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Religious Revival and Its Limitations in the Postwar Soviet Union: The Case of Northern Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The subject of the paper is the religious revival in the post-war USSR, understood as the limited return of religious practices to the public space, marked by an effort to officially register a religious community. Two types of such revival could be observed in northern Kazakhstan: one on the wave of patriotic intensification of the "Great Patriotic War;" the impetus for the other being the gradual liberalization and abolition of the Gulag system after 1956. The first type was characterized by adaptation with the Soviet system and the intermingling of religious elements with Soviet war mythology. The second type, on the other hand, meant long years of functioning in a religious underground and as a result in two parallel and mutually contradictory realities: the Soviet public sphere, represented first and foremost by the school and the workplace, which was hostile towards religion, and the private sphere, where religious traditions – ridiculed at school – were cultivated, mainly through the involvement of women.

Keywords: Kazakhstani religious landscape, religious revival, "Great Patriotic War," Soviet anti-religious propaganda
Słowa kluczowe: krajobraz religijny Kazachstanu, odrodzenie religijne, „Wielka Wojna Ojczyźniana", sowiecka propaganda antyreligijna

So far, research on the religious revival in the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II has focused mainly on either Nazi-occupied territories or central Russia, and more on Orthodoxy and the policies of Stalin and the Soviet leadership toward the Orthodox Church and its hierarchs.[1] Relatively little attention has been paid in this

[1] Cf. A. Roccucci, *Stalin i patriarkh: Pravoslavnaia tserkov' i sovetskaia vlast', 1917–1958*, Moscow 2016; M.I. Odintsov, A.S. Kochetova, *Konfessional'naia politika v Sovetskom Soiuze v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941–1945 gg.,* Moscow 2014; D. Peris, *'God Is Now on Our Side:' The*

context, however, to remote Kazakhstan, where, as a result of the Soviet policy of forced resettlement, a veritable religious mosaic has emerged. In view of this, it is also interesting to trace the process of religious revival there on a more grassroots level.

During the Soviet period, Kazakhstan, functioned as a *sui generis* laboratory for social experiments that were conducted on a massive scale. Following the brutal collectivization and sedentarization of nomadic Kazakhs in the years 1931–1933, further waves of deportees were transported to the country. In 1941–1942, the NKVD exiled as many as 220 000 Soviet Germans, who represented various religious denomination: among them were Catholics, Lutherans, Mennonites and Baptists. About two years later, the Soviet authorities launched a series of operations that targeted the "treasonous" nationalities of the North Caucasus for deportation: among them were Muslim nationalities (with strong Sufi influences) of Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Karachays. These were also joined by other Muslims: Meskhetian Turks and Khemshils from Georgia, and Christian Armenians, Greeks and Bulgarians from Crimea. All these wartime deportees shared the earlier fate of several groups already in exile: Catholic Poles and Germans form Soviet Ukraine, and Koreans from the Soviet Far East. All these deportations decisively altered Kazakh demographics – its cultural and ethno-religious composition – especially in Northern Kazakhstan.

Without going into a detailed analysis of this instrument of the repressive policy of the Soviet state, what is important to consider was that the long-term goal of the deportations was to eliminate those social and cultural attributes that supposedly prevented acculturation into Soviet society (i.e., for example, religion). Exile was to some extent officially also designed to "rehabilitate" and reintegrate "dangerous" groups into broader Soviet society. In practice, forced resettlement transformed these groups into forced labourers and social outcasts doomed to a miserable existence inside the "special settlements", surrounded by a hostile administrative and social space. The deportees provided the foundation for a new ethno-religious hierarchy in Soviet Kazakhstan by acting as a foil to the republic "titular" nation and other unrepressed nationalities.[2] This is one of the reasons why the patriotic intensification

Religious Revival on Unoccupied Soviet Territory during World War II, "Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History" 2000, [s. l], vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 97–118; J.D. Enstad, *Prayers and Patriotism in Nazi-Occupied Russia: The Pskov Orthodox Mission and Religious Revival, 1941–1944*, "The Slavonic and East European Review" 2016, vol. 94, no. 3, pp. 468–496; D. Harrisville, *Unholy Crusaders: The Wehrmacht and the Reestablishment of Soviet Churches during Operation Barbarossa*, "Central European History" 2019, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 620–649; K.C. Berkhoff, *Was There a Religious Revival in Soviet Ukraine under the Nazi Regime?*, "The Slavonic and East European Review" 2000, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 536–567; U. Huhn, *Stimmen Aus Jerusalem. Die Macht Der Gerüchte Und Die Religiöse Renaissance in Der Sowjetunion, 1941–1948*, "Journal of Modern European History" 2012, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 341–361.

[2] General overview on Soviet deportations in 1930s and 1940s: T. Martin, *The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing*, "The Journal of Modern History" 1998, vol. 70, no. 4, pp. 836–852; A. Kim, *The Repression of Soviet Koreans during the 1930s*, "The Historian" 2012, vol. 74, no. 2, pp. 267–285; by the same author, *On the Preparation and Conduct of the Repression of Koreans in the 1930s Soviet Union*, "The Historian" 2013, vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 262–282; E.D. Weitz, *Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges*, "Slavic Review" 2002, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 1–29; A. Gouldner, *Stalinism: A Study of Internal Colonialism*, "Telos" 1978, vol. 34, pp. 5–48; J.O. Pohl, *Colonialism in One Country: The Deported Peoples in the USSR as an Example of Internal Colonialism*,

of the "Great Patriotic War" fuelled by Soviet propaganda, brought Muslim Kazakhs and Russian Orthodox Christians some limited religious freedoms under the Soviet order. The last great migration, which took place at the end of the 1950s/beginning of the 1960s, was closely connected with Khrushchev's project of "taming the *virgin lands*". It was accompanied by the gradual liberalization of the circumstances of the special settlers, but not in religious terms.[3] Why?

