	28.02.2014	1949	https://vk.com/topic-63217974_29447693
49.	Samira, female	“Ia nashla sebia”.	14.09.2010	886	http://www.islamdag.ru/v-islame/26456
50.	Tat’iana, female	“Kak Tat’iana iz Kyrgyzstana prishla v Islam”.	25.02.2016	1183	http://www.islamdag.ru/v-islame/41683

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Summary

This thesis investigates how a language that has previously served only one religious system undergoes a profound transformation to enable it to accommodate two religions; and how this transformation stems from and further influences the course of political, social and cultural processes in a given society. The focus of this book lies, in particular, on the sociolinguistic development of two languages: Russian, which today meets the linguistic needs not only of Orthodox Christians but also of a growing population of Muslims in Russia; and Tatar, which essentially does the opposite – from being a predominantly Islamic vernacular, this language has been evolving to also accommodate religious communication within Christian communities. In this thesis I have analysed religious variants of the Tatar and Russian languages against the background of socio-political changes that have taken place in Russia in the immediate post-Soviet period, from 1991 to 2018.

As a result of this metamorphosis – where Russian and Tatar are used by both Muslims and Christians simultaneously – the linguistic systems of these languages are evolving to enable them to perform new functions. The chapters in this book demonstrate in detail how this process influences the form of these languages (e.g., script, morphology and grammar), as well as the meanings that speakers assign to religious vocabulary. The scope of the research goes beyond just the linguistic effects, as I have attempted to examine these linguistic modifications in relation to the socio-political conditions in which they have occurred. By focusing on the religious authority that sanctioned and conventionalized the use of a language within new religious settings, the thesis also explains major strategies and motives for instrumentalizing religious language in the struggle for resources and power.

One of the central concepts of this work is *translation*. When analysed in its narrow sense, the term casts the spotlight, first of all, on the approaches used to render the meaning of religious vocabulary from one language to another. As this process is never ideologically neutral, the case studies presented in this book demonstrate how translation serves as a tool to claim and exercise religious and political authority. This is often done by emphasizing or concealing an "us versus them" dichotomy or cultural "foreignness", and by challenging or reinforcing existing power hierarchies. Yet in its broader sense, the term "translation" refers not only to the transfer of vocabulary across languages and religions, but also to the travel of religious knowledge, identities and narratives. The thesis examines these symbolic "relocations" by focusing on religious mission and issues of conversion from and to Islam and various branches of Christianity in Russia. One observation is that the linguistic and religious transitions have influenced the present-day relations between Muslim and (Orthodox) Christian communities and their stance vis-à-vis the Russian state. Moreover, the expanding functions of Russian and Tatar to accommodate several religions also have far-reaching effects

on discursive constructions of ethnic and national identities in their respective religious communities.

The thesis consists of nine chapters and has the following structure. Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction to the scope and subject of the book; here I also discuss the theoretical framework, methodology and data that were used in the course of the research. Chapter 2 further acquaints the reader with the subject of this research, by providing an overview of streams that shape the discourse on religion in present-day Russia, and discussing the main trendsetters – from official religious institutions, via the state, to various social actors with varying degrees of authority. Thus, the first two chapters aim to set the stage for the case studies presented in the main part of the book, and help to illustrate the inherent connections between the actors discussed there.

The main argumentation of this thesis is built on six case studies that make up the two parts of the book: Part I contains three chapters on the Russian language of Islam, and Part II on the Tatar language of Christianity. The case studies in each part examine one of the three types of authority that, I argue, sanction and conventionalize the use of a language for religious discourse. These are: 1) official religious institutions and their leaders, 2) religious communities, and 3) individual figures (religious entrepreneurs) who challenge the status quo and dispute the authority of official religious institutions.

