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

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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

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[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

[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).

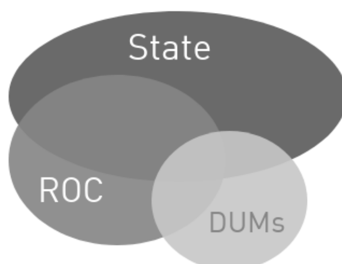

Figure 1. Gatekeepers of the mainstream discourse on religion

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

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[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

[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

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[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

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[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

[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