In my paper, I argue that those ethno-religious groups that participated in the Soviet narrative mythologizing the war effort were also able to develop some forms of religious activity to a limited extent. Communities excluded from this narrative, on the other hand, were forced to cultivate their religious traditions underground for a very long time. To demonstrate this, I shall make use of documents of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults from the State Archive of the Akmola Region in Kazakhstan, partially available on the internet. My second source will be in-depth interviews with Polish residents (mainly of the Shortandy district – Akmola region) and repatriates from Kazakhstan living in Poland (the centres in Pułtusk and Środa Wielkopolska).

Patriotism of the "Great Patriotic War" and the Religious Revival in Kazakhstan

Initiated by the Soviet leadership, the recourse to religion as a vehicle for patriotic mobilization during the war had an institutional dimension: two state supervisory bodies were established – a Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (1943) and a Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (1944), the competencies of which covered all denominations except for Orthodox Christianity (in 1965, the

"Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion" 2014, vol. 5, no. 7, https://raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_5_(2014)_files/Pohl%205%207_1.pdf [access: 1.01.2020]; A. Statiev, *Soviet Ethnic Deportations: Intent versus Outcome*, "Journal of Genocide Research" 2009, vol. 11, no. 2–3, pp. 243–264; P. Polian, *Against their will: the history and geography of forced migrations in the USSR*, Budapest–New York 2004; R.J. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II: Mobilization and Ethnicity in the Soviet Empire*, Lawrence 2019, pp. 119–123; J.O. Pohl, *Forced Labor in a Socialist State: Ethnic Germans from Kazakhstan and Central Asia in the Labor Army – 1941–1957*, "International Crimes and History" 2017, vol. 18, pp. 73–99; *idem*, *Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water: The Russian-Germans in the Labour Army*, "The Eurasia Studies Society Journal" 2013, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1–17; *idem*, *Soviet Apartheid: Stalin's Ethnic Deportations, Special Settlement Restrictions, and the Labor Army: The Case of the Ethnic Germans in the USSR*, "Human Rights Revue" 2012, vol. 13, pp. 205–224; *idem*, *The Persecution of Ethnic Germans in the USSR during World War II*, "The Russian Review" 2016, vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 284–303; J. Burds, *The Soviet War against* '*Fifth Columnists*'*: The Case of Chechnya, 1942–4*, "Journal of Contemporary History" 2007, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 267–314; M. Pohl, "*It Cannot Be that Our Graves Will Be Here*"*: The Survival of Chechen and Ingush Deportees in Kazakhstan, 1944–1957*, "Journal of Genocide Research" 2002, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 401–430; J.O. Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937–1949*, Westport 1999, pp. 79–92, 109–118; S. Ciesielski, G. Hryciuk, A. Srebrakowski, *Masowe deportacje radzieckie w okresie II wojny światowej*, Wrocław 1994; Tabuldenov A.N., *Deportatsyi i evakuatsiya naseleniya v Severniy Kazakhstan (1937–1956 gg.)*, Kostanay 2015.

[3] M. Pohl, *The Virgin Lands between Memory and Forgetting: People and Transformation in the Soviet Union, 1954–1960*, Ann Arbor 1999.

two institutions were joined to form one Council for Religious Affairs). The Council's principal function was issuing consent to the registration of prayer houses and mosques. It had its agents in each union republic, autonomous republic, country and region. Their role was to report systematically on the regular religious life of communities in their area of responsibility, which presented some difficulties now and again: for either they were outsiders, ignorant of local relations, or, conversely, locals feeling stronger loyalty to their compatriots than to the central authorities.[4]

As we shall see, grassroots manifestations of religiosity under the banner of Soviet patriotism were mostly preceded by activities initiated by official state structures responsible for religious affairs that initially were not substantially prepared for that. As early as in September 1944, the head of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, Ivan Polansky, felt obliged to instruct the chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of the Kazakh SSR, Nurtas Undasynov, that it was inadmissible that some regional executive committees consented to the opening of prayer houses for followers of religions other than Orthodox Christianity, based on recommendations of field agents of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church.[5]

The field agents often simply poorly knew their territories. For example, in his report for 1945, a representative of the Council for West Kazakhstan Region was unable say anything about the religious practices of the Baptists and Molokans and signalled his ignorance concerning the religious composition of the people in *rayispolkoms* and asked for some kind of 'textbook'. On the other hand, his information on the religious revival among Muslims is of great importance. Namely, in kolkhozes and factories, workers elected elderly men from among themselves to perform the function of mullahs. They had, he claims, no religious education or certificate from the administration (they were "non-registered").

The agent for the Pavlodar Region made his report for the same period in a similar spirit. He was not very well oriented in the "social composition of the faithful" but had seen that in Pavlodar a mosque, entered officially on the cult building register in 1945, was functioning and had a registered community attached to it; even so, in kolkhozes prayers were also celebrated by self-appointed mullahs with only elementary religious knowledge (in 1949, the imam of the urban mosque sold photographs of Muhammad and Ali!). Nevertheless, nobody spoke of a "religious underground". Why? Because

[4] Y. Roy, *Islam v Sovetskom Soyuze posle vtoroy mirovoy voyny*, [in:] *Islam w Yevrazii*, M.V. Iordan, R.G. Kuzeyev, S.M. Chervonnaya (eds.), Moskva 2001, pp. 157–169; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 258, Otdel propagandy i agitatsyi TsK VKP(b) – TsK KPSS, 1948–1953, l. 72–83, 99–110, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[5] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 3, Razyasneniye Polanskogo predsedatelu Sovnarkoma Kazakhskoy SSR tov. Undasynovu o nedopustimosti rassmotreniya Upolnomochennymi po delam RPTs zayavleniy veruyushchikh drugikh verospovedaniy i nebokhodimosti utverzhdeniya Upolnomochennogo SDRK pri SNK Kazakhskoj SSR i sootvetstvuyushchikh Oblispolkomakh KazSSR, 22.09.1944, l. 44, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

during the war, the faithful Muslims in the region, actively aroused the patriotic spirit all the time, donated 60,000 roubles for the Red Army, and now offered material assistance to war invalids who defended their homeland.[6]

Collective prayers were held here even before the official handover of the mosque to the faithful, and it was then that those self-appointed mullahs raised 150,000 roubles for the Red Army, for which they even received thanks from comrade Stalin himself. They also travelled across the region, collecting funds as part of an official delegation from the *oblispolkom*. This religious revival also lent itself to other denominations in the region, but their followers were not as successful as Muslims in respect of the legalisation of their religious structures. For example, Evangelical Christians, the Baptists of the village of Krasilovka, also applied for consent for the construction of a church, but their application was turned down with a comment that they should first register their community (this application, in turn, was "incompatible with the instruction").