Part I discusses the actors who are contributing to the establishment of Russian as the new Muslim *lingua franca* in Russia. I start by analysing the discourse of an eminent Islamic leader – Mufti Ravil' Gainutdin (Chapter 3), who belongs to the Soviet generation of "turbaned elites" and thus creates continuity with the Soviet forms of official Islamic discourse. Chapter 4 then looks at the identity construction patterns within a community of ethnic Russians who have converted to Islam in the post-Soviet period, and through their discourse are attempting to create a legitimate space for ethnic Russian Muslims. Finally, Chapter 5 introduces the discourse of a former Orthodox priest and convert to Islam – Ali Viacheslav Polosin, who in the early 2000s attempted to empower the Islamic mission in Russian and now serves as an advisor on Islam to Russia's high-ranking politicians. At the linguistic level, all three of these actors use a strategy of translating Islamic terminology – Arabic and Persian loanwords – into Russian, often resorting to the marked vocabulary of Russian Orthodox Christians. Their goal is to deconstruct the image of Islam as a religion that is "foreign" and "dangerous" to Russian society and to argue that Islam is fully compatible with Russian norms and values. Yet the three actors differ on the definition of these norms and of what it means to be a Russian. Russia's official Islamic authorities employ the state-supported discursive framework of Russia's "traditional religions", one of which is considered to be Islam, to secure an important contribution of Russia's Muslims to the country's political weight and progress. To construct what he refers to as *rossiiskii islam* (lit. "Russia's Islam"), Mufti Gainutdin draws on, among other things, the prominent narratives from the official discourse of the Orthodox Patriarch, particularly on the so-called "traditional values" trope. In this way, Gainutdin argues for equal resources and

representation for Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Russia. Ethnic converts to Islam, to the contrary, promote *russkii islam* (lit. "Russian Islam"), which is injected with implicit nationalistic ideas and claims of moral and ethnic superiority of Russian converts over born-as-Muslims. The third case study shows how the strategies of the two streams can be combined to receive broader political backing from the Russian state: Polosin, himself a convert and an affiliate with the institutions of official Islam, today mediates between the Islamic communities and the state, reinforcing the nationalistic agenda of the state.

Part II of the thesis also consists of three chapters on the different types of authority, and examines the process of "Christianization" of the Tatar language. In my analysis of power hierarchies in this part, I start from the bottom – from an individual entrepreneur (Daniil Sysoev, Chapter 6) – and move upward via religious communities (the Kräshens and baptized Tatars, Chapter 7) to the official religious institutions. These religious institutions are represented by the three organizations that have produced translations of the New Testament into Tatar, thus filling the niche of the official voice in standardizing the new religious language (Chapter 8). All three case studies in this part demonstrate an approach to the translation of religious vocabulary that is similar to the one discussed in Part I: Christian religious terms are fully rendered into Tatar by the existing Tatar religious terminology, which often maintains strong Islamic connotations. This strategy has been actively used by missionaries, as it makes the religion of the Other – (Orthodox) Christianity – seem "familiar" and hence acceptable to the target audiences, which in most cases are communities of Muslim Tatars. The texts that introduce Christianity via familiar Islamic terminology contribute to the construction of a religion that is Tatar in form but Christian in content, which makes the "non-standard" religious affiliation more palatable. In the communities that emerge as a result of the Christian mission, the Christian Tatar language serves as a marker of distinct identity that allows its speakers to distinguish themselves from both Orthodox Christian Russian and Muslim Tatar majorities. Together with communities of ethnic Russian converts to Islam (Chapter 4), these Christian Tatar groups constitute in-between communities that challenge the fixed ideas on the role played by the language-ethnicity-religion triangle in identity formation. In other words, they argue that one can be both a Russian and a Muslim, or a speaker of Tatar and a Christian. Finally, my analysis of the discourse of religious entrepreneurs such as Sysoev demonstrates that as long ago as the early 2000s there were already harbingers of an approaching conservative turn within the major religious institutions, especially in the Russian Orthodox Church. A proactive missionary agenda and piercing rhetoric in the style of Sysoev, which the Orthodox Church initially opposed with vehemence, have transformed within a decade from being "radical" to being "normal" in the public eye.

The findings of the thesis are summarized in Chapter 9. By contrasting linguistic practices in six case studies on Russia's Islam and Christianity, I have argued that religious language – as a system of communication and a set of symbols – can function, first of all, as a mirror that reflects the socio-political transformations in a given society; at the same time, it can

also be instrumentalized to acquire power and resources. In the case of Russia, the analysis of religious variants helps to elucidate the ongoing political and ideological convergence of Muslim and Christian religious institutions and communities, which function under the close scrutiny of the Russian state.