The news of the "religious and patriotic activities" of Muslim communities came from other regions as well. In the North Kazakhstan Region (*oblast'*) in 1945, one newly opened mosque was functioning in Petropavlovsk, and the local Muslim community pursued "religious and patriotic activities" during and after the war. In addition to that, non-registered mullahs and communities of the faithful were active; they were not eager to register out of fear of taxation, and, as an instruction from the Council said, the nomadic traditions of the Kazakhs, who could do without stationary mosques, had come to the fore here; meanwhile, the one mullah per one mosque rule should have been followed.[7] Muslim communities, that had earlier been subject to repression, became more active under the influence or with the participation of the clergy that had earlier been subject to repression, coming from regions famous for their stronger religious traditions. For example, in early 1949, the faithful of Kokchetav invited an Uzbek mullah from the Fergana Valley, a graduate of the famous Mir-Arab madrasa in Bukhara, exiled there for five years in 1941.[8]

In the case of the deported "punished peoples", the situation looked different. As the agent for Kokchetav Region wrote in his report for the fourth quarter of 1946, "the faithful from among the Chechens and the Ingush do not join the local people, Kazakhs and Tatars, in performing various religious rites."[9] The report for the first

[6] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Periodical reports of the Agents of the Council for the Kazakh SRR for Pavlodar Region, d. 397, l. 11.

[7] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Periodical reports of the Agents of the Council for the Kazakh SRR for West Kazakhstan, Pavlodar and North Kazakhstan Regions, d. 10, l. 61–73; *ibidem*, d. 29, l. 81–86, 91–103, 107–108, 113; *ibide*m, d. 30, l. 197–203, 210–212, 229, 231, 237; *ibidem*, d. 23, l. 4–7; *ibidem*, d. 20, l. 106, 108, 109, 133–136, *ibidem*, d. 339, l. 15, 17, 20–24, 175, 177–181, 188; *ibidem*, d. 397, l. 2–3, 6–8, 23; *ibidem*, d. 3, l. 44*; ibidem*, d. 348, l. 49–50; *ibidem*, d. 360, l. 5–6, 18–19; *ibidem*, d. 374, l. 16–17; *ibidem*, d. 405, l. 27; *ibidem*, d. 393, l. 12–14; *ibidem*, d. 398, l. 18–19; *ibidem*, d. 350, l. 212; *ibidem*, d. 401, l. 95, 99–100, 181–182; *ibidem*, d. 406, l. 84, d. 407, l. 115, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[8] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 394, Report of the Agent of the Council for Religious Cults for Kokchetav Region of the Kazakh SRR for 1949, l. 40–42, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[9] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 394, Report of the Agent of the Council for Religious Cults for Kokchetav Region of the Kazakh SRR for 1949, 09.01.1947, l. 13, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

quarter of 1948 from the North Kazakhstan Region concluded that they had assumed "an expectant position" and "did not demonstrate a willingness to grant a formal status" to their communities. The Chechens and the Ingush were scandalised that elderly Kazakh and Tatar women visited the Petropavlovsk Mosque, which was unthinkable in their culture. Over the years, the mutual isolation kept deepening, mixed marriages did not occur.[10]

And how did matters stand with other religions in Kazakhstan? In addition to Orthodox Christianity, the all-republican report of March 1951 listed the following denominations in the Kazakh SSR: "the second place after the Muslim cult is held by Evangelical Christians: Baptists, followed by Old Believers in groups and individually, Lutherans, followers of Judaism, Seventh-Day Adventists and others;" in addition to that, "Buddhist Koreans and Kalmuks" were mentioned.[11] An agent of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church reported the existence, in the North Kazakhstan Region, of six religious communities (besides Orthodox Christianity): Muslims, Baptists, Lutherans, Jews, Seventh-Day Adventists and Pentecostals. As for Catholics, the previous agent knew something about their existence; in January 1945, while requesting the Council for instructions on granting consents to registration, he mentioned "Catholic priests, mullahs, presbyters of Evangelical Christians and Baptists as well as clerics of the remaining cults." Nonetheless, it is evident that Catholics were completely absent from this post-war religious revival. Even if they are mentioned once or twice, the references are very vague. No official attempts were reported on their part to register a community or a prayer house at that time.

In northern Kazakhstan, the religious revival was closely intertwined with the "patriotism of the Great Patriotic War," but it is difficult to tell to what extent that process was spontaneous and to what degree it was a manifestation of opportunism. Certainly, individuals endowed with an excellent grasp of the situation and the changing realities, such as the mullah of the Petropavlovsk Mosque, Khasan Shamsutdinov, had their considerable share in the process. It is not quite certain what nationality he was, the official version being that his father had belonged to the Kazakh poor, even though he left behind a hundred cattle when he died. Reportedly, Shamsutdinov was a mullah even then, and he went for religious studies to Bukhara, but he was also said to have completed a course for Marxism-Leninism instructors. Between 1934 and 1938, he was a member of the city council, a member of the local electoral commission in the election to the USSR's Supreme Council in 1936 and became its deputy chairman in 1938. As he reported to the Council's agent, on 6 March 1953, one day after Stalin's death, he "addressed [in tears] the faithful gathered in the mosque…

[10] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 399, the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Periodical reports of the Agents of the Council for the Kazakh SRR for North Kazakhstan Region, 15.04.1948, l. 181, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[11] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 350, Dokladnaya zapiska chlena Soveta po delam religioznykh kultov pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR Prikhodz'ko Polianskomu o rezultatakh komandirovki v Kazakhskuyu i Kirgizskuyu SSR, 02.06.1951, l. 261, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

with an emotional speech about the painful loss suffered by all Soviet people and the workers all over the world."[12]

Leaving aside the question of individuals, undoubtedly lending a religious sanction to the Soviet armed effort had serious social and religious consequences: prayers for the fallen soldiers or raising donations for orphans or war invalids became both a manifestation of affection for the Soviet homeland and a religious rite or good work. This also worked the other way round, as e.g. the charisma of a *frontovnik* (frontline veteran) earned a Great Patriotic War combatant, wounded twice, an appointment in 1949 as the imam of the mosque in Semipalatinsk, the only one functioning uninterruptedly since the tsarist era.[13]

We must bear in mind, naturally, that as regards the opening of legally functioning religious cult buildings, the achievements of that period were not impressive. On 1 January 1957, there were 25 registered mosques in the Kazakh SSR, two per district on average. In the north of the republic, there was usually one mosque in the regional capital: such was the case in the Akmolinsk, West Kazakhstan, Kokchetav, Pavlodar and North Kazakhstan Regions. Aktiubinsk and Karaganda Regions had two mosques each, and there were three in the Semipalatinsk Region.[14] There was an area, however, where the 'achievements' of the end-of-the-war religious revival turned out to be much bigger: cemeteries. This was how the Council's agent for Tselinograd (formerly Akmolinsk) Region characterised the situation in his area of responsibility in July 1972:

> Until recently, many cemeteries in Tselinograd Region remained in the hands of religious organisations and the clergy. They kept the cemeteries in good condition and watched over the order of burials. Cemeteries were organised according to religious rules: Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, etc. Later, secular cemeteries were founded. And except for those secular cemeteries, clerics were forbidden to bury the dead in a secular, non-religious ceremony […]. Religious symbols: crosses and crescents, were placed on cemetery gates. And the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR adopted decisions on cemeteries twice, in 1965 and in 1967 […]. Meanwhile, non-registered members of the Muslim clergy […] continued their activities in some localities […] The local councils were not very effective in restricting their illegal activities […]. In 1971, more than half […] of the funerals in the region were held according to religious rites. There are

[12] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Periodical reports of the Agents of the Council for the Kazakh SRR for North Kazakhstan Region, d. 401, l. 99–100.

[13] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Periodical reports of the Agents of the Council for the Kazakh SRR for Semipalatinsk, Kokchetav and North Kazakhstan Regions, d. 10, l. 61–73; *ibidem*, d. 29, l. 81–86, 91–103, 107–108, 113; *ibidem*, d. 30, l. 197–203, 210–212, 229, 231, 237; *ibidem*, d. 23, l. 4–7; *ibidem*, d. 20, l. 106, 108, 109, 133–136; *ibidem*, d. 339, l. 15, 17, 20–24, 175, 177–181; *ibidem*, d. 397, l. 2–3, 6–8, 11, 23; *ibidem*, d. 3, l. 44; *ibidem*, d. 348, l. 49–50; *ibidem*, d. 360, l. 5–6, 18–19; *ibidem*, d. 374, l. 16–17; *ibidem*, d. 405, l. 27; *ibidem*, d. 398, l. 18–19; *ibidem*, d. 401, l. 95, 181–182; *ibidem*, d. 406, l. 84; *ibidem*, d. 407, l. 115, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[14] GARF, f. 6991, op. 3, d. 132, Kratkaya spravka o deyatelnosti religioznykh obyedineniy musulmanskogo kulta w respublikakh Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana v 1956 godu, 1.03.1957, l. 30, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

both communists and Komsomol members among those interned according to the dictates of Islam. Funerals Soviet in their form, but religious in their contents, also occur.[15]

The "Underground" religiosity of the deported peoples

The underside of these concessions to "official Islam" were, however, the brutal deportations to Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republic of Muslim peoples from the Caucasus: Karachays, Balkars, Chechens, Ingush, Meskhetian Turks, Adjarians and Khemshils, as well as Crimean Tatars, on charges of alleged collaboration with the Germans, which in turn was, to a certain degree, a response to the Nazi propaganda of "liberating Islam" in the northern Caucasus.[16] Soon after the deportations, the NKVD leadership ordered to its branches in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to enlist all Caucasian mullahs and Sufi religious leaders in special records. The loyal were to be induced to cooperate with official SADUM structures in disseminating patriotic ideology of "selfless labour" and "submitting to the authorities." It was also recommended that they be assigned lighter work and appointed as brigade leaders, so they could attract their co-religionists to work with them. Official NKVD reports spoke of 170 "patriotically tuned" mullahs and other religious authorities who, citing Koranic verses, "positively influenced the political attitudes" of the deportees. If there were indeed such cases, it was most likely a matter of dissuading Caucasian Muslim special settlers from extreme uncompromising attitudes to lower the mortality rate and unhappiness among them, resulting from their inability to return to their homeland.[17]

Due to the deportations, Islam in northern Kazakhstan undoubtedly gained a new, more defiant face, due to the peculiar forms of the Sufi religiosity of the Chechens and the Ingush deported in 1944. Initially, two brotherhoods (*tariqa*s): Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya (here most importantly the teachings of the 19th-century sheikh Kunta Haji Kishiyev) dominated the religious landscape of the highlanders resettled from the Caucasus. These brotherhoods took an active part in funerals, organised collective Quranic study sessions, sought to win neophytes and celebrated the *zikr* (*dhikr*), i.e., calling the names of God in a mystical whirling dance.[18] Even though

[15] GARF, f. 6991, op. 6, d. 470, Report of the Agent of the Council for Tselinograd Region, 30.07.1972, l. 103–106, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[16] J.O. Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR*…, *op. cit*. pp. 79–92, 109–118; S. Ciesielski, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–133, 146–163; J. Burds, *op. cit*., pp. 267–314; D. Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, Cambridge, MA–London 2014, pp. 140–150.