The big faith organizations in Russia are already forced to cooperate and develop an interreligious "dialogue" – however shallow and declarative-natured this dialogue in fact is – in order to sustain religious peace in the country. More importantly, as this research shows, Islam and Christianity in Russia are also coming closer to each other at much deeper and more fundamental levels. They are developing similar views on Russia's domestic and foreign politics, similar doctrinal lines of defence against the challenges of modernity, and both of them interpret and protect societal moral norms along the same conservative lines. In practice, this means that religious language is used not only to emphasize religious identity; increasingly, it also functions as a marker of belonging to the familiar and inclusive "us" group or as a manifestation of desired ethnic, national and political identities. As a result, Christianity and Islam are bringing about a *sblizhenie* (convergence) – a mutual movement toward each other (although on the understanding that the Russian Orthodox Church, with its gravity, will have to move less than the "light" and vulnerable representations of Islam). But the process is not without festering conflicts; in fact, the tension inherent to the paradigms of "us versus them" and Christianity versus Islam, which has characterized relations between Orthodoxy and Islam over centuries, is now placed into one joint box – the dominant discourse on religion, through which these two religions have to define themselves. The limited space within that box might increase the ideological tensions, which risks leading to physical consequences, such as sudden outbursts of violence.

This thesis also makes a valuable contribution to the broader field of sociolinguistics, as it further elaborates on mechanisms that allow a language to serve two or more distinct religious systems. By focusing on actors, contexts and motives that rely on religious language, the thesis has emphasized the *use* of religious vocabulary and its *functions*, which are embedded in the power struggles that go beyond religious denominations. The results of this research call for religious texts to be viewed not as passive sources but as instruments of domination and resistance, and invite a careful examination of religious language as a lens that might shed new light on the relationship between religious, social and political identities and their discursive constructions.

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

In dit proefschrift is onderzocht hoe een taal die voorheen slechts één religieus systeem diende, een grondige transformatie ondergaat om twee religies te kunnen accommoderen; en hoe deze transformatie uit de loop van politieke, sociale en culturele processen uit een samenleving voortkomt en deze processen verder beïnvloed. De focus van dit boek ligt met name op de sociolinguïstische ontwikkeling van twee talen: het Russisch dat vandaag niet alleen voldoet aan de taalkundige behoeften van orthodoxe christenen, maar ook van een groeiende groep van moslims in Rusland; en het Tataars dat in wezen het tegenovergestelde doet – van een overwegend islamitische taal is het Tataars geëvolueerd om ook religieuze communicatie binnen christelijke gemeenschappen mogelijk te maken. In deze dissertatie heb ik religieuze varianten van de Tataarse en Russische taal geanalyseerd tegen de achtergrond van sociaalpolitieke veranderingen die zich in Rusland hebben voorgedaan in de periode direct na de val van de Sovjet-Unie, van 1991 tot 2018.

Als gevolg van deze metamorfose – naar een situatie waar Russisch en Tataars tegelijkertijd door zowel moslims als christenen worden gebruikt – evolueren de systemen van deze talen om nieuwe functies te vervullen. De hoofdstukken in dit boek beschrijven hoe dit proces de vorm van deze talen beïnvloedt (bijv. geschrift, morfologie en grammatica), evenals de betekenissen die sprekers toekennen aan religieus vocabulaire. Dit onderzoek reikt verder dan enkel het beschrijven van linguïstische effecten, het tracht tevens de taalkundige veranderingen te relateren tot de socio-politieke omstandigheden waarin ze zich hebben voorgedaan. Door te concentreren op de religieuze autoriteit, die het gebruik van een taal in nieuwe religieuze omgevingen sanctioneert en conventionaliseert, verklaart dit proefschrift eveneens belangrijke strategieën en motieven voor het instrumentaliseren van religieuze taal in de strijd om middelen en macht.