[17] *Vainakhi i imperskaia vlast': problema Chechni i Ingushetii vo vnutrennei politike Rossii i SSSR (nachalo XIX – seredina XX veka)*, V.A. Kozlov *et al.* (eds.), Moscow 2011, pp. 697–698; R.J. Carmack, *op. cit*., p. 147.

[18] Shaikh Kunta-haji Kishiev prohibited waging wars, exacting bloody revenge, drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco; he also ordered humility towards the authorities. In his teachings, ecstatic mysticism blended with social sensitivity and concern for the poorest, see V.K. Akayev, *Sheykh Kunta-Khadzhi*, Grozny 1994; A. Bennigsen, *The Qādirīyah (Kunta Haji) Tariqah in North East Caucasus, 1850–1987*, "Islamic Culture" 1988, vol. 62, no. 2–3, pp. 63–78.

their activities were limited to the Chechens and the Ingush, they also permeated, to a certain degree, the public space as well. For example, Poles interviewed by me were struck by the fact that, when one was travelling together with a Chechen or an Ingush by car or by bus, a fellow traveller would look at his watch and at certain times stop the vehicle to pray.[19] Atbasar, Krasnaya Polana, Timofeyevka, Bestiube, Novo-Georgiyevka and Preobrazhenka became major religious centres of Caucasian Sufism. In exile, two new religious leaders, Sheik Bagautdin Denis Arsanov and UveysVis Haji Dzhagiyev, became famous among the deportees and new religious movements, colloquially called the *Arsanovtsy* and the *Beloshapochniki* (White Hat People), began to form around them. Unlike the traditional brotherhoods, these movements focused the thoughts of the faithful not on a return to the Caucasian homeland, but rather on remaining, adapting and persevering in their traditional values, while avoiding confrontation with the Soviet authorities. In 1956–1957, most Chechens and Ingush returned to the Caucasus, but some remained for religious reasons. After Dzhagiyev's death, his grave in Krasnaya Polana gained the status of a sacred site and an object of pilgrimage among the Kazakh Chechens and Ingush.[20]

In addition to being illegal (non-registered), these cults were also, according to the fatwas of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, "inconsistent with the sharia."[21] On the instructions of the Council for Religious Affairs, in 1977, a Dagestani qadi of Makhachkala, Akhmad Dakayev, carried out, together with the imam of the Alma-Ata mosque, an inspection of the religious practices of the residents of the village of Pyotrokovka in Tselinograd Region (Balkhash District) and concluded as follows in his report:

> The Chechen followers of the sect of the late sheikh Vishaji, called Beloshapochniki by the people, violate Soviet legislation and the sharia: (1) they forbid young people to learn at school, (2) they marry off minor girls without their consent, often to elderly men, (3) they practice polygyny (although this is against the sharia), (4) they attract women and children to celebrate the zikr, they beat the drums then, play music and women and children sink into the state of ecstasy.[22]

The qadi held "educational" talks with the residents, and when he returned there three months later on an "evaluation" mission, he wrote in his report that the brotherhood members had divided themselves into two groups: traditionalists, true to the "vestiges of the past" (*perezhytki proshlogo*) and reformers, who had given up some of the "harmful customs" (*otkazalis' ot nekotorykh vrednykh adatov*).[23]

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[19] Account by Halina Habowska (b. 1964), Środa Wielkopolska, 30.09.2020.

[20] M. Pohl, "*It Cannot Be that Our Graves Will Be Here"…*, *op. cit*., pp. 401–430; A.S. Musagaliyeva, R.M. Musabekova, U.M. Sandybayeva, *Severniy Kazakhstan kak region politicheskikh repressii i deportatsiy narodov SSSR*, Astana 2017, pp. 189–192.

[21] B. Babadzhanov, M.B. Olkott, *SADUM*, [in:] *Islam na territorii byvshey Rossiyskoy impierii. Entsyklopedicheskiy slovar'*, vol. IV, Moskva 2003, pp. 70ff.

[22] GARF, f. R–6991, op. 6, d. 1355, Otchot kadiya Makhachkalinskoy mecheti A.K. Dakayeva o poyezdke v Balkashinskiy rayon Tselinogradskoy oblasti, 27.12.1977, l. 1–4, quoted after: *Russian Perspectives on Islam*.

[23] *Ibidem*, l. 6.

Thus, the postwar religious revival in Kazakhstan did not only concern 'official' Islam and Orthodox Christianity, but also the other, "underground" forms of the religiosity of the deported peoples. As a result of the deportations, Muslim, but also numerous Christian, including Roman Catholic and various Protestant denominations, communities found themselves in northern Kazakhstan. At the same time, a *sui generis* hierarchy of denominations, more or less accepted by the authorities, emerged in the public sphere:

> By no means does the Soviet government treat individual religions and denominations in the same way [the Rev. Władysław Bukowiński shared his observations in his *Wspomnienia z Kazachstanu*]. Orthodox Christians recognising the Moscow patriarch are those regarded best by the authorities. They are followed by Baptists and some other sects, Lutherans as well as Muslims. Catholics are less well regarded, and in particular Catholic priests, seen as "Vatican's agents." It is, however, the Orthodox opposition and those sects which have their global centres in the United States, such as Jehova's Witnesses, that are treated the worst.[24]