Een van de centrale concepten van dit werk is *translation* (vertaling). In engere zin gaat dit over de manier waarop de betekenissen van een religieuze woordenschat van de ene taal naar de andere wordt overgebracht. De casestudy's in dit boek illustreren hoe een vertaling – welke ideologisch nooit neutraal is – gebruikt wordt om religieuze en politieke autoriteit op te eisen en uit te oefenen. Dit wordt vaak gedaan door de dichotomie "wij versus zij" of door culturele "vreemdheid" te benadrukken of te verhullen, en door het uitdagen of versterken van bestaande machtshiërarchieën. In de ruimste zin van het woord verwijst de term *translation* niet alleen naar de overdracht van vocabulaire tussen talen en religies, maar ook naar de reis van religieuze kennis, identiteiten en vertellingen. Dit boek onderzoekt deze symbolische "verplaatsingen" door zich te concentreren op religieuze missies en bekering van en naar de islam of de verschillende takken van het christendom in Rusland. Wat we kunnen waarnemen is dat onder andere de taalkundige en religieuze overgangen de hedendaagse relaties tussen moslims en (orthodoxe) christelijke gemeenschappen in Rusland beïnvloeden, evenals hun houding ten opzichte van de Russische staat. Bovendien hebben de nieuwe functies van het

Russisch en Tataars ook verreikende gevolgen voor discursieve constructies van etnische en nationale identiteiten in de respectievelijke religieuze gemeenschappen.

Het proefschrift bestaat uit negen hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk 1 dient als een algemene inleiding tot het onderwerp en de reikwijdte van dit onderzoek; hier bespreek ik ook het theoretisch kader, de methodologie en data die in de loop van het onderzoek zijn gebruikt. In hoofdstuk 2 maakt de lezer verder kennis met het onderwerp van dit onderzoek middels een overzicht van stromen die het discours over religie vormen in het huidige Rusland. Tevens behandel ik de belangrijkste trendsetters van het discours: van officiële religieuze instellingen, via de staat, tot verschillende sociale actoren met verschillende maten van autoriteit. Deze eerste twee hoofdstukken hebben als doel de weg te plaveien voor de casestudy's welke het grootste deel van dit boek beslaan, en om de inherente verbanden tussen de daar besproken actoren te illustreren.

De hoofdargumentatie van dit proefschrift is gebaseerd op zes casestudy's die samen de twee delen van het boek vormen. Deel I presenteert drie hoofdstukken over de Russische taal van de islam en Deel II de Tataarse taal van het christendom. In elk deel vertegenwoordigt elke casestudy één van de drie autoriteitstypen waarvan ik pleit dat zij het gebruik van een taal voor het religieuze discours sanctioneren en normaliseren. Dit zijn: (a) officiële religieuze instellingen en hun leiders, (b) religieuze gemeenschappen, en (c) individuele figuren (*religious entrepreneurs*) die de status-quo uitdagen en de autoriteit van officiële religieuze instellingen betwisten.

Deel I bespreekt de actoren die bijdragen aan de normalisering van het Russisch als de nieuwe islamitische *lingua franca* in Rusland. Ik begin met een analyse op het discours van een vooraanstaande islamitische leider – moefti Ravil' Gainutdin (hoofdstuk 3). Hij behoort tot de Sovjet-generatie van "*turbaned elites*" (letterlijk "tulband elites") en zet daarmee de Sovjet-vormen van een officieel islamitisch discours voort. Hoofdstuk 4 gaat in op de identiteitsconstructiepatronen binnen een gemeenschap van etnische Russen die zich in de periode na de Sovjet-Unie tot de islam hebben bekeerd en via hun discours proberen een legitieme ruimte te creëren voor etnisch Russische moslims. Tenslotte introduceert hoofdstuk 5 het discours van een voormalig orthodoxe priester en een bekeerling tot de islam, Ali Vjatsjeslav Polosin, die begin jaren 2000 probeerde de islamitische missie in de Russische taal kracht bij te zetten en momenteel hooggeplaatste Russische politici adviseert over de islam. Op taalkundig niveau gebruiken alle actoren uit deze drie hoofdstukken een strategie waarbij islamitische terminologie (d.w.z. Arabische en Perzische leenwoorden) naar het Russisch wordt vertaald en vaak toevlucht wordt genomen tot de kenmerkende woordenschat van Russisch-orthodoxe christenen. Zij proberen daarmee het beeld van de islam, wat gezien wordt als een "vreemde" en "gevaarlijke" religie voor de Russische samenleving, te deconstrueren; en betogen dat de islam volledig verenigbaar is met de Russische normen en waarden. Toch verschillen de drie actoren over de definitie van deze normen en wat het betekent om een Rus te zijn. De officiële islamitische autoriteiten van Rusland zetten het staatsdiscours van "traditionele religies" in. Zo waarborgen zij het idee dat moslims een belangrijke bijdrage leveren aan het politieke gewicht en de vooruitgang van het land. Om te construeren wat Gainutdin aanduidt als *rossiski islam*