That last observation found a full corroboration in the decisions of the Soviet authorities. Jehova's Witnesses, deported from the Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Moldovan SSR, as well as from the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus in 1951, were indeed excluded from the Decision of the USSR's Council of Ministers of 5 June 1954 on the lifting of some restrictions in the legal status of *spets*-settlers.[25] The same was true of the "Orthodox opposition," although this term itself needs further clarification. As far as the Kazakh SSR is concerned, these were principally the Old Believer communities functioning in the underground for almost the entire postwar period, concentrated mainly in the so-called Rudny Altai (East Kazakhstan Region). Diversified and represented by numerous branches (*soglasiya*), they were severely reduced during the collectivisation of the 1930s as wealthy peasants (*kulak*s), and apocalyptic sentiments and desertions from the Red Army during the war pushed their faithful deep underground. Ust-Kamenogorsk became the Old Believers' main centre in the Kazakh SSR, where their two Pomeranian and Pokrov communities (Austrian/Byelokrynitsa hierarchy) functioned illegally after the war. A prayer house was taken away from the more radical Pomortsy, belonging to the priestless faction, in the 1950s which they did not manage to win back until the collapse of the USSR. The Pokrov Byelokrynitsans used to pray in private houses and did not manage to register their community until 1983.[26]

The observations made by the Rev. Bukowiński may be complemented by the data given by the agent of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults for Tselinniy Country for 1962. Out of the 20 religious communities registered at that time, 12 were at Orthodox churches, four at mosques, three at Evangelical Christian (Baptist)

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[24] W. Bukowiński, *Wspomnienia z Kazachstanu*, Rome 1981, p. 34.

[25] *Spetspereselentsy v Karagandinskoy oblasti. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Karaganda 2007, p. 216.

[26] L. Poliakov, *L'epopée des vieux-croyants*, Paris 1991, pp. 184–186; N.I. Romanova, *Sovremennoye polozheniye Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Staroobriadcheskoy Tserkvi v Kazakhstane i Sredney Azii*, [in:] *Staroobriadchestvo. Istoriya, kultura, sovremennost'. Materialy*, V.I. Osipov, N.V. Zinovkina, J.I. Sokolova, A.I. Osipova (eds.), Moskva 2002, pp. 230–244.

prayer houses, and one at a Lutheran church. The other communities, and there were nearly 300 of them, functioned non-registered in the religious underground. There was not even one Orthodox community among them.

Orthodox Christianity demonstrated extreme legalism in this regard. It functioned exclusively within the framework set by the authorities. Islam, enjoying discreet support of the local authorities in a number of places, numbered 44 such communities, the Lutherans had 62, Evangelical Christians (Baptists) as many as 86, Mennonites 33, Pentecostals (*subbotniki*) 28, Catholics 27, Seventh Day Adventists 9, and Jehovah's Witnesses 5. In addition to that, the Molokans and the Old Believers (priestless and *Murashkovtsy*: "Evangelical Christian Holy Zionists") had one community each.[27]

Religious Christians	**Registered communities**	**Non-registered communitie**
Orthodox Christians	12 Tselinograd Kokchetav Shchuchinsk Krasnoarmeysk Kustanay Fyodorovka Semiozyorka Borovskoye Pavlodar Petropavlovsk (2) Lebyazhye	–
Muslims	4 Kokchetav Petropavlovsk Pavlodar Tselinograd	44
Baptists	3 Kustanay Petropavlovsk Pavlodar	86
Catholics	–	27
Lutherans	1 Tselinograd	62
Mennonites	–	33
Seventh Day Adventists	–	9

[27] A.S. Musagaliyeva, R.M. Musabekova, U.M. Sandybayeva, *op. cit*., pp. 211–213. Tselinnyi Krai is an administrative unit that existed from December 1960 to October 1965, formed from the regions of North Kazakhstan, Kustanay, Kokchetav, Pavlodar and part of Tselinograd (formerly Akmola).

Jehova's Witnesses	–	5
Pentecostals	–	24 (1962), 28 (1963)
Old Believers	–	1
Other sects	–	Molokans – 1 *Murashkovtsy* – 1

As we can see, the Baptists remained the leaders of the religious underground. In the opinion of the agent of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults:

> absolutely all Baptist congregations have a reactionary and, one might say, anti-Soviet profile. The preachers of these communities systematically violate Soviet legislation on religious cults, draw children into religious activities and draw Soviet citizens away from fulfilling their duties.[28]

To corroborate this opinion, a statement was quoted from a pastor from Shortandy, who reportedly declared to the representatives of the *raiyspolkom* in October 1961: "God forbids fulfilling and submitting to the laws of the Soviet authorities."[29] Contrary to their tradition of independently functioning parallel communities, the Protestants, as the Baptists were called in the USSR, received an overarching institution in the form of the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in 1944, which was characteristic of the period's institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of religious life. In 1961, however, there was a split in the union, the question being whether or not it was inspired by the Soviet authorities.[30]

It was not the Catholic, Baptist, Mennonite or Lutheran communities, however, that presented a problem to the authorities of the Kazakh SSR, but the religiosity of the German people. Fears related to the "German religious revival" were reflected in the resolutions and documents adopted successively by the CC of the CP of Kazakhstan in 1956, 1958 and 1963, dedicated to 'the strengthening of political work among the German population.' The authorities were concerned about the activities of the West German Red Cross and other charitable organizations, which were alleged to have spread "ideological diversion" and propagate "anti-Soviet literature" (i.e. probably simply religious literature) through the communities.

The KGB controlled the activities of German religious leaders, both formal and informal: the Lutheran pastor Yevgeniy Bakhman, the Mennonite Yakov Mantler, declaring that he "did not believe in communism," the Catholic Anna Gey from Krasnoarmeysk and the many Baptist leaders.[31] Bakhman, a graduate of Evangelical Lutheran Bible courses in Leningrad, was deported to Siberia in 1941, and in 1954, after his release, came to join his family in Akmolinsk (Tselinograd sine 1961).