(letterlijk “Ruslands islam”), imiteert de moefti onder meer het officiële discours van de orthodoxe patriarch en in het bijzonder de trope over zogenaamde “traditionele waarden”. Op deze manier pleit Gainutdin voor gelijke middelen en vertegenwoordiging voor moslims en orthodoxe christenen in Rusland. Etnisch Russische bekeerlingen tot de islam daarentegen, promoten *roesski islam* (lit. “Russische islam”), die wordt geïnjecteerd met impliciete nationalistische ideeën en aanspraken op morele en etnische superioriteit van Russische bekeerlingen over “geboren” moslims. De derde casestudy laat zien hoe de strategieën van de twee stromen kunnen worden gecombineerd om een bredere politieke steun van de Russische staat te krijgen. Polosin, zelf bekeerd en aangesloten bij de instellingen van de officiële islam, bemiddelt tegenwoordig tussen de islamitische gemeenschappen en de staat zodat hij de nationalistische agenda van de staat kan dienen.

Deel II van het proefschrift bestaat eveneens uit drie hoofdstukken over de verschillende typen van gezag en onderzoekt het proces van “christianisatie” van de Tataarse taal. De analyses van machtshiërarchieën in dit deel beginnen aan de onderkant, bij een individu (priester Daniil Sysojev, hoofdstuk 6), en gaan omhoog via religieuze gemeenschappen (de Kräshens en gedoopte Tataren, hoofdstuk 7) naar de officiële religieuze instellingen. De religieuze instellingen worden hierbij vertegenwoordigd door de drie organisaties die vertalingen van het Nieuwe Testament in het Tataars hebben geproduceerd, waarmee ze de nieuwe religieuze taal standaardiseren (hoofdstuk 8). De analyses van de drie casestudy’s in Deel II laten zien dat een vergelijkbare benadering voor de vertaling van religieuze woordenschat is gehanteerd als bij de casestudy’s in Deel I. Christelijke religieuze termen worden volledig naar het Tataars vertaald door de bestaande Tataarse religieuze terminologie te gebruiken, waarbij de sterke islamitische connotaties blijven. Deze strategie wordt actief gebruikt door missionarissen, wat de religie van de Ander – het (orthodox) christendom – “vertrouwd” en daardoor aanvaardbaar maakt voor de doelgroepen (in de meeste gevallen gemeenschappen van islamitische Tataren). De teksten die het christendom introduceren via vertrouwde islamitische terminologie, dragen bij aan de constructie van de religie die Tataars in vorm is, maar christelijk qua inhoud. Dit maakt de bekering tot het christendom beter verdedigbaar. In de gemeenschappen die ontstaan als gevolg van de christelijke missie, dient de christelijke Tataarse taal als een kenmerk van een afzonderlijke identiteit waarmee sprekers zich onderscheiden van zowel orthodoxchristelijke Russische als islamitische Tataarse meerderheden. Samen met de etnisch Russische bekeerlingen tot de islam (hoofdstuk 4) vormen deze christelijke Tataarse groepen de zogenoemde “tussen-gemeenschappen”, die de verbindingen tussen taal, etniciteit en religie uitdagen. Met andere woorden, ze beweren dat het mogelijk is zowel Rus als moslim te zijn of een Tataars sprekende christen te zijn. Tot slot laat mijn analyse op het discours van religieuze ondernemers zoals Sysojev zien dat er begin jaren 2000 al voorboden waren van een naderende conservatieve wending binnen de belangrijkste religieuze instellingen, vooral in de Russisch-orthodoxe kerk. Een proactieve missionaire agenda en doordringende retoriek in de stijl van Sysojev, waartegen de Orthodoxe Kerk aanvankelijk heftig weerstand bood, is binnen een decennium voor het publiek getransformeerd van “radicaal” naar “normaal”.

De bevindingen van het proefschrift zijn samengevat in hoofdstuk 9. Door de linguïstische werkwijzen in zes casestudy's over de Russische islam en het christendom tegen elkaar af te zetten, concludeer ik dat religieuze taal – als een systeem van communicatie en een reeks symbolen – in eerste plaats kan functioneren als een spiegel die de sociaal-politieke transformaties in een bepaalde samenleving weerspiegelt. Tegelijkertijd kan het ook worden geïnstrumentaliseerd om macht en middelen te verwerven. In het geval van Rusland helpt de analyse van religieuze varianten bij het verklaren van voortdurende politieke en ideologische convergentie van islamitische en christelijke religieuze instellingen en gemeenschappen welke functioneren onder nauwkeurig toezicht van de Russische staat.

Om de religieuze vrede in het land te handhaven zijn de grote geloofsorganisaties in Rusland reeds gedwongen om samen te werken en een interreligieuze "dialoog" te ontwikkelen – hoe oppervlakkig deze dialoog ook is. Nog belangrijker is dat, zoals dit onderzoek aantoont, de islam en het christendom in Rusland elkaar op veel diepere en fundamentelere niveaus naderen. Zij ontwikkelen vergelijkbare opvattingen over de binnenlandse en buitenlandse politiek van Rusland, hanteren soortgelijke doctrinaire verdedigingslinies tegen de uitdagingen van de moderniteit en beide interpreteren en beschermen maatschappelijke morele normen langs dezelfde conservatieve lijnen. In de praktijk betekent dit dat religieuze taal niet alleen gebruikt wordt om de religieuze identiteit te benadrukken, maar ook om bij een vertrouwde en inclusieve "wij"-groep te horen, en om de gewenste etnische, nationale en politieke identiteiten te tonen. Als gevolg hiervan brengen het christendom en de islam een *sblizjenië* (convergentie) – een wederzijdse beweging naar elkaar toe – tot stand. Daarbij moet in acht worden genomen dat de Russisch-orthodoxe Kerk, met zijn zwaartekracht, minder zal moeten bewegen dan de "lichte" en kwetsbare representaties van de islam. Maar dit proces gaat niet zonder conflicten. De spanning die inherent is aan paradigma's als "wij versus zij" en het christendom tegen de islam, welke de relaties tussen de orthodoxie en de islam in de loop der eeuwen hebben gekenmerkt, zijn nu geplaatst binnen dezelfde dominante discours over religie; een gezamenlijk discours waarmee deze twee afzonderlijke religies zichzelf nu definiëren. De beperkte ruimte binnen dit discours kan de ideologische spanningen verhogen, wat soms tot fysieke gevolgen leidt, zoals plotselinge uitbarstingen van geweld.

Dit proefschrift levert tevens een waardevolle bijdrage aan het bredere veld van de sociolinguïstiek, omdat het verder ingaat op de mechanismen, welke ervoor zorgen dat een taal twee en meer verschillende religieuze systemen bediend. Door te concentreren op de actoren, contexten en motieven die steunen op religieuze taal, heb ik de nadruk gelegd op *het gebruik* van religieuze vocabulaire en zijn *functies*, welke ingebed zijn in de machtsstrijd die verder gaat dan religieuze denominaties. De resultaten van dit onderzoek roepen op om religieuze teksten niet te zien als passieve bronnen maar als instrumenten van overheersing en verzet, en nodigen uit tot een zorgvuldig onderzoek van religieuze teksten, als een lens die een nieuw licht zou kunnen werpen op de relatie tussen religieuze, sociale en politieke identiteiten en hun discursieve constructies.

Curriculum Vitae

Gulnaz Sibgatullina was born on 23 April 1992 in Yelabuga, a town in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia. In 2009 she went to study International Relations with German and English as foreign languages at Moscow State Linguistic University. She obtained her Specialist Diploma (recognized as an MA degree) with distinction in 2014. During her studies, she went abroad for an exchange semester (2012-2013) at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, where she followed modules in Political Science as well as Persian and Turkish language courses.

In August 2014 she became a PhD candidate at Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (LUCL), working as a member of the research project "The Russian Language of Islam", funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). In 2015 she was awarded a fellowship for library research and travelled to the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center (REEEC) at the University of Illinois, USA. In 2016 she was a visiting fellow at the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures at the University of Edinburgh, which was made possible by a Leiden University Fund fellowship.

Between 2014 and 2018 she also lectured on Russian language acquisition, sociolinguistics and Russia's domestic politics at Leiden University and gave guest lectures at the University of Amsterdam and the European University in St. Petersburg.