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[28] Quoted after: A.S. Musagaliyeva, R.M. Musabekova, U.M. Sandybayeva, *op. cit*., p. 213.

[29] *Ibidem*, pp. 222 ff.

[30] I.V. Podberezskij, *Les protestants en Russie*, "Revue d'Études Comparatives Est-Ouest" 1993, no. 3–4, pp. 139–153; M.I. Odintsov, A.S. Kochetova, *Konfessionalnaya politika v Sovetskom Soyuzie v gody*

[31] A.S. Musagaliyeva, R.M. Musabekova, U.M. Sandybayeva, *op. cit*., pp. 215–225.

Despite constant KGB surveillance, from the very moment of his arrival he held Lutheran services among the faithful, and in 1957, he managed to officially register a Lutheran community there as the first not only in the Kazakh SSR, but in the entire USSR. From then on, Akmolinsk/Tselinograd became the centre of Lutheranism in Kazakhstan.[32]

At the time of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, the leaders of such communities were held criminally liable and sometimes sent to correctional labour camps. As the authorities closed the houses of prayer, the faithful gathered in private homes. The German population was pushed into the religious underground. Even though, according to the agent of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for Pavlodar Region, in 1976, out of the 1,059 faithful working in the local sovkhozes and kolkhozes, as many as 1,010 were of German nationality; in January of that year, out of the 51 religious communities operating in the region, only four were officially registered, and none of them was Catholic or 'German'. In addition, the faithful were dispersed here, rather than concentrated, as was the case in major urban centres, which further disadvantaged them. In cities, having a community registered was much easier. In Karaganda, the German Baptist community was registered as early as 1946, and the Lutheran one in Tselinograd 10 years later. Outside cities in rural areas, the situation looked much worse. In Pavlodar Region, the Baptists in the village of Trofimovka (Kachyry District) were the first to register a community, as late as 1975, followed by the Lutherans in several villages, and finally by the Catholics in Shcherbakty (1979, 54 believers) and Krasnoarmeyka (1980, 31 believers). "Illegal" Catholic communities began to emerge there as early as the 1950s and, although they consisted mainly of the Volga Germans deported in 1941, they started where there was a tradition of German settlement in the pre-revolutionary era.[33]

'Underground' Catholic religiosity was noted in reports of the Soviet security services, in particular under the *spetskomendantura* regime (in effect until 1956). In a note of 10 December 1952, the deputy commander of the MGB division for Chkalovo District in Kokchetav Region reported as follows:

> There are 14 *spets*-settlers' villages in the district, inhabited by Poles and Germans. Religious sects function among them, which gather in the houses of various residents and perform religious rites, and at the same time carry out anti-Soviet agitation, calculated to draw young people away from the social, cultural and educational activities carried out in the villages. For example, in 1951, in the village of Kalinovka, a religious group led by Adolf Szulc and Wilhelm Wolski was liquidated. They used to bring together 30–40 people for religious ceremonies, and once led *kolkhozniks* to the cemetery, where almost 400 people gathered. The organisers were arrested and prosecuted under Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the RFSSR. Currently, religious gatherings are held in the village of Beloyarka in the home of the German woman

[32] R.M. Musabekova, *'Bog zapretil vypolniat' zakony sovetskoi vlasti'. Represirovannaia religioznaia zhizn nemtsev Severnogo Kazakhstana (1950–1960-ye),* "Ezhegodnik Mezhunarodnoi assotsiatsii issledovatelei istorii I kultury rossiiskikh nemtsev" 2020, no. 2, p. 99; *Leningradskie nemtsy: sud'ba voennykh pokolenii (1941–1955 gg.)*, St. Petersburg 2011, https://bessmertnybarak.ru/books/person/2011109/ [access: 24.03.2023].

[33] Y.I. Podoprigora, *Nemtsy Pavlodarskogo Priirtyshya*, Almaty 2010, pp. 63–71.

> Attylia Rode and in the village of Podolske, in the flat of seventy-year-old Anna Kosowska. Such religious groups operate in every *spetsposyolek* and exert no small influence on young people, drawing them away from social life in the village and into religious sects that also attend these gatherings.[34]

In Kokchetav Region there was a wave of arrests at that time, and, as we learn from a report of the regional UMGB for the CC of the CP of Kazakhstan, the "anti-Soviet agitation" during religious gatherings amounted, among other things, to arguing that "on Sundays and [religious] holidays it is not allowed to work, because it is a sin."[35] A special party committee that visited Kellerov District at the time concluded:

> Religious fanaticism is observable among the *spets*-settlers of all contingents. Young people are influenced by their parents performing religious rituals, which makes them reluctant to join the pioneer and Komsomol organisations… The manifestations of religious fanaticism can also be seen in the fact that *spets*-settlers are observing the Advent fast, and do not attend cinemas, clubs or other places of social entertainment.[36]

Only the abolition of the Gulag system marked a breakthrough for the development of Catholicism in Kazakhstan. After 1956, the Rev. Władysław Bukowiński, Bronisław Drzepecki and Józef Kuczyński were released from the gulags, which provided a powerful impulse for a revival of Catholic religious life in Kazakhstan. The Rev. Bukowiński worked in Karaganda and travelled across Central Asia; the Rev. Drzepecki pursued pastoral work in Zielony Gaj outside Tselinograd, where he delivered sermons that "made everybody cry," as recalled one of the repatriates; The Rev. Kuczyński resided in Tainsha (Krasnoarmeysk) in 1956–1958, where he opened a church, soon closed after his rearrest for distributing catechisms, prayer books and devotional items. The German priest from the Volga region, Father Aleksander Schtaub, was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1945 after serving 10 years in a correctional forced labour camp and settled in Karaganda in 1956, where he pursued pastoral work until his death in 1961.

From 1962, the Uniate bishop and rector of the Uzhhorod seminary, the Rev. Aleksander Chira, and another priest of that rite, the Rev. Aleksander Zaritskiy (Żarecki), worked there, also underground. Bishop Chira lived to see the official registration of a parish in 1977 and permission for the construction of a church in Karaganda, which he consecrated in 1980. By the time of his death in 1983, a total of 12 parishes had been legalised there. Father Aleksander Bień, arrested in Zhytomyr in 1945, resided in Kokchetav Region in 1953–1956, and once he regained his freedom,

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[34] *Iz istorii polakov v Kazakhstane (1936–1956 gg.)*, *Sbornik dokumentov*, Almaty 2000, p. 79.

[35] *Ibidem*, pp. 80ff.

[36] *Ibidem*, pp. 83ff. On the secret religious services at Beloyarka, the native village of the painter Feliks Mostowicz, see A. Milewska-Młynik, *Feliks Mostowicz i jego droga do polskości*, "Zesłaniec" 2007, vol. 30, pp. 197–199. The term 'religious fanaticism' itself, as applied to the Catholic clergy and faithful, is not a Soviet innovation; for example, it was used back in the mid-19th century by Governor-General Illarion Vasilchikov with reference to the entire clergy and Polish gentry in Ukraine: 'the spirit of religious fanaticism has not disappeared altogether. It manifests itself now and then in the hidden and helpless hatred of the Orthodox faith and the Russians' (quoted after: D. Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793–1914*, Lublin 2021, p. 423).

he celebrated secret religious services there. In 1975, he obtained consent to organise a parish in Kustanay. Father Alojzy (Serafim) Kaszuba, a Capuchin monk from Lvov, who was prohibited from serving as a priest in Rivne (1958), travelled across Latvia, the Crimea and Kazakhstan, seeking to provide pastoral care to the people, for which he was repeatedly arrested, exiled and persecuted; in 1970–1977, he finally settled in Tselinograd and worked there until his death.[37]

Outside large urban centres, however, the situation was different, and it was more difficult to legalize the activities of a religious community. Polish Catholics of Shortandy District (Akmola Region), interviewed by me, only managed to obtain permission to build a church in 1990, which means that practically throughout the Soviet period, they functioned in the religious underground. The memory of those "itinerant" priests, though already somewhat blurred today, is still very much alive among them. One can still meet among them individuals who knew some of the priests from that group.[38] In other parts of Kazakhstan, however, Catholics made sometimes successful attempts to register their communities pursuant to Soviet legislation but official registration was achieved relatively late, compared with other "certified" denominations. As "agents of the Vatican" and *spets*-settlers with limited rights until 1956, Polish and German Catholics could not participate in the religious revival of the "patriotic uprising of the Great Patriotic War," which deprived them of the unique opportunity to legalise their religious practices and condemned them to years of clandestine existence away from the Soviet public sphere, into which they tried to integrate themselves in this "second, official life." They gained entry to it extremely late. In the State Archive of the Akmolinsk Region (Kokchetav/Kokshetau), for instance, one can find documents showing the efforts of two Catholic communities to obtain official registration from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both successful, with the efforts lasting a short time in one case and almost a decade in the other. In both cases, this had to do with a similar age structure: old-age and disability pensioners and the elderly were the activists. In one case, this group was heavily predominantly female. This situation suited the Soviet authorities: pensioners and elderly women were able to "devote themselves to religious matters in their old age" in a building on the outskirts of the city, located away from schools, as this had little impact on the public and professional spheres and on young people. At the same time, these groups indeed found it easier to deal with the organisation of religious practices: they had more time and did not feel the "pressure of the workplace." Apart from that, this was a continuation of

[37] B. Michalewski, *Katecheza w czasach ks. Władysława Bukowińskiego i jemu współczesnych kapłanów w Kazachstanie*, "Zesłaniec" 2007, vol. 30, pp. 101–117; *idem*, *Głosiciele dobrej nowiny w Kazachstanie. Lata 1936–1990,* "Zesłaniec" 2016, vol. 66, pp. 25–54; R. Dzwonkowski, *Praca księży polskich w Kazachstanie po II wojnie światowej*, [in:] *Polacy w Kazachstanie. Historia i współczesność*, S. Ciesielski, A. Kuczyński (eds.), Wrocław 1996, pp. 471–493; A. Hlebowicz, *Kościół katolicki w Kazachstanie*, [in:] *Polacy w Kazachstanie. Historia i współczesność*, S. Ciesielski, A. Kuczyński (eds.), Wrocław 1996, pp. 495–501; *Kniga pamyati. Martirolog Katolicheskoy Tserkvi v SSSR*, B. Chalitskiy, I. Osipova (eds.), Moskva 2000, pp. 267 ff, 270, 279 ff, 283, 286, 296, 322, 410; W. Bukowiński, *op. cit*., pp. 9–12, 48 ff, 66–68, 70–73; J. Kuczyński, *Między parafią a łagrem*, Paryż 1985; H. Warachim, *Włóczęga Boży. O. Serafin Kaszuba – kapucyn, apostoł Wołynia, Kazachstanu i Syberii,* Kraków 1991, pp. 162–198; Account by Halina Habowska (b. 1964), Środa Wielkopolska, 30.09.2020.

[38] Interviewed by me in November 2018.

the situation from the "religious underground" period with "old women" in the role of quasi-priests of the community.[39]

Conclusion

The period of the Great Patriotic War played a key role for the post-war history of religion in the Soviet state. Readiness to serve at the front and wartime support for the regime had decisive importance for the legitimisation of religious communities as groupings of loyal Soviet citizens. Deported "special settlers," were excluded from participation in the "patriotic euphoria" of the war, and it condemned their religious traditions (Catholicism, Caucasian Sufi Islam, Protestant denominations) to exist underground for many years compared with "official" Islam or Orthodox Christianity.

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Abbreviations: f. – *fond* (folio); op. – *opis'* (series); d. – *delo* (dossier); l. – *liniya* (sheet)

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